

A large, stylized red star graphic is positioned on the right side of the slide, partially overlapping the main title text.

Crafting headlines that deliver

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Headlines matter.



Headlines have an outsized job:
To make people stop and pay attention.

Be clear and concise;
specific, not vague.

Start simple.
Think:
subject, verb.
Who, what.

Change your perspective.
Tune in to your targeted audience.

Focus on people, not policy.

Avoid journalese like mull, incite, funds

Explore the 5 W's and 1 H.

Use strong words, and remember to value the verb.

Be conversational.

Use articles (a, an, the).

Some rules

Great guidelines

Think about your headline before you write a single word.

Ask yourself before you assign or create the story: What is the headline here? If it's uninteresting, dull, boring, repetitive, snoozy, etc., then you must ask yourself, why are we even creating this piece in the first place?

It's OK to leave your audience with questions.

Unlike in the body of your story, you want your headlines to make people have questions — and therefore want to dive into the story to get those questions answered

Always read the entire story before you write the headline.

You read the story, right? The whole thing? All the way to the end? You understood it, right? Great headline writers almost always really understand the content and the context.



Headlines should make you want to read

**We're suing the UT
System. Here's why.**

**OPINION — Why is SIU using AI when
our syllabi say that students can't?**



**Four Emerson alums, hundreds of
thousands in debt: The price of an
Emerson education**

Headlines should make you want to read (pt. 2)

This new Instagram account has been hiding hundreds of dollars all over LSU's campus

Conefest pokes fun at Bayview parking fiasco

Campus Benches Ranked by Cry-Ability



Original:

**More than a degree: Unique
friendship at Bowdoin**



Better:

From trauma bonding to songs of summer, these friendships make Bowdoin unique

What makes it work: We dig into the narrative to reveal hints of the details that make the story interesting without giving it away.



Original:

**Early attendance at USC
football games decreases this
season amid high temperatures**



Better:

**No shade. \$10 water.
Despite a 3-0 record,
students are skipping
football games.**

What makes it work: Details like \$10 water raise eyebrows and make people want to read more, plus, there's the juxtaposition of a winning team with declining attendance, which seems contradictory.



Original:

Charlie Kirk Eulogy on the Oval Friday night



Better:
Despite being 'thrown
together,' vigil draws
hundreds, ends in
spontaneous song

Why it works: A headline reads better with a subject/verb/object structure, not a sentence fragment or a title. Simply stating that an event happened gives people almost no reason to read. Reading this entire story yields a much better headline, because of the twist at the end.



Original:

**Philadelphia scores
high in difficulty to live
in with asthma**



Better:

**It's tough to live in
Philly when you have
asthma.**

Why it works: It's more personal and it avoids falling into the trap of being too clinical, boring and scientific when you're dealing with research.



Original:

Over 100 protest reported
housing of ICE agents outside
Hyatt Place Medford



Better:

**100 people protest
outside of a hotel
where ICE may be
staying**

Why it works: The original was unfortunately unintelligible. Use plain English and strong verbs and nouns that people can understand.



Original:

Former US Special
Prosecutor Jack Smith
speaks at Mason



Better:

**Despite death threats
and heightened
security, controversial
speaker goes on**

Why it works: Simply put, this is more interesting and pertinent to students.

Remember!

- Start thinking about the headline the moment the story is assigned.
- Be interesting. Think what **you** would want to read.
- Strive for a subject-verb-object structure.
- Read the entire story before you write.
- Keep practicing. That's the only way to get better!