

# Cutlines — a quick reference

## The basics

In the first sentence, state:

- Who is doing the action.
- What is going on.
- Where and when the action is taking place (provided the sentence isn't too long, then put the when and where in the second sentence).

### In the second sentence:

- Put the action in context
- Tell why the picture is important or why it is in the paper.

### The third sentence:

- Provide details about the event.

### In multipicture packages:

- Use a copy block to describe the event.
- Use taglines with each picture to give the names of the principle people in the picture and relate the picture to the event.

### Pictures with a story:

- Let the story do the “heavy lifting.”
- Give the names and relate the picture to the story.
- Quotes are OK provided they help tie the picture to the story.
- Avoid repeating passages from the story.

## Some dos

- Identify people from left or clockwise, but PICK ONE and stick with it. To switch back and forth will only confuse readers.
- Be ESPECIALLY careful with names. Collect business cards. Get people to spell their names or print their names in your notebook if the name is difficult.
- Look at the picture when you write the outline.
- Try to ensure that everyone who edits the outline has a proof in hand while he's editing.
- Include details such as the dog's name, the name of the dish being served, etc.
- Collect printed material such as restaurant menus, brochures and maps that might help later. Leave the items on your desk for easy reference even after you leave for the day.
- Get phone numbers in case you or the reporter needs to get back in touch with the person.

## The pitfalls

**Describing the obvious:** The reader will be able to see the picture, so there's no need to tell what he can plainly see. Instead, take the opportunity to relate the picture to the story.

### Cliches, corniness and stilted language:

Being too dry is bad. Being silly or frilly is worse.

- “Looks on” is such an outdated expression. Use something more descriptive: watches, supervises, waits his turn, etc.

Other poor expressions:

- shares a laugh *or* shares a quiet moment
- takes a break.
- checks out *or* sorts through
- pictured here *or* in this photograph.

### Sloppy reporting and assumptions:

Check your facts. Be ESPECIALLY careful with names and titles. (Wouldn't it be nice if the editors knew to trust the photographer's information before the reporter's?)

### Assuming the reporter has all the information:

Not everyone in the photograph will be in the story. Collect more information than you expect to need. Add details when you know the person in the picture is not in the story.

### Sentences that try to describe everything:

KISS is a good guideline here. In this case, keep each sentence simple; keep each sentence short.

### Generalizations and overly broad assertions:

- Be specific in your descriptions. It's a 13-pound fish, rather than “a big fish.”
- Avoid the words “always” and “never.”
- Avoid saying something “will” happen. Storms, earthquakes and other calamities invariably cancel even the best-laid plans.
- Avoid editorial comments. For instance, don't say “In the most difficult part of the process ...” Rather, quote the subject saying, “This is the most difficult part of the process.”
- Avoid assigning emotions, especially to animals. Don't assume someone is happy just because he's smiling. If you think the emotion needs to be in the cutline, then ask the subject “What were you thinking when you were doing that?”

## Court terms

attorney ..... someone who represents another  
lawyer..... someone admitted to practice law  
plead, pleaded, pleading..... not *pled*  
damage ..... destruction  
damages..... awarded in a lawsuit  
versus ..... spell out in all cases except  
..... court cases use *v.*

## Police terms

accused of..... not *accused with*  
aka ..... no periods  
.32 caliber..... not *0.32*  
deputy, detective, officer..... always spell out  
dive, dived..... not *dove*  
drunk ..... state of being; he was drunk  
drunken ..... the adjective; drunken driver  
due to..... avoid; use *because of*  
female..... avoid; use *woman* or *girl*  
individual, individuals..... avoid;  
..... use *man, woman, person, people*  
impact..... is a noun, a collision  
..... use *affect* as a verb, *effect* as a noun  
male..... avoid; use *man* or *boy*  
mph .....no periods  
people..... not *persons*  
point-blank  
prior to..... avoid; use *before* in most cases  
seat belt ..... two words  
sneaked..... not *snuck*  
state police, highway patrolman ..... the people  
State Police, Highway Patrol ..... the agency  
teenager

## Politics

Adviser..... not *advisor*  
chairman, chairwoman... not *chair* or *chairperson*  
fund raising, fund-raiser, fund-raising (adj.)  
news conference ..... not *press conference*  
lectern..... holds the paper  
podium ..... the stage where the speaker stands  
hike..... a walk in the woods, not an increase  
re-elect..... use hyphen on double vowels  
runoff  
spokesman, spokeswoman .....not *spokesperson*

## Religious terms

Bible ..... caps for the book  
biblical..... always lowercase  
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints  
..... Mormon Church, the Mormons  
Gospel (the 4 books) .....gospel (generic and adj.)  
hallelujah  
Jew, Judaism, rabbi, Hanukkah, Rosh Hashana  
Islam, Islamic, Muslims, Quran, imam  
Mass (Catholic)..... always uppercase  
the Rev. .... requires *the*

## Time element

about..... not *at about* or *approximately*  
afterward ..... not *afterwards*  
a.m., p.m..... always lowercase  
21st century ..... lowercase *century*  
daylight saving time  
daylong, daytime  
following..... avoid; use *after* whenever possible  
monthlong, weeklong, yearlong  
pre-empt, pre-exist ..... hyphen on double vowel  
preregister ..... pre- as a prefix is usually solid  
prior to..... avoid in most cases; use *before*  
workday, workweek  
year-end

## Others

one, two, three, ... nine, 10, 11, 12 ...

ax, axed, axing	firm ... a business partnership
baby-sit, baby-sitting	Fort ..... always spell out
baby sitter	free-lance, free-lancer
ball carrier,	goodbye
ballclub, ballplayer,	Inc. ....no comma before
ballpark, ballroom	Internet
barbecue	Ku Klux Klan
capital .....the city	Mount .....always spell out
capitol ..... the building	nobody; no one
doughnut ..... not donut	OK, OK'd, OK'ing, OKs
Down syndrome .. not <i>Downs</i>	rock 'n' roll
earth ..... dirt	toward ..... not <i>towards</i>
Earth .....the planet	theater ..... not <i>theatre</i>
e-mail	the fact that ... just <i>that</i>
Father's Day, Mother's Day	T-shirt
fiance ..... man	under way
fiancee ..... woman	work force, workplace
firefighter	worn-out