



Dear Teacher:

The basic instructions for the various categories in the Press Pass competition are those published on page 4 of the Press Pass handbook. However, the notes overleaf, which are an amplification of the material on page 4, are designed to help you to remind students of the key differences between journalism and a school essay. Essays are what students are used to, but they all probably need a helping hand to say goodbye to the essay and familiarise themselves with the different styles of writing involved in journalism.

The best way of doing this is by getting them to **use** the free newspapers they are reading, analyse them, criticize them, **and comment on them in class**.

Common to both essays and journalism is writing that is grammatical, clear, and contains active rather than passive verbs. That's where the similarities end.

Correct punctuation is vital. Students should know the difference between commas, colons, semi-colons and dashes – and should remember that the comma is probably the most useful piece of punctuation available. It never gets tired of doing its work!

Journalism is, in a sense, writing to a formula. This does not mean that it has to be dull or boring. It's like riding a bicycle. Once you've learned how to do it, it comes almost automatically. The formulae have been developed over years and years of skillful journalism. They are highly adaptable, and are there to help both the writer and reader to present and acquire the most – and the most interesting – information in the shortest possible time.

I hope you find the notes overleaf helpful. Your students might also like to check out the winning work in this year's NewsBrands Ireland Journalism Awards - [www.journalismawards.ie](http://www.journalismawards.ie)

Best of luck with Press Pass!

**Prof. John Horgan**

*Chairman of the Press Pass Judging Panel*



# 1

**Paragraphing.** Get your students to choose both news and feature articles from the papers with which they have been supplied and talk in class about what they have discovered. One of the big differences between journalism and essay-writing is that paragraphs in essays tend to be much longer.

- A paragraph is supposed to contain only sentences or phrases that are related to each other. They can be described, therefore, as having a “unity of thought”.
- Ask your students to find paragraphs in newspaper articles that are, in their view, too long, and ask them to suggest where they could be divided, and why.
- The introductory paragraph in the classic news story will have thirty words or less. It should go straight to the heart of the matter.
- Varying the length of your paragraphs is a good way to hold a reader’s attention. Ask your students to find examples of this in the papers they have been given.

# 2

**News stories** are constructed in the form of an inverted triangle. The most important information is at the top, the least important information is at the bottom. This is because the reporter doesn’t generally know in advance how much space his article is going to be given. If the inverted triangle structure is used, the sub-editor can reduce the length of the story by cutting the final paragraph or paragraphs without affecting the basic strength of the story.

- Ask your students to choose a news story from one of their papers and then draw the inverted triangle showing how the facts appear in their order of importance – they can summarise the facts; they don’t need to write down the whole article inside the triangle.
- Ask them to choose a badly written news story, and to explain why it is badly written.
- The introductory paragraph in the classic news story will have thirty words or less. It should go straight to the heart of the matter. Ask your students to choose a well written news lead paragraph and get them to explain why they think it’s good.

# 3

**Features** can be of many different kinds. So can feature lead paragraphs, whether the feature is an interview, an opinion piece, a descriptive piece, or an investigative piece. All are equally valuable types of features.

- A feature lead paragraph can be a summary (“The results of the recent census raise important questions about what the population of Ireland will look like in 20 years’ time”); a shocker (“Did you know that a million young salmon in every river are eaten by predators before they can reach the sea?”); A ‘slow burn’ (“John didn’t know when he got up that morning that before he went to bed he would be carried into the school refectory shoulder-high by his cheering class-mates.”). In fact there are as many types of feature lead as your imagination and word skills can supply.

- Ask your students to identify as many different types of **feature lead** as they can from the papers they have been given.
- Ask your students to identify as many different types of **feature** as they can from the papers they have been given.
- One of the most important paragraphs in a feature article is the last one. Don’t let your article tail off into small bits and pieces. You can do this with a news story but not with a feature. This is because ending your feature with a striking piece of information will reward the reader for his attention and will leave him with the feeling: “Well, I enjoyed that.”
- Ask your students to choose good **final paragraphs or sentences** from features in the papers with which they have been supplied, and ask them to explain why they think they are good.

# 4

**Audience.** Remind your students at every class that **they are not writing for you, the teacher!** Get them to think of **someone they know** who is or might be a reader of the paper for which they are writing their news story or article, and to concentrate on writing for that person. They will know, far better than you, the teacher, what is likely to interest that person most.

