

# 13th COSCOM Stringer Handbook



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## **Stringers**

What is a stringer and how do you become one?

Stringers are part-time reporters or photojournalists who write, take photographs or provide story information about events in their organizations. Stringers are paid for their services by receiving a byline.

This guide will help you write stories and take photographs for publication in the Fort Hood Sentinel and other military journals.

## **Definition and Evaluation of News**

News is what happens to and is people. It is anything you learn today that you didn't know yesterday. News is information people need. It's written to inform the reader. News is a timely report of an event of sufficient importance to interest a number of people and possesses a combination of elements of appeal.

News is evaluated by journalists in terms of:

- Authenticity -- the genuine news value of the report. It means the event happened and is not fiction.

- Good taste -- the content does not offend the readers' social, religious or cultural mores.

- Mass Appeal -- the content affects or interests readers in some way, for some reason. Mass appeal is determined by certain news elements generally categorized as:

*Immediacy* - Events that happen today are more interesting to the reader than events of yesterday or the day before.

*Proximity* - Readers are generally more interested in something that has happened close to home rather

than in a distant location, unless there is a local tie to that faraway place.

*Consequence* - News can be localized by telling readers how an event will affect them.

*Conflict* - Readers are drawn to stories dealing with conflict, such as stories about war, sports, domestic confrontations, elections, crime or man against nature.

*Oddity* - Anything unusual or comical can make a story that will draw reader attention, but it must be in good taste.

*Emotion* - Stories that cause readers to feel sympathy, anger, sadness or happiness make good copy. Emotions can draw readers into the story.

*Prominence* - People are naturally interested in the activities of well-known people. Prominent, newsworthy people on your military installation include the post commander, senior NCO, etc.

*Suspense* - News events or situations that have not been concluded may be read as eagerly as any mystery story or serial.

*Progress* - By their nature, advancements -- in any field, discipline, specialty, etc. -- are news and interest readers, especially if they affect the reader.

### **News Gathering**

The public depends on the news media to tell them what is happening locally, nationally and internationally, and how it affects them. To do that job well, you must:

- Have a sense for what news is
- Be alert to the obvious facts in a news story

sergeant major of the Army	Army Sgt. Maj.
command sergeant major	Command Sgt. Maj.
sergeant major	Sgt. Maj.
first sergeant	1st Sgt.
master sergeant	Master Sgt.
sergeant first class	Sgt. 1st Class
staff sergeant	Staff Sgt.
sergeant	Sgt.
corporal	Cpl.
specialist	Spc.
private first class	Pfc.
private (1 or 2)	Pvt. (1 or 2)

## **Rank Abbreviations for Military Publications**

This style military rank abbreviation is from the Associated Press Stylebook, which is the standard for Army publications. These abbreviations are used only before full names. Second and subsequent references use only the person's last name, unless there is more than one person with the same last name included in the story. In those instances, use the rank abbreviation with the last name.

general	Gen.
lieutenant general	Lt. Gen.
major general	Maj. Gen.
brigadier general	Brig. Gen.
colonel	Col.
lieutenant colonel	Lt. Col.
major	Maj.
captain	Capt.
first lieutenant	1st Lt.
second lieutenant	2nd Lt.
chief warrant officer	Chief Warrant Officer
warrant officer	Warrant Officer

-- Always double check your facts  
Military reporters write stories with the "internal audience" in mind:

- Military members
- Civilian employees
- Family members

Because you are writing for the post newspaper, you should concentrate their newsgathering efforts on the installation's people and events. To gather news, you must know the various story types:

News - News informs an audience about something that will or has happened.

Feature Stories - Feature stories are about people. They are entertaining and stir the reader's emotions. They normally take up about 50 percent of the paper.

Sports - Sports stories can be about any of the ongoing recreational events at any installation.

### **News Feature**

A news feature is a "perishable story related to a current event or situation that is of interest to your readers and combines various feature writing techniques with elements of straight newswriting." News features are often found in weekly newspapers such as the Fort Hood Sentinel. This is the style of story you will write.

The news feature format combines the best elements of news and feature writing styles to present the news in its context -- with the human elements included.

Feature writing involves interpretation, style, imagery, description and emotional appeal. It gives depth to facts and records human drama.

### **Interviewing**

Interviewing is one of the most important steps in the newsgathering process. It's the basic tool for obtaining information in practically all forms of news and feature stories.

Whether you interview over the telephone or face to face, preparation is the key to planned interviews. Research the subject and the source of information by reviewing his or her bio before the interview.

#### *Questions*

- Write several questions in advance. This is the key to a successful interview.
- Design the questions so you get the information you need to write the story.
- Prepare more questions than you think you'll need.

- Use your questions to keep the interview on the story's focus.

#### *Tape Recorders*

The key to effective interviewing is the ability to take notes with a tape recorder and pad and pen. Always ask the interviewee for permission to use a tape recorder. There are limitations to both.

-- Advantages

- Records everything.
- Enables the reporter to capture the rhythm of colorful speakers.
- Useful for rapid speakers.

-- Long shots: Long shots establish the scene and show the reader the big picture. There does not need to be identifiable people in these shots.

-- Medium shots: Medium shots show one or two clearly identifiable people doing something. Try to get at least a three-quarters view of the person and make sure you can see the eyes. Most of your shots should be medium shots.

-- Close-ups: Close-ups focus on the center of the action and include only one person. When fitting the person and action into the frame, called cropping, make sure you do not cut them off at the joints. Examples: If showing the face, cut above the eyes and below the mouth. If showing the hands at work, cut in the middle of the hand or include the wrists.

### **Cutlines**

Along with the photograph, a cutline (called a caption by non-journalists) explains who and what is in the photograph. The cutline should include:

Who -- rank, full name and unit. If more than one person identify them from left to right.

What -- what is happening and what equipment is in the shot.

Where -- where is the action taking place.

When -- the day.

Why -- why are they doing what they are doing.

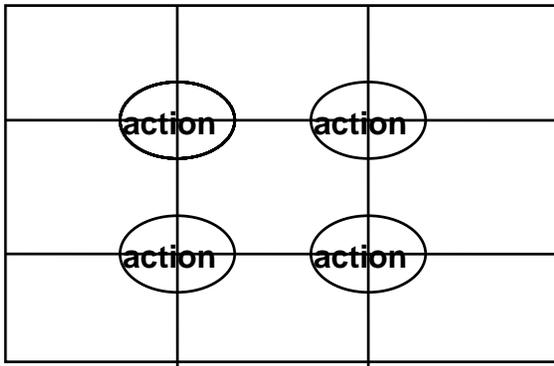
Type this information and the name of the photographer onto a piece of paper and tape to the back of the photo.

## Photojournalism

Photographs enhance the effectiveness of newspaper stories, often hooking the reader so that he or she reads the companion story. If you know how to use a 35mm camera, there are just a few tips to taking photographs for publications.

Newspaper photographs need to show action unless it is a mugshot. When possible and appropriate, the picture should include identifiable people.

The action should follow the Rule of Thirds. If you divide the image in the viewfinder into thirds horizontally and vertically, the action should happen near one of the intersections of the lines. The shots should be taken from a variety of angles and both horizontally and vertically.



Photographers should take a variety of shots.

- Enables the reporter to relax and concentrate on what is being said.

- Disadvantages

- Records everything -- background sounds, telephone rings, etc.

- Tapes must be transcribed.

- Mechanical failures.

- Intimidates subject.

### *Effective Notetaking*

- Learn to abbreviate. Develop a personal shorthand method using abbreviations for common words.

- Transcribe your notes immediately following the interview.

- Learn to remember complete anecdotes and vivid phrases.

- Learn to keep writing, even if the source gets on something that doesn't interest you.

- Learn to get the high points -- facts, dates, correct names, figures, etc.

- Learn to remember what's said after the formal interview. Sometimes your subject will give you the best quotes after the interview.

### *Interviewing Tips*

- Put subject at ease.

- Ask clear, brief questions.

- Avoid yes/no questions. Ask open-ended questions.

- Avoid leading questions.

- Ask specific questions to get specific answers.

- Don't be afraid to get away from your prepared questions.
- Don't ask dirty or embarrassing questions.
- Don't insult your source.
- Don't be afraid to stick to basic questions.

### **ABCs of Journalism**

Once you have conducted your interviews and made any relevant observations about the scene and activity, it is time to begin writing the story. All journalists should adhere to the ABC's of journalism.

- Accuracy involves facts, names, times, places, numbers, etc.
- Brevity involves sentence length. Be brief, but not at the expense of completeness.
- Clarity prevents the use of slang or jargon and encourages proper word choice.

### **Leads**

The first paragraph of a newspaper story is called the lead. News features are written in the inverted pyramid style with the conclusion at the beginning of the story. It contains a lead, bridge and body. Facts appear in diminishing order of importance so readers can decide if they want to read further into the story.

*News Peg* -- The news peg is why the story is written.

*Summary Lead* -- A summary lead is the first paragraph of a news story that:

- Tells the reader what the story is about in one sentence.

### **Ending**

A news feature is the skilled telling of a complete story and needs a strong feature conclusion where the writer makes or reinforces a point. There are seven types of feature endings.

- A SUMMARY ending summarizes the points made in the story. It usually keys on impact, effects or outcome.
- A TIE-BACK ending plants a fact, idea or scene in the lead and completes it at the end.
- A WRAP-UP ending ties up loose ends, answers questions or solves problems posed in the lead.
- A CLIMAX ending provides a natural ending to a story told in chronological order.
- An UNENDING ending leaves a key question unanswered. It is used to stimulate reader thinking -- to get the reader involved with the situation posed in the story.
- A STINGER ending is a surprise ending designed to jolt the reader.
- A COMBINATION ending combines two or more of the above.

### **Submitting the story to PAO**

Put the story and digital photos on a disk or e-mail the story and photos at [www.hood.army.mil/13coscom/](http://www.hood.army.mil/13coscom/). Make sure the article includes the author's name and unit. Bring photos to the Public Affairs Office, Building 39009 on Support Ave, 13<sup>th</sup> COSCOM Headquarters, or put them in an envelope and send it in a shotgun envelope the 13th COSCOM PAO.

*(The information for this section was adapted from material produced by the Journalism Division, Directorate of Public Affairs and Journalism, Defense Information School, Fort George G. Meade, Md. More information can be found at [www.dinfos.osd.mil/jwebsite](http://www.dinfos.osd.mil/jwebsite).)*

### *Newswriting tips for writing better sentences*

- Limit sentences to 25-30 words each.
- Write short, simple sentences.
- Use strong verbs.
- Use words familiar to your audience. Remember your audience includes people not in your MOS and family members.
- Don't bury important information in the body.
- Keep paragraphs short.
- Vary beginnings of each paragraph.
- Alternate sentence length for variety.
- Don't add your opinion.
- Produce in the body what you promise in the lead.

### *Content*

The writer presents the human side of the news along with the facts. The writer does this by using feature writing techniques such as quotes, vivid verbs and descriptive writing.

Some elements particularly important in a news feature include:

- Transitions, which hold the story together and move the reader smoothly from one paragraph to the next.
  - Focus -- the reason the story is written.
  - Content -- includes both the facts and details of a news peg and the interesting context surrounding it.
  - Organization of the content. Everything should be where the reader expects it.
- News features must be timely and must answer the W's as fully as possible.

- Makes him/her want to read on.
- Gives him/her important facts first, summarizing the story.

- Is usually written in 30 words or less.
- Is based on the five W's and H.

*Six Key Questions* -- Readers can only ask six questions about an event:

-- **Who:** Who answers a reader's questions of who did what, or to whom something happened. It may be a single person, a group of people or an organization. An additional who type lead is the impersonal who. It's used in leads when the subject or person is not well known to the readers, when another form of identification would be more meaningful to readers, or when there are several persons to be identified.

•When using the Impersonal Who, the subject must be identified by job title/position and organization.

•Full ID (Service, if applicable, rank and full name must follow in the bridge.)

-- **What:** What tells briefly what happened at a planned or unplanned event. It normally emphasizes what the **Who** did, and not what was done to the **Who**.

-- **When:** When refers to the time or date of an event. It can be answered in general terms, i.e. this afternoon or today. How specific the writer must be depends on how important the time element is to the story.

When is seldom the most important element of a story, but it must be included since it orients the reader in time. Circumstances, however, may make it significant enough for a lead emphasis: (EX: Just 15 minutes after police had erected a danger sign ...)

-- **Where:** Where gives the location of the news event. As with the when element, this question can also be answered in general terms. Using the where element as the lead emphasis is rarely justified.

-- **Why:** Why concerns the cause of the event, such as training on METL, or preparing for or going on a deployment.

-- **How:** How relates the circumstances or manner in which something is accomplished in the story.

### *Lead Emphasis*

Lead emphasis refers to the first few words in the summary lead. The most important W should be placed at the beginning of the lead sentence. The Who or What is the most common lead emphasis because who did something or what happened is generally the strongest W. At a minimum, leads should contain at least the Who, What, When and Where elements and should be 30 words or less.

### **Bridge**

The second paragraph of a news story is the bridge. Its purpose is to expand on the lead, which is limited by its 30-word maximum length.

The bridge must contain at least one of the five elements in the acronym WAITS.

W -- any other W's not included in the lead

A -- attribution to support facts in the lead

I -- identification -- primarily with impersonal who

T -- tie-back to an earlier news story to refresh reader's memory

S -- secondary facts that are significant, but not important enough for the lead.

### **Body**

The remainder of the story is written in descending order of importance. The functions of the body in a news story are to:

- Expand on information given in the lead and bridge.
- List additional facts in diminishing order of importance. Writing in inverted pyramid style is important. When a story is too long, it may be continued on another page or cut.

All people must be fully identified in the body of a news story. On first reference, identify service members by rank, abbreviated as listed at the end of this guide, before the full name. Full name is usually First, Middle Initial, Last, but if the interviewee uses another variation, such as retired Gen. H. Norman Schwartzkopf, then follow the interviewee's preference.

Also in identifying people include:

- Occupation or job title. Note that rank is not a title/occupation. Never identify people by their pay grade.
- Military unit. It should be completely listed, i.e. Company A, 3rd Battalion, 22nd Infantry Regiment.

*Body -- Do's/Don'ts*

- Use subject-verb-object sentence structure.
- Use common, easy-to-understand words. Don't use jargon such as utilize.
- Keep the emphasis of the sentence to the front.

