

10 TIPS FOR WRITING COPY

1. KEEP SENTENCES SHORT AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE SIMPLE.

People don't read long sentences. We can't change them. Use strong verbs and strong nouns. Drop all the excess.

2. SHORTER PARAGRAPHS ARE MORE INVITING.

People also don't read long paragraphs. One thought per paragraph. One quote per paragraph. A paragraph can be one sentence. Deep breath English lit teachers.

3. AVOID VAGUE WORDS.

Words such as "many," "a lot," "several," "some" or "a few" waste space. Find the specific or drop the thought.

4. BE SPECIFIC AND ACCURATE.

You are reporting events. It matters that you say the team had a 7-3 season more than it matters that the team had a winning season.

5. KEEP YOUR READER'S ATTENTION.

Take a break from traditional copy every once and a while. Give them a treat with fact boxes, Q and A, bio boxes, timelines, quote collections and public opinion polls.

6. AVOID USING THE PHRASE "THIS YEAR" AND THE NAME OF YOUR SCHOOL.

They know the year and they know the school. That's the point of the book. Don't mention them.

7. WRITE COPY IN THE THIRD PERSON.

You're an objective reporter. Make it sound that way. "He," "she," "it" and "they" are your pronouns. Exceptions exist, but they are few.

8. DO NOT EDITORIALIZE.

Quotes are the most important part of the story. So are sources. Have at least three sources per story. Never make an opinion statement that cannot be attributed to a specific source. Be particularly careful with opinionated adjectives and adverbs.

9. FOLLOW YOUR STAFF'S STYLEGUIDE.

List the rules for using names, titles and figures as well as the rules for punctuation and capitalization. Associated Press knows all. Consult the pros when you are lost.

10. USE THE LANGUAGE OF YOUR READERS.

Write the way you speak. This isn't a term paper people. But, avoid slang and obey basic grammar rules.

10 TIPS FOR WRITING CAPTIONS

Captions are the most read **copy** in a yearbook because they provide immediate information about what is happening in the photographs featured on the spread. As such, they should be filled with facts and details that the reader wouldn't otherwise know.

1. Interview more than one person per photo. Get the facts that may not be obvious.
2. Verify name spelling of subjects in photos with the official school registration list.
3. Group captions should begin with the group's name followed by rows designated as "Front row, Row 2, Row 3, Back row," in a different typeface from names or in parenthesis.
4. First sentence, written in present tense, should answer the important questions of who, what, when, where, why and how.
5. Remaining sentence(s), written in past tense, provides additional information about the event or subject that would not be obvious from looking at the photo.
6. Photo credits may be included at the end of the caption, if not credited elsewhere. Simply use "Photo by" followed by photographer's name.
7. Photo stories, longer captions including details that might otherwise be found in copy, may result in the need for less copy. Photo stories should be at least three sentences long and could include quotes from subjects in the photograph.
8. Do's of caption writing should be followed: answer all obvious questions, variety of phrasing, use complete name, first sentence written in present tense, active voice when explaining the action.
9. Don'ts of caption writing that should be avoided include: overuse of lead patterns, passive verbs, stating the obvious, commenting on or talking to the photo.
10. Gag or joke captions should never be used. They are unprofessional and alienate the readers.