

HEADLINE WRITING GUIDELINES

Use this checklist to ensure the headline of any story has all the necessary components to meet AP Style standards.

1. Read the entire story; give the readers an idea of:
 - a. What the story is about
 - b. What kind of story it is (i.e. breaking news or feature)
2. Summarize the story
 - a. Summarize in one line
 - b. MUST include a specific subject and an active verb
 - c. Show how this particular story differs from others
3. Use headline style
 - a. Eliminate unnecessary words (i.e., a, an, the)
 - b. Omit forms of the verb 'to be' (is, are, was, were)
 - c. Use numerals
 - d. Abbreviate days of the week and months
 - e. Use present tense verbs, aka 'historical present tense'
 - f. Use strong verbs but avoid commanding verbs
 - g. Follow a subject/verb-object structure
 - h. Only the first word and proper nouns are capitalized
 - i. Don't use a period at the end
 - j. Use single quotes to quote material

- k. Use a comma as a substitute for "and"
- l. Use specific details if they are available
- m. Use only widely known acronyms and abbreviations
- n. Only use names when they're prominent and use only notable nicknames

4. Determine headline "fit"

- a. Use the correct form and length to ensure it fits into the given space on the page where it will appear
- b. Use a headline designer to identify the layout and design as not to exceed the maximum character count for publishing

5. To lengthen or shorten a headline, you may need to eliminate or substitute words, or change its focus entirely; ask these questions:

- a. What words could the headline live without and still make sense?
- b. What other words might convey the point equally well?
- c. Am I retaining the rules of headline writing style, such as using historical present tense and omitting articles?