

# A reporter's guide to content layering

HANDY  
1-PAGE  
EDITION!

## SIMPLE TOOLS, AND HOW THEY ENHANCE YOUR NARRATIVE

### Background box

- **WHY?** Most of our audience doesn't read a paper every day. If they don't know what's going on, the casual reader will move on.
- **WHEN?** You find yourself including "boilerplate" info high in the story at the expense of news.

### Questions & Answers

- **WHY?** Readers ask questions just like the rest of us. A Question/Answer format is a natural form of communication and one that can convey drab data in a plain and simple way.
- **WHEN?** Big stories, or stories that have profound reader impact and low reader interest (tax stories, important government meetings and the like).

### Biobox

- **WHY?** Readers can get at-a-glance information that can arm them with what they need to get into a story.
- **WHEN?** You find yourself including dutiful information high in the story at the expense of news or valuable narrative.

### Highlights box

- **WHY?** Sometimes key information needs to be explored chronologically; readers may also want information at a glance.
- **WHEN?** You find yourself trying to pack too many things into a lede.

### What's next box

- **WHY?** We may understand civics and social justice, but most readers don't.
- **WHEN?** You're reporting an important "turn of the screw" story that's one step in a confusing process.

### Local impact box

- **WHY?** It provides readers with visible local information in a national story they may not read otherwise.
- **WHEN?** You've got a wire story that has a quick local add but doesn't really weave content throughout.

### When to go non-linear

If there's just "no story there," don't try to force it. Perhaps your information can be told in chunks: think of them as an intro and lots of short subheaded elements.

## IN YOUR LEDE OR BUDGET ENTRY, 30 WORDS TO WATCH

*There are some simple ways to tell if the story you're working on needs a visual or layered text. In fact, there are times when the story you're working on IS a visual. Here is a quick list of some key words. If they're up high in your story or listed in your news budget entry, chances are good that you'll need to look at some non-traditional ways to tell your story.*

<b>Agreement</b>	A box that lists the tenets of the agreement.
<b>Ahead</b>	A text box that lists the next step in the process.
<b>Annual</b>	A chart or box that compares the event to previous years.
<b>Chronology</b>	Timeline that shows past events.
<b>Compared to</b>	Box which places one item against another.
<b>Debate</b>	What are the key points of the debate?
<b>Decrease</b>	How much did it decrease? Chart comparing previous years.
<b>Divided by/up</b>	What was divided up? Show it, whether it's land or money.
<b>Expansion</b>	What expanded where? Could be a list of numbers or a map.
<b>Figures</b>	Don't use this word without a box detailing the figures.
<b>Increase</b>	How much did it increase? Chart comparing previous years.
<b>In proportion</b>	In proportion to what? Show the relation of objects.
<b>Key players</b>	Muglets or photos of people who have a stake in the issue.
<b>Key points</b>	Bulleted list of things the reader would want to know quickly.
<b>Last year</b>	Box or chart comparing the two years.
<b>Looking ahead</b>	Text box that tells the reader "what's next."
<b>Looking back</b>	Timeline or box that gives the reader background context.
<b>Merge or merger</b>	Chart comparing the two companies or organizations.
<b>Organization</b>	Background on the organization or biobox of the company.
<b>Percentage</b>	Percentage of what?
<b>Plan</b>	Bulleted list of the plan's tenets.
<b>Process</b>	Flowchart or diagram.
<b>Proposal, proposed</b>	Bulleted list of the details of the proposal.
<b>Profile</b>	A biobox about the person's key life points.
<b>Pros &amp; cons</b>	List the pros and cons with a bulleted list.
<b>Released</b>	What was released? Look for summary opportunities.
<b>Report</b>	Highlights or a summary.
<b>Schedule</b>	A grid-based calendar or list of upcoming events.
<b>Statistics</b>	Graphic or chart that compares the data.
<b>What's next</b>	A box listing future events.

Note: Some of the "words to watch" compiled from The Associated Press' handout, "Making Graphics."

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