



Seeing the Complete Picture Handling the News in Layers

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The job of the news designer is a simple one, says Edwin Taylor, a British journalist and former editor of U.S. News and World Report: Get the reader to the first paragraph!

Layering the news is a method to get people to read. It makes the newspaper complete and compelling.

A definition of layering: "The reporting and presentation of a news story in multiple pieces using a variety of visual and text-organizing techniques." Layering also involves the ability to see the complete picture -- how headlines, summary decks, photos, captions, graphics, quoteouts, readouts, and nuggets can work in combination.

- o **Headlines** should be direct, clear and capture the essence of our stories.
- o **Photos** should tell a story.
- o **Graphics** should simplify and explain.
- o **Cutlines** should go beyond the obvious and add to the information.
- o **Nuggets** or **glance boxes** should supplement stories and highlight important information.

Visualize the entire package. Avoid repetition. Exploit every opportunity to attract and interest the reader.

Anyone involved in the editing and layout of a newspaper has the ability to see the complete picture. This is not high science. Coordinating elements just takes a little time and thought.

A person who is writing a caption should obviously be looking at the photo. But, looking at the layout can help as well. The person who proofs a graphic or nugget should also be familiar with the story. And so on.

Here are some other tips in considering the complete picture.

HEADLINES

News headlines should be direct and capture the essence of the stories they accompany. In the end, the most important goal is to provide information clearly and concisely.

SUMMARY DECKS

Summary-deck headlines, which many newspapers now use to communicate more complete information, may be the most effective tool in developing secondary information.

They serve two purposes:

- They offer the editor an extra shot at enticing the time-starved reader into a story.
- They give the reader at least a good sense of what a story is about.

CAPTIONS

Research reinforces something we've known all along -- readers like photos. The research also points out that captions are among the most-often read portions of a newspaper.

The second and third lines of a photo caption represent opportunities to offer the reader some other information other than what is apparent in the photo -- something the person said or did, another tidbit from the story, important or telling background.

QUOTEOUTS

A quoteout or readout is another opportunity to draw in the reader or showcase information that could not be written into the headline or summary deck. Sometimes editors must use quotes to fill space. That's inevitable. But even in those cases we should try to come up with something that contributes to the information. A quote should be able to stand on its own.

GRAPHICS

Informational graphics and nugget boxes are important ways to impart information. Even a simply map tells the reader something and provides an entry point into the story.

Line graphs, bar charts and pie charts add to the story when used correctly. Shifting numerical data to a graphic or table also allows the writer to focus on the narrative of the story. Roy Peter Clark, of the Poynter Institute, calls this the "heavy cargo" of a story.

Always be thinking of the reader -- or potential reader. Seeing the complete picture will allow the reader to make good progress, from element to element, before he/ she has even started into the text.