

Desktop Publishing

The Ten Commandments of Headline Writing

1. Write headlines in present tense, it gives readers a sense of immediacy.
Wrong: **Pioneers defeated Gophers, 56-54**
Right: **Pioneers defeat Gophers, 56-54**
2. Punctuation in headlines usually only involves three marks. The comma is often used in place of the word “and”. The semicolon is used whenever a period would be appropriate. If quote marks are needed use single marks instead of double quotes.
Wrong: **Clinton and Gore cut taxes.**
Senator calls move “terrible”
Right: **Clinton, Gore cut taxes;**
Senator calls move ‘terrible’
3. Avoid using the any of the forms of the verb “to be.”
Wrong: **Five seniors are chosen for scholarships**
Right: **Five seniors chosen for scholarships**
4. Headlines are written in “downstyle.” Capital letters are used only for proper nouns and the first letter of the first word.
Wrong: **School Wins High State Rating**
Right: **School wins high state rating**
5. Avoid repeating words and other information in a headline.
Wrong: **Student Council to discuss student rights**
Right: **Student Council to discuss rights** OR **Council to discuss student rights**
6. Avoid bad splits between decks of the headline.
Wrong: **Club to travel to New York for convention** OR **Spanish club will attend fiesta**
Right: **Club to travel to New York in May** OR **Spanish club will attend fiesta**
7. Don’t use names unless the person is very well known.
Wrong: **Jessica North reviews novel**
Right: **Author reviews first novel**
8. Leave out the articles “a”, “an” and “the”.
Wrong: **The Pioneers to face a tough Barlow squad**
Right: **Pioneers to face tough Barlow squad**
9. Be clever, not cute. Avoid clichés like the plague.
Wrong: **Teens to tap toes, trill tunes** OR **Track teams run like the wind**
Right: **Phone users have no hangups** OR **New spray bugs farmers**
10. Write most numbers as numerals. Occasionally numbers under ten may be spelled out.
Wrong: **Top fifteen make speech finals** OR **9 to run for ASB offices**
Right: **Top 15 make speech finals** OR **Nine to run for ASB offices**