

Sports Journalism Skill Module

Writing Headlines

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

- Identify and apply the best practices for writing headlines
- Analyze samples of headlines
- Evaluate headlines
- Revise Headlines

RESOURCES AND PREPARATION

- *You Try It!* Student Worksheet – Writing Headlines: From Good to Great

Additional Online Support:

- www.holtmcdougal.hmhco.com
- www.BlueNoseEd.com

Teach the Skill

1. Introduce Writing Headlines

Remind students that when they write headlines to their sports stories, their task is to encapsulate the story in a way that readers will understand at a glance. Headlines have three basic jobs:

- grab the reader's attention;
- summarize the story;
- let the reader know how important the story is.

Remind students of the **best practices** for headline writing.

Use the active voice

Good: Vikings Trounce Steelers

Not So Good: Steelers are Trounced by Vikings

Use the present tense

Good: Cubs Pitchers Blank Braves

Not So Good: Cubs Pitchers Blanked Braves Last Night

Don't Use Periods, and Use Commas instead of 'And,' 'But,' and Other Connecting Words

Good: Penguin's Martin Suspended, Jailed

Not So Good: Penguin's Martin Suspended and then He's Thrown in Jail.

Avoid Editorializing, and Stick to Everyday Words and Expressions

Good: Piniella's Cubs Drop Ten Straight

Not So Good: Piniella, Epitome of Managerial Ineptitude, Leads Cubs on Losing Streak

2. Teach Headline Writing

- First, choose a recent sports story from the local paper. Block out the headline, and make photocopies of it. Next, have your students get in small groups. Have each group read the story. Using the best practices for headline writing, have them write an original headline for the story. When everyone is done, have all the groups write their headlines on the board. Finally, reveal the original headline from the newspaper. Discuss similarities and differences between the students' headlines and the one that was published in the paper.

Ask your students to evaluate the headlines they have written as a group:

- A. Does the headline *capture* the story's main idea?
- B. Will it make readers *interested* in reading the story?
- C. Are the words in the headline *short, easy-to-read, and powerful*?
- D. How could this headline be *improved*?

- Badly written headlines are a common source of humor on late-night television. Tell your students that it is useful to imagine how a comedian like Jay Leno might deliberately misunderstand one of their headlines to make a joke out of it. To help them avoid the pitfall of the unintentionally-funny headline, draw the following diagram on the board. Fill in the bad headlines (taken from actual newspapers!) in the left column. Then ask for volunteers to re-write the headline in a more journalistic fashion, following the best practices that they have learned.

EXAMPLE

Original Sports Headline	Rewritten Sports Headline
1. Shot Off Woman's Leg Helps Nicklaus to 66	1.
2. Deer Kill 17,000	2.

3. Apply the Skill: Hand out the You Try It! Worksheet: “Writing Headlines: From Good To Great.” Allow the students to work in small groups. When they are done working, have volunteers from each group report on their work.

QUICK SKILLS CHECK Ask students to tell you the three main functions of headlines. Then have them list the best practices for good headline writing. (*use the active voice, use the present tense, use correct headline punctuation, and avoid editorializing*)

YOU TRY IT!

Writing Headlines: From Good to Great

GOAL

Every word counts in a headline. Evaluating and revising writing can improve your headlines. Taking the time to write a great headline for your sports story will make your writing stand out from the crowd, and will improve your chances in the BlueNose Edutainment contest.

DIRECTIONS

Evaluate each sample headline in the chart below. Revise the headlines, remembering to follow the best practices for writing headlines. Try to brainstorm active verbs, or choose a different word, or even change the order of words. Once you have revised the sample headlines, circle the headline that appeals to you the most.

Sample Headline	REVISIONS			Revised Headline
	Active Verbs	Word Choice	Word Order	
1. <i>Nadal Ends Federer's Dominance at Wimbledon</i>	halts stymies squashes	Perhaps change "dominance" to "reign," or "rule."	Perhaps put the word "Wimbledon" first	Wimbledon: Nadal Halts Federer's Reign
2. <i>Two French Riders Make Headway in Tour</i>				
3. <i>Slumping Striker Helps Spain Win European Title</i>				
4. <i>Pacific-10 Commissioner to Announce Retirement</i>				
5. <i>Krzyzewski and U.S. Have Gold as Only Aim</i>				

Self-Check

Remember that a good headline grabs the reader's attention, summarizes the story, and lets the reader know how important the story is. Evaluate your writing. What is the impact of your revisions?