

WRITE PHOTO

## Contributors' guide<sup>©</sup>

Coretext publications, online and print, are produced to professional journalism and editorial standards. Content follows the same established news reporting and feature writing principles and structures that are applied in newspapers and magazines (print and online). Copy needs to be accurate, concise, grammatically correct and thoughtfully constructed to engage with informed readerships. It must be devoid of author opinion or 'editorialising' such as unverified claims or statements, unless the article has been written as an authoritative essay or commentary. All copy is edited for publication style, economy of word use and clarity. For non-journalists unfamiliar with the mechanics of news reporting and feature writing we offer the following basic guide.

core n. the essence  
text n. the body of information in a book, manuscript or document



## News reports/press releases

Writing a news report (or press release intended to be a news report) is very much formularised. Trainee journalists are sometimes encouraged to write on the inside of their notebooks who, what, how, when, where, why as reminders for the questions a news report must answer. Who-what-why is a mantra for this type of reporting; the lead questions to be asked and answered, with 'how' and 'when' generally following on in support.

Your opening paragraph should be the short one-sentence answer to the most pertinent of the above questions. Never start with a quote. It suggests a lack confidence in your understanding of the issue or subject.

If, say, a Prime Minister – for the exercise we'll invent the Hon. John Franklin – opens a new ore-loading facility in the Pilbara region in Western Australia, you would start your story with **who** because in this case the 'who' would (most likely) have the news edge over the **what**.

**The Prime Minister Mr John Franklin cut the ribbon on Australia's largest ship-loading facility at Port Hedland yesterday. The \$100 million facility is designed to handle a billion tonnes of ore over the next 40 years.**

[Note: if you are writing for a national or international publication you would need to add where Port Hedland is.]

**How/why: The facility was jointly funded by the federal and state governments. Mr Franklin said the investment would help to lock-in a long-term trade relationship with China.**

News stories are written as a series of short one-sentence paragraphs. Try to place a quote close to the top of the story (usually the third paragraph) to substantiate what you have just stated.

**"This infrastructure means the iron ore industry will play an important, long-term role in the Australian economy for generations," Mr Franklin said.**

You would then have a few further paraphrased comments from Mr Franklin, if he made any. Don't just string together a chain of quotes. That is stenography, not journalism. You are reporting; distilling the story for readers.

After Mr Franklin you would, ideally, also have supporting comment from others such as the Chinese Government representative, the Mining Industry Council, the WA Government, and perhaps the Port Hedland municipal council or chamber of commerce for a local perspective. If the construction of the facility has been contentious for environmental, political or other reasons then this needs to be acknowledged high up in the report and given appropriate mention again later in the report. Naturally, a press release on behalf of the miners or governments would probably ignore this, which is why the news report must be an objective record because its primary responsibility is to its readership rather than the information source. Every word written for the public record shapes history. This is an important, but often forgotten, responsibility.

If the facility was not being opened with fanfare by a dignitary such as a prime minister, the report would most likely open with the **what** and **why** rather than the **who**.

The following is an example of **what** as the main point:

**A \$1 million olive-processing facility was opened at Inglewood on the Queensland–NSW border by the Queensland Premier, Mr Paul Smith, yesterday.**

**The facility will process locally grown olives, as well as fruit from central NSW. An estimated 250,000 olive trees have been planted in the district during the past three years, as many livestock producers have begun diversifying into this crop.**

**Mr Smith said the processing plant marked the transition of olive production in the region from a speculative venture to a new long-term primary industry.**

**“Up to 25 per cent of Australian olive production could be coming from this region within the next 10 years,” Mr Smith said.**

**The processing facility has been built by Inglewood Olive Processors, whose managing director, Mr Michael Jones, said the Australian industry would be worth more than \$200 million a year by 2010.**

In five paragraphs you have said it all. Note that there is no embellishment; no words such as ‘exciting’, ‘major’, ‘significant’ etc. A report, or media release, like this can be edited with a scalpel, that is, cut paragraph by paragraph from the bottom (as once was the way). The original was twice this length, but losing the bottom five or six paragraphs has not diminished the report.

This is particularly relevant for today’s online platforms such as web sites and e-newsletters.

If an editor can read the first two sentences and know everything he or she needs to know, this is the story that will be chosen over others when space is tight.

Prior to computers, newspaper journalists using typewriters were required to write the first three paragraphs on three separate sheets of copy paper. In a competitive newsroom environment, that first paragraph, standing alone, had to say it all in as few words as possible. That rule still applies.

In addition to the initial news report or press release (depending on what type of organisation you work for) always be on the lookout for follow-ups as a way to maximise your coverage. Follow-ups will help you establish a reputation for reliability and thoroughness, plus give you a second chance if your first report fell through the net on a busy news day.

Even though a news report is usually short and sharp, it doesn’t have to be colourless.

A news report is still telling a story. It doesn’t matter whether you consider yourself a writer, a journalist, a reporter or a corporate communicator, if you are doing the job well, you are being an engaging storyteller.

That’s the inherent quality that an editor is seeking. It separates contributors whose writing is sought-after, and those whose offerings are dreaded because of the workload they create at the editor’s desk.

Here is an example of an original story that was filed with the right idea, but ... :

**In the tradition set by the 'father of lupins' in Western Australia, Dr James Harvey, the new metribuzin-tolerant lupin variety takes a Nyoongar word as its name – Mandelup.**

**Mandelup is the Nyoongar word for 'lots of Christmas trees'; with lupin breeder Dr Bruce Evans quipping that all of his Christmases had come at once with the release of this variety.**

**Mandelup is being hailed as a revolution in lupin breeding – it is higher yielding than all current varieties in the medium and low-rainfall regions of Western Australia. A key quality of Mandelup is its improved metribuzin tolerance.**

**Mandelup also shows better resistance to anthracnose than Belara, Kalya, Quilnock and Myallie.**

**Farmer, Mr Roy Smythe, said Mandelup was a rebirth for the industry ...**

(The Christmas trees referred to here are a bright-orange-flowered tree, similar to a wattle, which blooms in WA from December to January, and this is what the Aboriginal name refers to ... not the conifers people put in their lounge rooms at Christmas.)

The problem with this report is that it doesn't have a focus. It strives for too much for colour and loses itself. There is no stand-out **what** or **who**. The attempt at basing the story on something a bit quirky, such as the Aboriginal naming tradition, is terrific, but in the execution it buries the point of the story. Also, while the report does eventually give us the **what**, it doesn't provide the **why**. What is the purpose of the new lupin variety and the millions of research dollars that would have been spent on it?

This is often a sign of the writer becoming so buried in information and ideas that they lose sight of the story's *raison d'être*.

Whether it's a short report or a feature, it pays to stand back and ask – what, in one sentence, is really going on here? What do I tell the proverbial taxi driver so he/she will understand in 30 seconds?



Just a bit more thought and a little extra research was able to produce this alternative:

**The Western Australian lupin industry may achieve its long-awaited rebirth with the release this week of a new high-yielding variety, Mandelup, which also has herbicide and disease resistance.**

**After 13 years of research, breeders have finally developed a variety that is tolerant to the broadleaf herbicide metribuzin and resistant to the devastating fungal disease anthracnose. In 1996 anthracnose almost brought the whole sandplain cropping system in the northern wheatbelt to its knees when it destroyed the lupin industry, which represented the only break crop available to wheat growers there.**

**Mandelup also continues a tradition set by WA's 'father of lupins', breeder Dr James Harvey, by taking a Nyoongar name.**

**Mandelup is the Nyoongar name for the orange-flowered tree that blooms in WA's south-west around Christmas time, and is known as the WA Christmas tree. Aboriginal people used to dig up and eat the tree's suckers, which are said to taste like candy.**

**Fittingly, the Mandelup lupin is a timely sweetener for the state's grain growers. Its tolerance to metribuzin will allow lupins to be retained in the crop rotation, allowing a more sustainable farming system. Also, the variety's improved resistance to aphids should reduce pesticide use.**

The second version is much more to the point, but still packed with information and a splash of 'colour'.

## Feature writing

A feature, quite simply, is a story – the story of the event, the technology, the people, the episode etc.

In newspapers, including online publications, features are often written to provide the background or behind-the-scenes account of what might previously have been outlined in news reports.

News reports **tell** us what happened. Features **show** us what happened – or is happening.

While the purpose of a news story is to report, the purpose of a feature is to provide insight and perspective. Features can also be an ideal opportunity to present a specialist or historical perspective.

The techniques and tools are the same as for literature: narration, humour, drama, pathos. A feature version of the news report on the olive-processing facility might start like this:

**Tim Collins looks the typical Queensland cattleman – tough and lean with a face weathered by too many hard seasons. For almost two decades Collins has been mayor of the tiny township of Inglewood, and watched helplessly as his hometown's lifeblood was drained by the atrophy of its traditional industries, wool and cattle.**

**Last month, gripping a pair of scissors, Collins finally let his emotions run, but the tears on his ruddy cheeks were of hope. For the first time in 30 years, Inglewood's ebbing population is climbing thanks to an ancient Mediterranean fruit, the olive.**

**In recent years thousands of hectares of once prime pasture have been turned over to olive groves as farmers have taken a gamble on a whole new industry – and it was Tim Collins, mayor and one-time cattleman, who cut the ribbon to open the processing plant that all but guarantees the gamble will pay off.**

A feature allows you to bring in much more detail, explanation, colour and emotion. It carries the reader into the story.

However, because a feature can run anywhere from 1000 to 3000 words, depending on the publication and platform, the writing has to be even more disciplined than a news report; every word considered carefully because a reader unacquainted with the subject needs an uncluttered path if they are to keep reading beyond the opening sentences.

The subject may be passionate, but the writer has to be dispassionate. The fewer the words used to convey a mood, or atmosphere, the more powerful will be the impact on the reader.

That said, over-writing can be difficult to avoid, even for the most experienced writers – which is why the best writers usually have the most dispassionate editors.

In the meantime, get the words down 'on paper', then work on them and pare them back. Try to be a brutal self-editor. Always read and re-read your copy. No one ever gets it right first time. You can always improve on what you have written; finding surplus, inadequate or inappropriate words, and errors.

The best way to read over copy is to print it out. When reading on a computer screen your eyes will tend to tell your brain what it wants to see, not what is there.

Feature writing is much less prescriptive than news reporting and works best if you can take a deep breath, mentally shake loose the shoulders and just go for it, experiment, knowing that later you will edit.

Practice produces confidence and confidence becomes more important than set rules. Having said this, accuracy remains critical. You can interpret and colour, but not distort. Being a story, a feature should have a beginning, a middle and an end.

One approach is to turn your mind into a film camera. Open the story with a close-in shot, a vignette from the bigger scene, then steadily pan back to reveal the full breadth of the subject you are writing about.

As you sort your thoughts and the material you are working with, keep an eye open for a strong observation or statement with which to close the article. Try not to squander it too soon because sometimes it is the very last sentence in a feature that leaves the most enduring thought in the reader's mind.

A few other points to note:

- don't try to write a feature article with only one person interviewed – you need the depth and texture of different perspectives;
- decide on the 'tense' at the start and stick to it – the general 'rule' is present tense for features and past tense for news reports; and
- if you are freelancing, study the style of the publication you intend to approach – styles vary enormously, from the sober to the light-hearted, from the aloof observer to the participant.

One of the best examples of quality feature and essay writing is The Atlantic (founded as The Atlantic Monthly) ([www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com)) yet it has an almost anachronistic insistence on authors incorporating themselves into the storyline – to illustrate that the writer knows because he/she was there. A 'small' characteristic like this needs to be understood before even considering an approach to the magazine's editors.

Also, do not try to regurgitate the same approach for different markets. Know who is reading your target publication and start thinking about this before you even begin interviews.

The following is an example of two entirely different approaches to the same story – in this instance, a real report on an Australian aid project to rebuild Cambodia's rice farming after the Pol Pot era:

For the Weekend Australian Magazine:

**Perched on a roof above Phnom Penh, two solitary Australians pulled the stopper from a bottle of Russian champagne and made a toast. It was a poignant snapshot; the surrounding buildings blackened by mildew and war and the brown puddled streets empty of life.**

**It was 1988, the champagne was distastefully warm and the toast was sombre. The two men, Harry Nesbitt from Perth and Glenn Denning from Brisbane, were at the start of an incredible journey that would challenge their courage, their skills and their endurance beyond anything a couple of agricultural scientists would otherwise sanely anticipate. The task being asked of them, was to bring the ancient Khmer rice culture back to life – in effect, to resurrect the Killing Fields.**

For science and geographic magazines:

**In the mid-1990s Sam Vesha's 2.4-hectare farm could barely feed its extended family. In Cambodia's Svay Rieng district, near the Vietnam border, its agriculture was antiquated, its rice yields low, and its future bleak.**

**That's when Sam's father agreed to let him take over. Seven years later the land is an intensively worked enterprise based on new high-yielding rice varieties, which have allowed some of the farm to be turned over to horticulture and aquaculture. It has been transformed from a paddy field to a market garden; from subsistence agriculture to an intensive enterprise producing a surplus that actually earns income.**

**The difference between the past and the present has been Sam's willingness to grasp the opportunities provided by a concerted agricultural aid program, CIAP – the Cambodia–IRRI–Australia Project. CIAP has become a powerful example of how aid and agricultural science can help communities recover from war and dispossession.**

Such re-writing from the same set of notes is extra work and often difficult once you have already written the story a certain way. If possible, leave some time between the two to refresh your thinking.

Finally, writing is about communicating; by telling and showing, by harvesting experiences and thoughts (other people's) and by reminding the world of the infinite wonder and value of human vision, courage, doggedness and genius.

The writer's job in this grand quest is that of the humble messenger; the conduit for other people's ego and passion.

## Some submission and style guidelines

A few pointers if you are submitting an article for publication:

Treat the computer as a typewriter. Don't try to design the story. So –

- remove all formatting such as indented paragraphs, headers/footers, big bold or underlined headlines, text boxes or borders; copy should be in a uniform 12-point font such as Times New Roman or Arial;
- insert two paragraph returns (¶) between paragraphs – or, when formatting your Word document, add 6-point spacing after each paragraph; and
- use black, not coloured, type.

There is nothing more frustrating for an editor than having to spend time stripping back a submitted article to get to a clear page of text.

The other annoyance, and one that puts more red lines through names on the contributors' list than any other, is when it is obvious the writer has virtually just transcribed his or her notes, with little attempt to thoughtfully construct a purposeful report.

Inevitably, an interviewee will say or explain something late in an interview, when they've warmed up, which might be the obvious story lead, but there it is, buried half way through the copy because the writer is simply following the path the interview took.

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## PHOTO WRITE

### Contributors' guide<sup>©</sup>

Imaging follows the same professional principles that are applied in leading newspapers and magazines. Photography for Coretext needs to be thoughtfully constructed. In describing the aspirations of the famed Magnum photo-journalism cooperative, co-founder Henri Cartier-Bresson spoke of Magnum photographers needing to evoke curiosity about what is going on, to convey respect for what is going on and to have a desire to transcribe this visually. These are the elements required if a picture is to be given a story to tell. Technically, good photographs must adhere to basic focus, exposure and composition principles. For aspiring photo-journalists not yet familiar with the mechanics we offer the following guide.



core n. the essence

text n. the body of information in a book, manuscript or document

# Photography

Digital photography has become the epitome of convenience and 'automatic everything', but modern cameras (and smart phones) are still just tools and only as good as their operator. The camera cannot take a well composed, carefully focused and creatively exposed photograph (even when on program or auto). Only a person can. Technology has not replaced the craft.

# Photojournalism

The first thing to ask yourself is what is the story that this photograph is telling. A photograph intended for publication must go beyond a mere accoutrement to an article but be able to still convey the essence of the story if the words are stripped away. To do this it must draw the viewer/reader into the world or life the lens has captured.

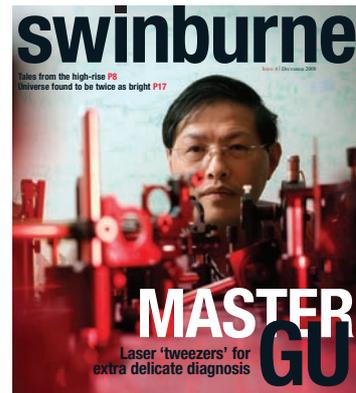
This requires thoughtful composition and an understanding of some basic technical principles beginning with the following three points.

- When photographing people – get in close, unless of course if the background is relevant. Otherwise near enough to see the personality in a person's face.
- In uneven, high-contrast daylight either use fill-flash, or move your subject into the light. Deep shadow on a face (particularly when cast by a broad-brimmed hat) makes a photo unusable. Ideally you seek out the first hour or last hour of daylight for deep, even lighting; but that necessitates the photographer being able to dictate the event being photographed, and we know this is a luxury for most.
- Try not to shoot front-on. Try different angles – looking up, looking down (standing on a chair or ladder), from the side ... basically anything other than the firing squad look.

In addition to the above:

- Take extra care focusing and use a high enough shutter speed or tripod/monopod to avoid camera shake.
- Look for animation. People make good character portraits when you photograph them while they are talking to somebody, or are in some way occupied and not worrying about the camera.
- Experiment with lenses ... use a telephoto lens to blur the background or blur the foreground. Both are useful techniques for drawing the eye to the main in-focus subject (see Rule of thirds below). A wide-angle lens can provide unusual perspectives that can transform a dull subject into something more interesting. Think of yourself as a theatre director: try to create, from what is available – be it landscape or furnishings – a tableau into which you place your subject.

When you have digested these points you can begin to practise the finer elements of composition which will add impact and artistry to your photographs.



# Composition

The starting point is the 'rule of thirds'. This has been the basic rule of composition since first articulated by Plato, based on his observations of nature.

Imagine a noughts-and-crosses grid within your viewfinder and place the main subject where any of the lines intersect. This will usually place your subject off-centre, which allows the viewer to subconsciously scan the photograph for all of its elements, increasing its interest and impact.

Some examples:



Another technique is to include a foreground element that provides a reference point for viewing the main scene. In the photo above left the plants lead the eye to the subject, creating a strong portrait that evokes curiosity.

Finally, before you press the shutter release, train your eye to scan the scene within the viewfinder, especially the edges of the frame. Look for any intruding clutter that will distract or detract from the image.

The above measures will add interest and authority to your photography and quickly build your confidence in presenting yourself as competent with a camera.

## Image resolution

The single biggest reason why supplied photographs cannot be used is their resolution. Cameras today can be set to a wide range of quality parameters. Low resolution JPGs are fine for social media, but unusable for print and not necessarily useable online if intended for use full-screen.

The quality of a photo comes down to megapixels – loosely speaking, the digital equivalent of the grains of emulsion on film. The optimum starting point for publishable images larger than a small head-and-shoulders is a 5 to 6-megapixel image (a JPG file size of about 2.5 megabytes.)

Part of the problem for publishers receiving photos from amateur photographers is that a low-resolution image looks quite OK on a computer screen – but a computer screen is only 72 to 92 dpi (dots per inch). Print publications generally require 300 dpi. So while a 1024 by 768 pixel image will look fine on a laptop screen, it will end up the size of a passport photo if it is not to pixelate, or break up, when stretched to the resolution needed for commercial printing presses.

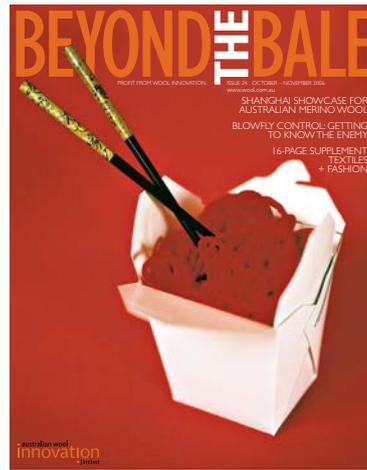
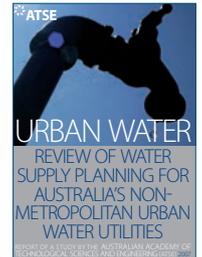
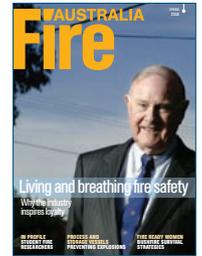
Therefore, use the camera on its highest JPG setting, and if the camera allows you to shoot in RAW mode, even better. RAW means the CCD chip is receiving all the data coming through the lens. JPG files are created by the camera discarding pixels (image information) to create a smaller file size.

Before submitting photos it is imperative that you embed captions and other relevant information (metadata) into the image. Most photo agencies, including Coretext, will not accept photos that do not contain embedded captions and the photographer's details. In **Adobe Photoshop**, for example, click on the 'File Info' tab to input captions, the photographer's name etc. This information will then stay with the image. Similarly, **Affinity Photo** (also used at Coretext) has a drop-down metadata tab. Common programs like **Adobe Bridge** and **PhotoMechanic** also make this requirement quite straight forward.

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Further examples of photojournalism: [www.reportage.co.uk](http://www.reportage.co.uk)

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# CORETEXT

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