Writing News Stories for Department Homepages

News Story Components
A typical department news story is between 250-500 words, and includes a concise headline, a lead paragraph, the body copy, and a conclusion or end quote, as well as a high-quality image. Longer pieces also should include subheadings. Links to related articles or additional information are always welcome, when incorporated properly.

Before You Begin – Gather Information
Your news story must answer the following:
- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why
- How
- "Who cares?" (Is there serious value in the information you are providing, and who is the target audience?)

NOTE: The primary target audience for Davidson College website are current and prospective students and their families.

Getting Started – the Lead
Most – if not all – of the above facts should be addressed in your lead, though some of the lesser details could follow in the next or subsequent paragraphs. Your lead should be short – no more than 1-2 sentences, and no more than about 40 words.
(To give you an idea of the length, the above paragraph ^^ is 45 words.)

Types of Leads
There are three main types of leads:
- Summary, in which you summarize many of the facts listed above in a concise manner. [Example](#)
- Anecdotal, in which you tell a quick story or describe a scenario that is directly related to the story. [Example](#)
- Question, in which you draw the reader in by asking a question that relates to the content (and that you answer early on in the piece – do not leave them hanging). [Example](#)

Never begin a piece with a quote, though you may include a quote as early as your second paragraph.

Body
Once you have your lead, the following paragraphs should provide more details. Generally, your body copy should:
- Flow nicely
- Use concise sentences
- Use active voice
- Avoid unnecessary words (such as "very unique" or "afternoons from 3-5 p.m.")
- Have good transitional sentences
- Include quotes when you can, and insert them on their own lines

Style Guide
Refer to the college's online style guide if you have questions about college style or need clarification. The college primarily follows the Associated Press style, with a few differences that are unique to Davidson.

Writing for the Web
In addition to high-quality writing, your piece should incorporate some "best practices" for writing for the Web specifically. These include:
- Piece should be scanable/easy to pick out information. Reference the Writing for the Web document available in the College Communications Marketing Toolbox for additional details.
- Use subheads to break up long blocks of text
- Break up different thoughts into new paragraphs
- Use bulleted lists when possible for emphasis and 'scanability'
- Use hyperlinks when useful – think user-friendly, navigation. Note: do not add words like "click here." Instead, assign the link to existing words in your sentence that are descriptive, i.e. it will be clear where visitors will go if they click the link.
- Include images – always at least one. The Web is a visual space and images grab attention and help tell a story.

Your news story should not:
- Summarize all of a person's credentials. Instead, when writing about a new faculty member or guest speaker, include highlights and consider a link to their CV or personal/professional website.
- Simply list award recipients. Find ways to make that sort of content more interesting; introduce the award, give background about the award and why it is awarded, and consider including professional headshots and blurbs about each recipient or a group shot with caption.
- Use the news section as an archive for all department activity. News stories should be compelling, interesting, and timely.

Writing a Headline
Headlines should be about 45 characters and should entice the reader to click and read more. Try to avoid cumbersome, academic headlines. Focus on action words and the most interesting of the details. You can shorten headlines by:
- Removing the word "Davidson." (since the piece is on our website, it's assumed that "students" would be Davidson students, or a professor would be a Davidson professor, etc.)
- Abbreviating words like Professor (Prof.) or Department (Dept.) [Note: this is not the style to use for the written content, with the exception of Prof., which can be used for second and subsequent mentions of a Professor]
- For currency, using "K" for thousand, and "M" for million. Ex: "$25K grant," "$1M grant" [Note: this is not the style to use for the written content]
- For Ordinal numbers, using "first," "third," etc. [

Importance of Images
Ideally, you want every news item to have at least one accompanying image. This is best practice for Web news content, and it also adds a nice, visual component to your piece.

Photo Tips
Here are some tips for getting good, useable images:

- Plan ahead. Whenever possible, select someone ahead of time who will be responsible for taking and submitting photos from the event/trip/activity.
- Get a diverse mix of photos. Don't just take posed, group shots, and "grip and grins."
- Check for good lighting, and frame your photos well. Don't be afraid to ask people to move to a better location, or direct them in small ways.
- Get a range of shots, close ups, medium shots, and wide-angle shots. For the Web we generally try to shoot photos at wide angle and crop the photos using Photoshop as needed.
- Be aware of surroundings – look for anything that would be a distraction in the background, including bright lights or windows, dark locations without enough light, logo t-shirts (e.g., students wearing clothing from another college or university), room clutter or a messy location, flags or banners, etc.

Photo Examples
Whenever possible, candid photos are preferable to staged shots. Examples:
- Students working in a lab, or a class discussion on the green, rather than a posed group shot of the whole class looking at the camera.
- A professor talking with a student, rather than a headshot of either.
- An "action shot" from an event (e.g., the speaker talking with students or faculty instead of a podium shot). Be aware of surroundings – look for anything that would be a distraction in the background, including bright lights or windows, logo t-shirts, flags or banners, etc.)
- If a headshot is the most appropriate choice for a specific piece, it must be well-lit, well-framed, and professional (appropriate attire, no pets or food or other "accessories").

With advanced notice, College Communications can take headshots of faculty and students, and in some cases may already have some. Email digitalstaff@davidson.edu with photo requests.

NOTE: Always fact-check, and run your piece by your department chair or director prior to submitting it as news copy. The copy you submit through workflow should be the final version. Digital staff will check for adherence to the style guide and best writing practices as outlined above, but should not be expected to fact-check or fix excessive grammatical or stylistic errors.

New Story Writing and Photography Examples

New Professor
- Poet/Scholar L. Lamar Wilson to Teach this Spring
- Preceded by a Love Story: Sweet Land Director Joins Faculty

Department Event
- Tri-Beta Chapter Honors Darwin on His Birthday (note: the photo quality is borderline in that part of the image, the Darwin cut out, is over exposed)

NOTE: Department events should be added to the EMS mastercalendar and pulled into a department homepage through an event accordion. If you don't have an event accordion, we can request that one be added to your department homepage by emailing digitalstaff@davidson.edu. The event listing and

the news story should be different and not duplicate each other (different event and news story titles, different focus, etc.).

Student Wins Award
- Senior Paper on China-Taiwan Relations Named Nation's Best

NOTE: The photo that is used with the story is of the student talking/interacting with someone verses a headshot of him looking directly at the camera. This kind of photo, a candid photo or one showing action/interaction, is preferred and is generally the style used by regional and national newspapers and magazines to accompany a news story.)

Student Research
- If You Put Something Else in Your Pipe and Smoke It, Are You Safer?

NOTE: Notice the headline for the story, it's an example of headline that you might see in a newspaper or magazine verses providing the scientific name of the student's paper (that can be provided in the article itself). Headlines and news story content should be focused to the layperson and the reader that may not be a scientist (you try to balance this so you represent the science or topic properly without being overly technical in the writing).

Also, note the photo of the student, it's taken in the laboratory where she is doing her research and it includes some props to help people visualize the story. Caution: don't overdo the use of props. They should help tell the story without coming off as fake, staged, or overly posed.

Faculty Honor
- Dean Raymond Selected to Chair National STEM Initiative

NOTE: This is a longer written story and includes subheadings to show different topic areas and photos in the article to break up the text. Note both photos are candid/interactive shots. The podium shot is cropped so you see more of the reaction of the story subject than her speaking and the photo with the faculty member also shows interaction. These types of photos and captions also allow you to tell a story within a story (without describing in great detail what is happening in the photo).

Interesting Class
- Looking Up: Drones, Data and Digital Studies

NOTE: This news story includes a photo of the student flying a drone and video captured from the drone. It also includes the use of subheadings to break up the text into different sections/topic areas.