



Bridging the Gap Between New-to-Journalism and Experienced Students: The Creation of Interactive AP Style Writing Resources



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Abstract

This Honors College creative project explores the knowledge gap between journalism students who entered the major with prior knowledge of journalistic writing and Associated Press (AP) Style and students with no prior knowledge. The project aims to find out what new-to-journalism students are struggling with and then create worksheets, style guides, and more to supplement journalism coursework. This thesis consists of creating a set of resources for journalism students that can be accessible to anyone online and through the OU Department of Communication, Journalism, and Public Relations, and the OU Writing Center (OUWC). Interactive resources do not currently exist, and no one has explored which writing components struggling journalism students may be missing. "Interactive" means that students will receive worksheet-styled guides for journalistic writing, digest them, react to them, and then interact with them, a process that engages students more by going one step further than a "stand and present" teaching model (DePietro 27). The expected benefit is that new-to-journalism students will be better equipped to write in the field, and the resources could serve as a reference that journalists can interact with worldwide.

Introduction

When students begin their college journeys, many start at different levels of competence in their field. Concerning journalism specifically, students are not all at the same level of familiarity when beginning introductory journalism classes. Students are classified into two categories of understanding: new-to-journalism students, meaning those who enter the college major with little to no understanding of the writing style, and students with prior experience. Because JRN 2000: Intro to Journalism classes have various curricula, all students do not spend the same amount of time learning Associated Press (AP) Style, the writing style used by journalists, public relations specialists, and some communication workers to quickly communicate. To help students who struggle with journalistic writing and experienced students who sometimes need refreshers, I created comprehensive resources that aim to make users more comfortable with the writing style. This poster will highlight the process of creating the first interactive set of journalistic writing resources, and a critical discussion will assert that these resources will help improve student satisfaction with AP Style writing and effectively strive to close the gap between new-to-journalism and experienced students.

Resource Excerpt

Lead Writing Practice

Practice is the best way to write better leads. To get accustomed to identifying the five W's, identify them in the lead for this story:

The Oakland University Board of Trustees (BOT) approved construction of campus arts and athletic facilities, following a \$78 million general revenue bond issuance approval at the June 10 Board meeting.

Who: Where:
What: Why/How:
When:

Use the information below to write an example lead. Try to include as many of the W's as possible, but make sure your writing stays concise — meaning avoid extra words.

Who: Oakland University Office for Student Involvement
What: Hosting an open forum with Oakland University President Ora Hirsch Pescovitz
When: Friday, Jan. 25 from 1-2 p.m.
Where: The Oakland Center Ballrooms
Why/How: To give students the chance to ask questions about the coming school year

Methods and Materials

The first step toward the creation of these journalism resources was interviewing journalism professors to address where the gap in knowledge lies and access what resources professors would like to see the most. Then, I created original worksheets from the professor feedback, using the *AP Stylebook*, Tim Harrower's *Inside Reporting*, and other resources for the formatting, while pulling from my own writing and experience to create worksheet examples. The content on the worksheets was determined from the needs listed by Intro to Journalism professors. As the resources were compiled, they were tested on students in two OU Intro to Journalism classes to gauge what works best. Students spent about 30 minutes navigating the resources and then answered a Google Forms survey asking them if the resources made them feel more comfortable with AP Style. After this data was collected, results were processed to determine the effectiveness of the resources. I followed up with the Intro to Journalism professors to obtain feedback before finalizing the resources. Those resources were compiled and uploaded to an open, online resource database, and paper resource binders were provided to the journalism department and the OUWC.

Results

The completed resources include more than 25 pages of written information coupled with worksheets to ensure the highest level of learning. *Professor Recommendations about Most Beneficial Resources.* Five journalism professors who have taught JRN 2000 were interviewed before the creation of the resources to gauge what writing help would be the most beneficial to students. Professor feedback centered around student issues with the use of mechanics, the inverted pyramid style, grammar, and lack of writing skills. *Student Feedback.* After the creation of many of the resources, 32 students in two JRN 2000 classes were asked to complete the first three worksheets – lead writing, the inverted pyramid, and story organization – and fill out a Google Forms survey to provide their thoughts on their effectiveness. Of the 32 students, five of these students (15.6%) are majoring in journalism, 11 are communication majors (34%), three are public relations majors (9%), and two either intend to become journalism majors or earn a journalism minor (6%). The remaining 11 students (34%) were most likely taking the class for elective credit.

Table 1. Effectiveness of AP Style Writing Resources and Likelihood of Future Use.

	1	2	3	4	5
Effectiveness Ranking (not effective-extremely effective)					
Overall effectiveness	0%	0%	15.6%	43.8%	40.6%
Lead writing guide	0%	0%	15.6%	37.5%	46.9%
Inv. pyramid guide	0%	0%	12.5%	40.6%	46.9%
Organization exercise	0%	3.1%	15.6%	34.4%	46.9%
Likelihood of Future Use (not likely-extremely likely)					
Overall likeliness	3.1%	3.1%	25%	40.6%	28.1%
Future work in class/major	0%	6.3%	28.1%	40.6%	25%
Future work, majors only*	8%	0%	28%	32%	32%

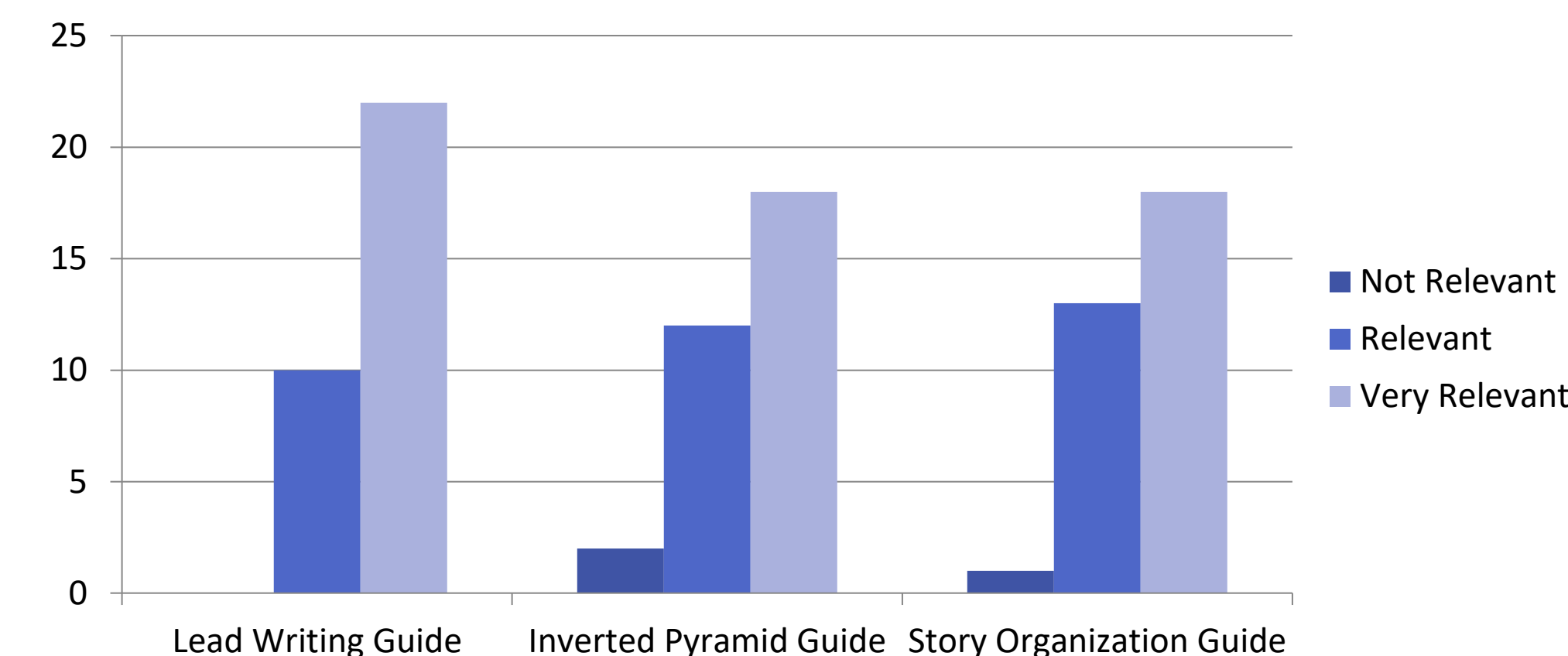


Chart 1. Relevance of Materials Tested on Students. Y-axis = number of students

Discussion

The main outcome from the creation of the resources is for students taking journalism classes to feel more knowledgeable about AP Style. Interactive resources are now uploaded to an online database, as well as were given to the OU Department of Communication, Journalism, and Public Relations and the OUWC. This project can serve to bridge the gap among new-to-journalism students and experienced students, which may make them more likely to stay in their journalism programs and feel confident in their writing skills. The online resources can serve as a hub for AP Style knowledge that students, freelancers, and others can use and interact with worldwide.

Professors expressed the need for more students to be engaged in Intro to Journalism classes, which likely depends on the type of student and the type of introduction class they find themselves in. To address this, the resources aim to provide supplemental writing support alongside classroom assignments, work with journalism theory, or any learned AP Style specifics. Journalism students then will move into JRN 3000, Advanced News Writing and Editing, where those writing skills will be further developed, hopefully after having been strengthened beforehand from working with these writing resources

Conclusions

As the Associated Press updates its rules each year, these resources will need to be further developed based on additions and newfound student needs. Since the 2019 *AP Stylebook* included many new changes, these resources will likely not need to be updated for the next few years, giving students the chance to get used to them and offering professors time to choose whether to directly implement them into classroom practice. Having a book of resources can also establish a liaison between the journalism department and the writing center, which will allow students to have supplemental, in-person support that will push them to become better writers and be more prepared for when they leave OU. The resources effectively address issues with lead writing, organization, avoiding bias, grammar specifics like punctuation and syntax, and more. The creation of this set of resources could be built upon to establish other forms of interactive journalistic style help. Access to the resources will be given to the OU journalism department, where they can be further developed to fit the updated AP Style standards of future years. Hopefully, with this project, journalism students will be more encouraged to stay in their programs, and other students can be more apt to earn degrees in journalism, public relations, communication, or advertising.

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References

References available upon request