

# Journalistic Style

The main tenets of journalism are clarity, accuracy, and brevity. Most journalistic pieces exist to tell readers facts quickly and accurately.

The most important elements of journalism are as follows:

- Ledes
- The 6 W's and an H
- Nutgrafs
- Attribution
- Active voice
- Canadian Press Style

It's important to know the two main types of stories: hard news and features.

Hard news is what you read in a daily newspaper. These stories include a quick summary (and sometimes analysis) of a newsworthy and timely event, person, policy, etc. Hard news informs readers quickly and in a straightforward manner.

Features, on the other hand, are longer, narrative-style pieces, typically found in magazines and online. Feature stories are meant to entertain, and provide a pleasurable reading experience that takes the reader deeper than hard news. They are not always timely, and may focus on events that took place in the past.

## Ledes, 6 W's and an H

Ledes are placed in the first line of a news story. A lede is catchy and gives enough information that a reader could ignore the rest of the story and still understand its point.

When crafting the lede, remember—6 W's and an H.

Example: The Prime Minister announced at a press conference cuts to student loan funding to lower expenditure.

**Who?** - The Prime Minister

**What?** - Cuts to student loan funding

**Where?** - In this case, the whole country

**When?** - Today/this morning

**Why?** - To lower government spending

**Why it matters?** - Students may have a harder time paying for their education

**How?** - He announced it at a press conference

A good lede might be:

*Prospective students may need to look elsewhere for funding, as the Prime Minister announced cuts to government funding for student loans at a press conference this morning.*

## Nutgrafs

Stemming from the term, “nutshell paragraph” a nutgraf is a small paragraph that gives all the important details. Nutgrafs are more common in feature stories, which typically lack a lede, but sometimes exist in hard news articles as well.

A good nutgraf will be placed two or three paragraphs into a feature story, after setting the scene, introducing some characters, and establishing what the story is about. Like a lede, a nutgraf tells your reader why the story matters.

Example: Let’s say we’re writing a feature story about Sally—a prospective student affected by the Prime Minister’s cuts to student loan funding.

*Sally Jones sits in her high school classroom. The walls are bare concrete, there are no motivational posters typically seen in schools. She’s the last student lingering around, and she’s trying to finish some homework before heading to one of her three jobs. Today, she’ll be washing dishes at her father’s restaurant.*

*“I don’t know what I’m going to do,” she texts her mother. She’s concerned about her school applications. “How are we going to afford this?”*

*Sally is trying to find a way to pay for her education. Her family has never had money, and they’ve scraped by for years. Sally was planning on applying for student loans, but with the Prime Minister’s new cuts to funding, she’s worried she won’t be able to attend university.*

The underlined portion is the nutgraf of the story. It’s catchy and provides important details while urging readers to continue on (unlike hard news, you don’t want readers to get all their information up front in a feature story).

## Attribution

A journalist’s own knowledge should never be the basis for a news story (that’s called a column). A journalist’s job is to report the facts and do due diligence in reporting. As part of this process, attributing facts and statements to their original location is crucial.

For example:

*“We are cutting funding to student loans,” the Prime Minister said.*

*The Prime Minister announced that student loan funding is being cut in the next fiscal year.*

*Funding to student loans will be cut in the next fiscal year, according to a press release from the Prime Minister’s office.*

## The Active Voice

Journalism is about brevity and clarity. Using passive voice increases word count and is not as clear as the active voice.

Active voice places the subject (i.e. noun) first, and the subject's actions (i.e. verb) second, Passive voice does the opposite.

**Passive voice:** *Tears fell from Sally's eyes and rolled down her face.* (word count: 10)

**Active voice:** *Sally let her tears fall.* (word count: 5)

**Active voice and concise:** *Sally cried.* (word count: 2)

Try to avoid passive voice whenever possible, especially in hard news stories, and be specific with your verb choice. Writing should be clear, concise, and straightforward.

## Canadian Press Style

Canadian Press (CP) Style can seem cumbersome, but serves an important function. It ensures consistency and accuracy across the journalism world. The CP stylebook is vast, but there are some basics that you should know.

- Numbers under 10 are spelled out (e.g. seven, eight, nine, 10, 11).
- Cities are always accompanied by their province, except for provincial capitals and well-known cities (e.g. *Brantford, Ont.*; *MooseJaw, Sask.*; *Toronto*; *Calgary*).
- Spell out street types (e.g. Yonge Street, Whyte Avenue; **not** Yonge St., Whyte Ave.)
- Use last names without courtesy titles (e.g. Jones; **not** Miss Jones).
- Dates are written as follows: **Oct. 2, 1993**. The month is abbreviated and takes a period, followed by the day number (1, 2, **not** 1st, 2nd.), followed by the year.
- Days of the week are spelled out (e.g. Saturday, Sunday, **not** Sat., Sun.).

CP Style is extensive. As a TMU student, you have likely been given sign-in access for the CP Style website. You can find the online stylebooks at this link:

<http://stylebooks.thecanadianpress.com/online/>