



Dream of Travel Writing

Article Nuts and Bolts: Putting Together a News Brief

So today, we are starting a new series that I've talked about for a little while, which is going to be...we're calling it article nuts and bolts. So this is looking at how to put together different types of articles that you encounter as a travel writer. And the reason that we're doing this is that I found that a lot of you are used to writing a certain type of article, or maybe a couple different types of articles. But it's very easy to, as a freelance writer, get into this kind of plateau where either because you are comfortable with it, or because you have an editor who assigns that to you, that you end up writing a lot of the same thing.

And sometimes this is nice, right? Sometimes it's nice to write this kind of article because like I said, you feel comfortable doing it. But what I've noticed happen to most people is that if you're in the position where you're doing a lot of business profiles, or maybe you're doing a lot of features, or maybe you're just doing a lot of short pieces, or maybe you're doing a lot of roundups, there is a tendency, no matter how much you like to originally, to get fed up, to get sick of doing that. And it doesn't necessarily mean that you're actually sick of the particular thing that you're doing. It's typically just that you need some more variety in your writing, you need to use your brain in some different ways.

Yeah, so I believe that was Vylana. Someone just said...yeah, Vylana said that she have really loves roundups.

And I myself used to end up doing a lot of roundups. And what roundups really are, in actuality, is that roundups are typically pieces made up of a lot of smaller articles, right? We can think of it that way, that a roundup is really...you know, I was doing these 1500 word roundups, so it was really like 5 270-word pieces, or something like that, that I was writing every month. And because I was writing a lot of these same roundups for the same outlets that had a lot of these different small component articles, in a given month, I might be essentially writing like 45 or something of these tiny articles, and it's like the same format over and over again.

And well, that can be totally great in terms of writing more quickly and optimizing your writing time because you know how it gets put together. Sometimes you just feel bored. And I read this really neat thing that I'm gonna be writing more about lately that I wanna share with you guys. You know in the winter, often, we all feel a bit tired, and we attribute it to the weather and all these things.

There's this really fascinating thing about productivity where if you are bored of what you're doing, then you feel tired. And this is actually the trick that hypnotists use to make you fall asleep during hypnotisms is they make listening really boring, which is count numbers while watching something move back and forth repetitively, and that makes you tired and puts you



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to sleep. So sometimes if you feel like you are just tired all the time, and you think you're sleeping enough, and you don't know why, it might actually be that you're bored even though you don't realize it.

So the reason that we are talking this month about looking at different types of articles is to help you push out into some different things. I know sometimes, especially if it comes to, for instance, breaking in to feature their longer articles, people have some fear around doing that because they don't think they're up to the task. But we're talking about news briefs today because what I've actually found is that writing short – or tight, as editors call it – is what is difficult for a lot of people. So if you saw the blog post, or the newsletter before today's call, then you heard me talk a little bit about this. But writing short or tight is actually one of the most difficult skills, as a journalist, to accumulate.

You know, even if you are introverted, once you start interviewing people, and hearing people share their stories, I feel like that hump is a lot easier to get over. But ringing in your writing so that no matter what length of your writing, you're packing in the most information in each sentence, which is important for print because space literally costs money, that is something that will really take your writing to the next level.

And I had a coaching call earlier today where this person is really busting her butt sending pictures. She was trying to send 150 pictures last month, and she told me she's really disappointed in herself because she only sent 30. And I think that we can all agree that she deserves like a round of applause for getting 30 pictures out in one month, especially coming right back from the holiday. And she was saying that she just felt like it was taking her forever to write them. And I hear this a lot about pitching, and part of that is because you're taking a lot to generate the idea, of course, but also, part of it is distilling what you wanna say into a small space. And that's really what writing these short articles is about and why I really recommend everybody do it, at least a little bit, even if it's not something that you wanna specialize in.

So we're gonna talk about what it means to write tight, some different ways to do that, and how to practice it. That's the first thing that we're gonna look at today. And then, how many of you guys have heard of the inverted pyramid? Let me know in the chat box if you ever heard of this term inverted pyramid. This is something that people who work in news, and maybe if you went to journalism school, they use this term a lot, the inverted pyramid. And it's viewed kind of as the classic way to put together a brief, whether that's a news brief, or even just a news story, and so we're gonna talk about that.



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But in travel, it doesn't always work out in quite the same way, and we're gonna look at how that's different as well. And then, I've pulled three examples of these short, short front-of-book, newsy pieces from an airline magazine that we're gonna look at together as well. And in fact, one of them...I was flipping through the magazine the other day, and I saw Lisa Lubin. Some of you, guys, might know Lisa Lubin. So from Lisa around the world, or something like that, Lisa's world or something. So we're gonna look at a piece of Lisa Lubin wrote as well as we look at these pieces in the wild today.

So in terms of what we're talking about today, I got really lucky when I first started travel writing that one of my first gigs, so to say, was writing daily – actually, couple of times, multiple times a day – news briefs for a magazine that was around travel to specific country. And sometimes, these cultural briefs were on all sorts of things like the Olympics, or a terrorist attack, and often, they are on more traditional topics, but it really forced me with my literature degree as opposed to journalism degree to study not just this inverted pyramid format, but how to, in 200, 215 or maybe less words, get through everything that the reader needs to know about our topic.

And if you are in one of our home programs, like Ideafest, or if you've joined us for the live Ideafest, or the boot camp, in the past, we've done this exercise of breaking down a short front-of-book article, which is sort of like what we're gonna do today, but more of today, we'll be talking about the structure. And one of the things that always happens, when we look together at these short articles, is that I ask people to explain what took place in the article that they were looking at. And as they are going through and explaining, almost uniformly, they take more words in their explanation, to tell us what the article is about than are actually in the article itself.

So this is really the heart of what we are looking at today with this concept of writing tight, or writing short. So something that I had mentioned in the newsletter on the blog post before today's call, was that a lot of times, if you come from a setting of writing for the web, which might be that you write for your own blog, you write for other blogs, or other websites...or for instance, I used to work in education, I worked in MIT, and I work on the websites for our offices. So this can also be if you write for the web for different companies that you work for right now that aren't in the travel writing setting. I think for the web, it's really different in terms of the ways that ideas are communicated. It's really different from print. And part of it circles back to what I mentioned about just the premium of space.

In the blog post in the newsletter today, I mentioned how when you are looking at a print setting, literally, every piece of space costs money to put on the paper just from that standpoint. But there's also other things competing for that use of space that may be thought of as a better use of the space and money than what your writing is. And often, those are



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advertisements. So I've seen a lot of instances, for myself and other people, I'm hearing this from editors that a piece might get cut, either entirely or just trimmed down, because another ad came in. And you know, the writer tends to be quite, "I'm happy about this." Like, "Oh they assigned me, you know, 750 words, or 1200 words, and then they all run the pieces 700 words, and that's what I'm getting paid for even though I filed a piece that was 1200 words, or something like that.

And the thing here is that on the one hand, having you write the piece...you know, people pick up magazines as to read the pieces, right? But paying you for your piece costs the magazine money, whereas putting an advertisement in that spot earns the magazine money.

So this is the constant balance that editors of print publications are working on, is how do I have enough content that is actual content – or you know, in some cases, advertorial content that our magazine is interesting to readers – and telling them what they wanna know and what they show up to our magazine looking to find, while still having money coming in from having enough advertisements, and how do we make sure that those advertisements are in places where people will see them, so they're not hidden, and things like that. So there's this constant equilibrium between getting the most out of the text that's on the page, and making sure that the text is as interesting as possible while still utilizing space for ads.

So I'm not necessarily talking here about editors who are, you know, even pandering to advertisers, or trying to align their editorial content with advertisers. This is really all editors, right? All editors have to run ads, unless, in some cases, if you're writing for a magazine that's for an association, like a membership group. They might not be writing ads, but they're magazine is gonna be much, much shorter as a result, and something that is also not gonna pay you, as a writer, as much.

So we need to write short because that's the amount of space individually available to us. But what often happens is that our pitch is the place we think, as the writers, where we are showing an editor who we are, maybe what idea we're pitching them, or that we know their magazine. But we often forget, or sometimes by the final draft, you've gotten so into the idea that you've forgotten that your pitch is, in and of itself, a clip. Your pitch is how you are showing your writing skills to that editor that you are pitching, just as much as your past magazines that you've written for your past clips are showing that. That pitch is really one of your most important sales tools of your writing ability, and this is why I've mentioned before that editors often don't, or won't need to ask you to see other clips, if you write a really great pitch, because they're convinced, from your pitch alone, that you've got the chops, as they say, to write the piece that they are assigning to you.



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And this is a really interesting thing because our pitch has so much to do, right? Our pitch has to communicate the idea. It has to communicate why it's a good fit for the audience. It has to communicate who we are and why we can write it. And that's one of the reasons that pitches often get quite long. And people ask me a lot, "How long should my pitch be, or how long is it okay for the pitch to be?" And I think there's a lot of... obviously, there's a lot of leeway there.

But if you ask this to an editor, they will always say the pitch should be as long as it needs to be. Sometimes they'll say the pitch shouldn't be more than a paragraph, or something like that. But the answer, the really deep answer, is that the pitch should be as long as it needs to be, and not any longer. And writers are always like, "Oh, I mean, what does that mean? Like how long does it need to be?" That's a circuitous answer. Well, what do I say here?

But what they really mean is that if you are writing tight, if you are writing short, if you are writing really efficiently and effectively, that the pitch should include everything that an editor needs to know to assign it, and nothing more.

So in a lot of ways, this idea of writing tight, or writing short, can be attributed to the words that you use, right? It's like saying "about" rather than "in regards to," or "in terms of," right? There's a lot of constructions that we use that add extra words when you could just use one, or using passive words, like "has been done." So there's a lot of verb structures also that take extra words.

So on the one hand, writing tight and writing short can be accomplished by looking back over the text that you've put on the page, and pulling out words that don't need to be there. And if you just look up how to write tight, or something like that, which I did before the call to try to get a sense of what is the advice the people usually give, a lot is about this. A lot of it is just about taking out words. And that's definitely one of the ways that you learn to write shorter is to take out words that don't need to be there.

But what I find typically is that the way to write shorter is not to put the words down on the page, and then go and remove them afterwards. But rather, in advance, to be very clear about what needs to go on that page in the first place so that you don't put additional words there at all, right?

So that kind of seems like a first world thing, like, "Well, great. Once I have more experience, then I can, you know, know which things need to be there." But no, you don't



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have to wait until you have more experience, or until you've been writing more and had more practice.

A lot of writing tight and writing short comes down to structure, okay? So that's what we're gonna look at, and we're gonna start talking about the inverted pyramid in a second. But on the topic of writing short, there's just a couple other tips that I wanna give you, guys. So obviously, I mentioned taking, you know, verbs that are passive, that include extra words, or taking phrases, like "in regard to," things like that, that are very easy to scrunch down. There's oftentimes, when you are taking two words that mean the same thing and saying them next to each other.

So I often find, for instance, that when I'm looking at...this is more on a travel content marketing site. But when I'm looking at people's pitches, and they say, you know, "This newsletter will boost your subscriber engagement, increase click rates, and create more sales." They're all sort of versions of the same thing. You could really say, you know, "increased subscriber engagement," or "increased customer engagement, increased your sales." You could say any one of those things, and it would really take the place of all three.

But what's much better to do in your writing is actually to use specific details. So what I find is that if you look at your piece of writing, whatever it is, if it's a pitch or an article...and of course, we're gonna talk specifically about news brief articles today, but I mean this generally.

If you look, and you have a lot of words that are general, sometimes you're using that to try to be brief, because you're saying a thing in general instead of saying a specific example that could take up more words, but that's not accomplishing your goal. So I looked at three pitches for the person that I had on my coaching call earlier. We looked back at some old pitches of hers to try to figure out why she wasn't getting so many responses. And what I saw was that even though her ideas, the kernel of the idea, the inherent idea, was interesting, a lot of what she had in her pitch was basically just this verbiage, general things. And she would have had better success with a pitch that was maybe the same length, or maybe shorter, maybe even a little bit longer, where she used specific details.

So as we start talking about news briefs, even though we're talking about being very short and tight, what you're gonna find, when we look at the examples, is that a lot of these articles accomplish their brevity, not by glossing over things, although that can happen, but by being very selective about the details that they include.



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So it seems like only a few of you are familiar with the inverted triangle, so let's get into looking at that because that's really the heart of this news brief. So the reason we're talking about this inverted triangle, or the inverted pyramid, is that the idea is that the fat part of the pyramid is at the top, and then the narrow part is at the bottom. So this graphic that we're looking at here... actually, inverted pyramid has its own Wikipedia page, so this is the Wikimedia image that we're looking at here.

And something that really struck me, when I was looking at the inverted pyramids for today's call, is that it kinda doesn't make sense why the things that are on the bottom should be the narrow part of the pyramid if you just look at it like this, particularly here, right? At the bottom, you'll see they say other general info, background info. Why is that the pointy part of the pyramid, that seems like it should be the base of the pyramid, right?

So if this inverted pyramid, upside down triangle, visual didn't work for you, don't worry about it. This is just the way that people in the industry, especially kind of people in journalism school and old school reporters refer to this. So if the visual doesn't make sense to you, don't worry about it. But you can think of it as a three-step construction, and that's how we're gonna talk about it.

So the main thing to notice here, to start with, is that the top of the pyramid says "the most newsworthy info." Who, what, when, where, why, how. So we're gonna talk about this more on the next slide. But I wanna point this out, because I'm seeing increasingly a lot of leads for pitches, as well as leads for stories, but especially leads for pitches, and especially leads in short stories, where say somebody's writing an article where the end article is gonna be, let's say, 150 words. I'm seeing a lot of the leads for that pitch, or the corresponding article itself, where the lead or the first section, introduction, is running maybe even two paragraphs. And it's got a long quote. Maybe it's got some background information, but the setting of the scene is taking up about half, or three quarters of the amount of the article at hand.

So when you're writing a short piece, when you're writing a news brief, the idea is that you don't have time to set the scene in this way, that you don't have time to open with a quote, or to open with a description of a place, or background information. But you have to open with exactly what is the point. And what I mean by what is the point is that we're not just telling them the because, the why, right? We have to also give all of the salient details, so that in that one sentence, the reader understands where this is happening, who's involved, what the time frame.

So this first sentence of the news piece, you can think of it almost as something that offers a grounding in what you're talking about, but isn't necessarily that same kind of, you know,



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lateral, catchy bit of information that you might think of as the usual lead, where you start with a quote from somebody that is really interesting, and you know, will make the reader say, “Oh,” but doesn’t necessarily express exactly what the point of the article is.

So in features, you can do that. In features, you can talk about...you know, set the scene for what’s gonna be the climax of the piece, and then you’re gonna go circle back to it at the end. But with the news brief, what you really need to start with is hitting all of these buttons, and we’re gonna talk about them in a second.

So the second part of the news brief here, it’s called the important details, but you may have heard the term nut graph. I’m just gonna write this over here on the side. Nut graph is in there. Sometimes they call it graph like that, and sometimes they call it graph like this. So nut graph is another industry journalism term for the paragraph that has all of the important details. So I don’t use this terms when we talk about pitching, but a lot of other people do. They say that, that second paragraph of your pitch is where you should include the nut graph, or should tell everything that your eventual article would be about. So the nut graph is sort of like the technical industry term for that, is a way to think of that, okay?

So what the nut graph is we already answered this who, what, where, when, why, now in our first sentence. So what does the nut graph, or this important details paragraph...what does that do? You can think of that almost as the paragraph that explains why the situation exists, why the situation is important, what the repercussion of the situation are, okay? So again, we’re gonna look at all this in a lot of detail with some examples, and I’ve got another pyramid that has some more details as well.

So then, remember how I was saying that this third section here on this inverted pyramid is a little confusing, because it says general info and background as not the base of the pyramid, but as the tip. So why is that? So if you read a really, really straight news article, as in something not in travel, but like in politics, or you know, finance, or something like that in the newspaper, what you’ll notice is that they start with these sentences, like this first sentence where we do the who, what, where, when, why, how. And then they go off into like maybe little paragraphs, where each paragraph is touching on a different part of the story. Like maybe one paragraph is giving us a brief example of the CEO who has gotten the company with the situation. They’re talking about his background. Or maybe another paragraph has a quote from an employee at a company talking about how they feel about their company being in this situation.

So in a very typical news setting, those parts at the bottom of the pyramid are each sort of separate segments that complete the picture, but the picture has been really fully outlined by



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the top, by this who, what, where, when, why, and how section, okay? So that's a really brief overview. We're gonna go into it a little bit more, but I wanted to just tell you what the three parts of the pyramid are before we dig into this.

So what about these questions? Any of you that have journalism training have probably had these drummed into you. But if you don't, if like me, for instance, you have a literature degree, maybe you did not. And something that I find happens really often – and I didn't do this in this webinar, it might be something worth doing for a future webinar – is to compare, as I mentioned sometimes, Robert Reid, who has worked for many years on Lonely Planet, his blog is Reid on Travel. He did this in a keynote at the TBEX Conference one year. He compared a blog post on a certain topic, a certain destination, with an article from a newspaper on the same destination. And he color-coded the whole thing so that it was quotes, versus historical background, versus first person, to show you the different compositions of those two articles.

And one of the things that stood out past the sort of seemingly obvious, you know, point that bloggers will talk about their first-person experience, was that in the newspaper piece on this destination, in the beginning, they sat out a lot of this framework, this who, what, where, when, why, how, whereas in what a lot of web writing looks like, those things come out much, much later, if they come out at all. And I often find, for instance, that I might be reading something, and then I'm like, "Oh, when was this published?" And it's very common these days for bloggers to not have the timestamp on their articles anymore.

But for me, as the reader, especially if I'm reading something about travel, about a destination, or perhaps it's a bit of service advice, kind of information about how to travel somewhere, then I really wanna know when that came out, because I wanna know if it's still relevant now, if it's recent, if I need to double check it, right?

So that's one of the reasons why it's really important to accomplish all of these who, what, where, when, why, how ever. But particularly in a short piece, you need to do it right away. You need to get it done to bring the reader into the short story that you're telling so that they can understand where you're coming from. If you ever have done debate, like in high school or college, one of the things they teach you in debate is that one of the very first steps that you need to do is set the definitions. You need to set the definitions of the terms that are under debate.

So you can think of this sentence, this top of the pyramid, as setting the definitions, setting the communal understanding of what you're gonna talk about, going forward. So that means identifying where in the world, or in a country, or in a certain city what your explaining takes



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place. It also means that you have to identify this what, right? What do we mean by what here? What means are you talking, you know, about a person or a place or phenomenon, obviously, on that level. But it also means saying in very clear, you know, layman's terms what is going on here.

So for instance, there's an article example that I'm not gonna show you today. I actually was looking for some different front-of-book news brief style pieces to share with you guys, and I found, and I had talked to someone in that coaching appointment about this recently that "American Way," their front-of-book news things don't satisfy this criteria. They're quite general, they're quite glossing over.

So you could kinda say if that's a type of news brief that you like to write, then perhaps you should go write from "American Way," not to take a dig at the magazine at all. But for instance, they were writing something where the piece was advertise the title implied that it was about craft cider as a trend in America, so cider being, you know, alcoholic drinks that are made from apples, as opposed to not an alcoholic drink. So in this instance, they were talking about alcoholic cider.

And the piece was very confusing because the title implied one thing, the first sentence implied one thing about this trend. But then, it became a profile almost, just about one place where they make cider. But they didn't really explain too much about the background, or who those people where, or why that place was important, and then they said that there were some number of hundreds or thousands of cideries raised around America, so this trend is definitely here.

And as we were looking at that piece together, I constantly found myself asking these questions, especially why sometimes where, particularly when, also a bit of what and who. And so this is why it's so important, no matter what piece you're writing, but especially with these front-of-book, shortened news brief pieces to get these questions answered right off the bat, okay?

So a technique that I use, if you're not used to doing this kind of writing, is that I take exactly the way that I have the text for you here, okay? So I take these little bullet points, and I put them on my page, and I put the title, or kind of what I think the title might be of the piece, and then I put these little bullet points, and then I write in what each of those things are. So I write the who, and the what, and the where, and then when, and the why, and the how. I write in each of those things. And then I try to organize them into one sentence.



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So for instance, you know, I'm gonna take a totally made up travel thing here that's based on something realistic that we're gonna go visit next week. But let's say that the who is a brewery that has its organic certification and is all about being a farm as well. And so like there's all these details about it that I could put in here. But really, the who is a brewery, okay? They're a farm and brewery, if we wanna be more specific.

And the what is that they are opening a new tasting room, okay? I could say what the tasting room does, and where are all those things, but for this part of the news brief, that's not important yet. So the what is that they are opening a new tasting room. The where is that their tasting room is in New Paltz, and this is in New York, and that the farm is in Acorn. We might need to not mention where the farm is, what's really important is where the new tasting room is, it's in New Paltz, okay?

When? So when are they opening this new tasting room, okay? That seems pretty simple, we get the date. But sometimes the when can be complicated, sometimes it's that they're doing a party on this day, but the official public unveiling is gonna be a different day, and they have a special event on another day. We can put all of that in that third part of the pyramid, okay, that part at the bottom. But for right now, we just need that one day.

And then why. Why are they opening this tasting room if they already have a tasting room at their brewery? This is really...the why is always important, right? So, one the one hand, we could say why they're opening the tasting room if they already have their brewery, right? But is that really the why to everybody? Is that the why to all of the readers? Does that really matter to most people? I don't think so. So we could say that the why is, you know, they're opening this tasting room because the brewery is closed in the winter, because it's in the country, and it's hard to get into, blah, blah, blah. No.

The why is because they are bringing a type of beer that is completely based in terroir, or like the taste of a certain place to the US, which is something that is new. You know, like most beers, we think of it as being distributed everywhere. We don't think of the Anheuser-Busch beers of tasting of a certain place. This is just that brand of beer taste. And so they have like 36 different beers that they make, and the yeast is like wild yeast that they've caught on their site, and so the why is because they don't wanna be just at their site. They wanna bring this beer to the masses, right? So they're opening a tasting room in New Paltz as a step towards educating more people about the terroir of beer, okay?

So then the how. Like how would be here, right? Why is how important? Do we really even talk about the how that often? In this case, in terms of the opening of the new brewery, I



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guess we could say the how is they acquired a space that was formerly used as a pizzeria. But does that matter in this case? I'm not sure.

And so in a lot of cases, you'll see that you've just been using the five Ws, as they call it, and not the how, okay? So sometimes, if the how is more like that someone has created a brand new beer, then the how might be a little more important, but it's not always important in that first sentence.

So for this theoretical article that we'll be writing, we would say, as that first sentence, you know, that Arrowood Brewery, a farm and brewery, that's how we write, is opening a new, year round, all-day tasting room in New Paltz on blah, blah, blah date in order to bring terroir-oriented beer to the masses. That would be the first sentence of this theoretical paragraph.

So then, what would we add after that? We'll look, as I said, at a kind of more simplistic version of that pyramid early on. But let me blow this up a little but more, so you guys can see it better. But here is some more information about what should go in these three different sections. So I really like, in this example – this is why I had two inverted pyramids for you guys – how it says that the first sentence should be approximately 30 words. I love that, okay, because as I mentioned when we just went through this who, what, where, when, why, how exercise before, it's really easy to make that who go on forever, and make the why go on forever, and it's not even the why that matters to the readers, right? It's really easy to make those things be a lot of words.

But if you're aiming to have that first sentence be just 30 words, then you need, at the top, to use the slimmed down version of each of those things. But the reason, like I said, that we write it on in this bullet point format, is that you might write all of those other things, and then they might go into their own little mini paragraphs or sentences later on in the article. So it's absolutely worth capturing those at the beginning, okay?

So then, in the body, or we talked about this also as the nut graph of the article, what goes here? I really like some of the examples that they've given here. So they talked about argument, controversies, story, issue, evidence, background, details, quotes, photo, video, audio. So this is the kind of place where I might include quote from the owner of this brewery talking about why they have moved to this place and what they're trying to do with the beer. I might give details about what the space looks like, or perhaps when it's open, but I might give more details about the beer itself, you know, and how it's made. I might talk about how they captured this wild yeast that's from outside their brewery. I might talk about how their barrel aging their beer, which is something very new. You think of whiskey as being



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barrel age, but not beer. I might talk about why they have 36 different varieties, and they're only a brewery that's a year old, and what the reason for that is, and how they come up with different beers, maybe how they tasted different beers.

Then what's gonna go in the end? So the tail, as it's called on here, is the extra info, the interesting related items. So this might be the part where rather than just mentioning some different types of beer that they have, or saying that they make it with wild yeast, or how they catch the wild yeast, I might include, you know, either true quotes from the owner, or by explaining in more detail here. I might kind of include the story of why they got into using wild yeast and what that translates into the flavor for the beer. I might include a quote with somebody who's sitting there at the brewery tasting room right now trying that beer, or might include a quote from another expert on making beer, who's also using wild yeast and talking about how that affects the flavor. So that's the kind of stuff that then would go in the tail there, okay?

So this is the inverted pyramid at the base. This is how the inverted pyramid kind of works in any sort of news setting. But what about in travel, okay, because travel writing, whether that's travel writing kind of as a craft, or travel writing as an actual commercial practice, is inherently based in writing for different outlets, writing for different audiences, right?

So what that means is we need to think about, before we get into going off and writing these articles yourself as practice, for instance, we need to think about how are these sold. How do they look in the actual marketplace? So I mentioned that the inverted pyramid, as I outlined it for you, is really common in newspapers. You'll see it in any newspaper. If you open up like the finance, or the politics section, you can see how everything fits into that structure, but what do these look like for travel?

So in the travel sections of newspapers, for instance, they're a lot less likely to find these news briefs today. And that's because a lot of the travel news, that's call it, is in things that are very new, are actually being written up online, and they're being written up in news briefs on different websites. So, a lot of that very traditional "Here's what's happening" news takes place online right now.

And so, I didn't pull out one of these for you guys to look out, but a good place to see news briefs in their natural settings, sort of say online, in travel, is "Condé Nast Traveler," so I'm just gonna write that on the chat box. I get their CN Daily, I believe, is what they call it. CN Daily, or CN Traveler Daily. You get their newsletter, and they have tons and tons of news briefs in there everyday about all sorts of different things that are happening in travel. So it might be, for instance, talking about a change in airline fees, or airline policies. It might be



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talking about a destination that has something going on, like say Maldives, which is in a lot of danger from global warming because all of the islands are very low, so it's very easy for them to be taken over by water. Perhaps they have started an initiative that has global ramifications that's also affecting tourism. So that's the kinda thing that they would write about in CN Daily.

So a lot of those very strictly, let's call them, reported news briefs about things that are new, new, new, like very new, are happening in web settings. And so this is the kind of thing where a lot of you might be in the position to be writing these. So like I mentioned, when I first started travel writing full-time as a freelancer, I was doing these for website, and that's really commonly where a lot of them live.

So for instance, "Condé Nast Traveler" is a very straight travel-oriented website, but some of you may be familiar with this website called Well+Good. This is more of a wellness website, but they have a huge travel section, and they do a lot of these also news brief type things. I saw one the other day that was about kind of co-working settings, or office settings, that are specifically for like nomadic female entrepreneurs. They had a news brief type thing about that. So you'll find a lot of these very typical listing as new type news briefs online these days.

But in magazines, where do they take place? They take place a lot in the front of book. And you've heard me mention this kind of interchangeably, news brief and front-of-book news brief, because short pieces in magazines naturally happen in the front of the magazine, which they call the front-of-book, or front of the book. And that's because when a reader picks up a magazine, the magazine, or the design of the magazine, intends to very quickly draw them into the experience of reading, rather than page flipping.

So in the beginning of the magazine, they have these things which are meant to cater to all sorts of different interests. They have lots and lots of short things so that they'll catch the eye of readers who are very, very different, as opposed to in the features, where they're only gonna have to say three features, maybe up to five features. And if you're not interested in the thing that that feature's about, then you know, they kind of lost you. So in the front, they try to get you into the experience of reading, so that then you will continue to consume the rest of the magazine, because now you're in the reading state of mind.

So in the front of the book, in magazines, they have a lot of different types of news pieces. So sometimes they will be specifically about things like openings, like a hotel opening, an attraction opening, you know, in some cases it might be something like a winery opening, or



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a destination, which is essentially opening in a different way. Like when the Olympics come to town, that changes a lot of the things in a destination, which we're seeing right now, right?

So, in a lot of smaller magazines, these front-of-book news briefs are written by the editors, so you can't pitch them, and you'll see this, if you have access to the travel magazine database, when we talk about what to pitch each magazine, we only mentioned...we'll, we tell you everything in the magazine, but then, we break out, and we talk in a lot of detail about the pitches that are open to freelancers. And it always surprise me, there are certain magazines from kind of like, what does this magazine buy from these freelancers? And I look it's only the features because all of those front-of-book things are written by the editors.

And it seems like wouldn't it be easier for editors to write the features, you know, because they really know the magazine and their audience. But it's actually the other way around, because these editors are getting a lot of PR pitches. They're following industry news because they have to, because they have to know what their magazine should be covering. And so, it's very easy for them to just write those short, little pieces themselves, and then to have writers who are out there in the field write these features, because these writers have more time to travel than the editors do.

But what happens is that in the larger magazine, so again, we're talking about like a Condé Nast here, Travel and Leisure, "National Geographic Traveler," Lonely Planet Traveler, things like that. In the larger magazines, those front-of-book pieces are also open to freelancers because the magazine just has so much stuff going on that it's not the best use of the editor's time to write those short things. It's a better use of their time to be organizing other people to write those short things.

So what that means is that these great big magazines, the newsstand magazines of the world that pay \$1 or \$2 a word, they are paying \$1 or \$2 a word for 150 word front-of-book pieces. So rather than write a 2000 or 2500 word feature for small magazine, that's gonna pay you \$150, or \$300, or maybe \$400, you can write a front-of-book news brief for a huge magazine, which is gonna run you 250 words, so a tenth of the words of that article and have about the same amount of money.

So this is a much, much better use of your time as a freelance travel writer to write these short pieces for big magazines as opposed to big pieces for small magazines. And the thing is that editors really need these because they get way more pitches for their feature while than they possibly know what to do with, than they would possibly ever use, but they don't get us many pitches for the front of the magazine. So it's a really great thing to do if you have some ideas that you've been trying to sell, to think about how to do that as a really short piece and



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pitch that too a bunch of magazines, because the thing about news pieces is that the front-of-book section of most magazines tends to be quite a grab bag. They don't have so many specific formats. Sometimes they'll have an interview with the celebrity, or something like that or maybe a comparison piece, but they tend to be quite open to interpretation, which means it's really easy for you to write one pitch for a short piece, and send that to a lot of different magazines. So let's get into that. Let's look at some of these examples.

You should be seeing an article that says House of Spirits. I've got it over here on the side, so it's probably a little bit clearer for me than for you guys, so I'm gonna read from this directly.

So just quickly, Marge has a question. "How far in advance would you pitch a news brief for a major magazine?" It's a really great question. We're gonna talk about pitching later, but I'm gonna answer this now. So the thing about news briefs is that large magazines are often working a year, or even more than a year in advance, for a lot of their longer front-of-book sections, so 1000 words front-of-book sections, for instance, or 560 words front-of-book sections. But for these news briefs, they can work a lot closer.

So if you're pitching a newsstand \$1, \$2 a word type magazine, then you can pitch this, I would say no less than four months in advanced, because the editorial timeline in terms of how the editors work for magazines of that level includes a lot of review, a lot of printing out the entire magazine, looking at how things fit together, and moving them around.

So those magazines also have that long period, and then they go to press earlier because they have big circulations. So three months before a magazine is hitting people's inbox, it's probably pretty close to down as far as not just commissioning articles but having them back from writers. So really four months is kind of the latest I would say, for a large magazine, that you would be getting those assignments. But if we talk not about the Travel and Leisures of the world, but just one step down from that, even like a "Midwest Living," or "Sunset," or something like that, the timeframe shifts. So then, you're looking more, even like three months, you could be talking to them. If you're talking to a small niche magazine that does accept news briefs from writer, then you can even be getting those assignments two months out from the issue date. So that would be how that plays out.

Okay, so let's look at a House of Spirits piece. Okay, so in this piece, there's a very, very brief title that says "House of Spirits," and below that, the deck, or the subhead is "a famous hunted house makes its screen debut." Now, they start by saying...and this is their first sentence, okay? I'm gonna tell you the part that kind of has the who, what, where, when, why, all right? So they say "Dame Helen Mirren gets top billing in this month's supernatural thriller, "Winchester," but it's the setting that's the real star. The Winchester Mystery House



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in San Jose, California was built by firearm heiress Sarah Winchester, who Mirren plays in the film after the deaths of her husband and infant daughter led her to believe she was cursed and needed to placate the ghosts of those killed by the Winchester rifle.”

Now, this is really a funny piece to me because I grew up in this area, and the Winchester family house was kind of our only local attraction. Now, it’s Silicon Valley, and they have like the Apple Museum and all sorts of things. This was kind of our only local attraction, okay? And it’s something that, as a travel writer, I frequently ask myself, “Could I possibly write about this thing? Like would everybody travel here to see this? Is this is actually interesting?” And so sure enough, it wasn’t until it’s now in a movie of the same name.

So what’s the who, what, where, when, why, and how of this, okay? So the who is in a way, Helen Mirren, I guess, in a way, it’s the Winchester mystery house. The what is that this house has now been featured in this movie. But I guess that can also be the why, right? So it’s a little unclear in this first sentence the exact answers to these questions, even though it does give you a lot of information. The where is very clear. It’s the Winchester Mystery House in San Jose, California. The when is that the piece is coming out this month. They tell us that. And the why is that the house is actually really the star of the movie, because it’s quite interesting. And so then, the piece goes on to tell us about why this house itself is so interesting.

So they mentioned upfront that she built this house after the deaths of her husband and daughter led her to believe she was cursed, and still go on to say in the piece that the house is really unusual because she just built, and built, and built, and sometimes she would have windows that would just go directly into a wall, or she would have a door that was meant to go somewhere else but didn’t get finished. And so you open this door, and it’s literally a five-story drop, or two-story drop to the ground.

So how did they put this together? They’ve got that intro where we talked about the five Ws, then they’ve got a quote from Helen Mirren, right? So I remember I said that in that nut graph, often one of the first things that happen is a quote from one of the protagonists of the piece about why it is important. So that’s what they’ve got here. Mirren says, “The house is mind-blowing. It’s like a doll house but enormous. Lots and lots of tiny little rooms, and little corridors that go on and on and on forever.”

So what they’ve done by incorporating this quote is not only to bolster that why, but also, to give description of the house through her quote. Then they give background. They say Winchester designed the house herself, never stopping construction in her lifetime. Topping out at 160 rooms, it may have been built to confound spirits with stairways that lead



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nowhere, windows that look into other rooms or at walls, and a door that opens to a two-story drop. The number 13 recurs throughout, 13 bathrooms, 13-step stairways, 13-paned windows.”

So this is really that nut graph for their giving more information, so it’s mixing the historical background along with a lot of specific details about the place. Then it goes on to say that it’s been a historic attraction, but it’s the first time it’s been used as a film, and then they talk more about the film and how the house acts as a constant, living character in its own right.

And then, again, remember I mentioned earlier when we were talking about the hypothetical brewery piece? Now, they’ve included a quote from a different person on a different topic. So they’ve included a quote from the film’s director, which is, “We’ve had expectations of finding a really scary house when we first visited. But getting to know the house and its history, we’ve grown really fond of the place and the woman who created it,” says Michael. “The house is full of mysterious oddities, but also design experiments and patented features that make a lot of sense.

And that’s the end of the piece, right? It’s super short. I would say it’s maybe 150 words. So what’s the structure of this piece? It starts with those five Ws, like I talked about. It’s got that quote that cements why it’s important, and gives you some more details. Then it goes into straight, straight details, almost a physical description of the place. And then, it talks more about this why now. It talks about the movie, and it ends with another quote.

So this, and the reason I started with this one is this is the super common format for the short piece. They managed to get quotes from two different people in there. They’ve got all sorts of statistics, or numbers, about the physical description. They tell you why it’s important, and they tie it back into that why now, all in this tight, tight little 150 words space.

So let’s look at the next one I’ve got here, which is we’re gonna take this...let’s see how this works, okay. I got to turn this off for a second, and then you should be seeing something called winging it. So now, you should be seeing Winging It.

Okay, so this is the one for any of those of you who are bloggers, who are familiar with Lisa, this is one by Lisa Lubin. So I saw this is an issue of “Hemispheres,” and something that’s really common with these news briefs, sometimes you’ll see multiple news briefs on one page. I’ve seen up to about 3 or 4 just on one 8.5 by 11 page. But this is one where you’ve got little bit of text and then a great big picture. So I talked in the blog post in the newsletter for today’s columns about how today, in this very Instagram-y, photo-heavy culture, you’re



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often fighting with photos for the space for your text. And that's definitely the case here because what Lisa is writing about is something that's very visual.

So as it says in the very brief headline, they call it Winging It, and the subhead is, "A stadium designer scales down with butterfly-inspired cocktail lounge." So let's look at this first paragraph and how she accomplishes the five Ws, and let me know in the chat box if you are not seeing this Winging It piece. So what did she do with this first paragraph?

Kansas City-based architect, David Manica, has designed stadiums around the world, from FC Barcelona's upgraded Camp Nou to the Raiders' future home in Las Vegas. Now, he has come home to open a decidedly more intimate venue, the Monarch Cocktail and Bar Lounge.

Okay, so the five Ws here. Who? We've got David Manica. What? The Monarch Cocktail Bar and Lounge. Where? Kansas City. When? She doesn't say when exactly. She says now, so we can assume it's quite recent. And then why. She doesn't quite say this here, okay, but it's gonna come in the next sentence. And this sometimes happen.

Remember I talked about how in our Helen Mirren haunted house piece, Helen's quote kind of expanded on the why. Here, the why is really solidly in the quote. So the quote says, "I'm happy that I get to travel around the world and come back to Kansas City," Manica says. "But there wasn't anything here, like the high-end bars of London or Moscow. So I decided to open one myself."

So this is really common with these really short articles, that the why is best expressed with the quote that you get directly from the source. They say it best because they know why. So this is something that happens a lot, and that's why I put it out in the former piece as well, that you frequently have that first little paragraph where you answer the who, what, where, when, and then that why comes in a quote.

And so you'll notice really often in these news briefs that a quote immediately follows that initial paragraph. So then, what do we have? Then just like in that Helen Mirren piece, we go into more background and specific details. So the name of the bar resonates with the city's history, as the Kansas City Monarchs were a legendary Negro League baseball team that employed Satchel Paige, Jackie Robinson, and Ernie Banks. But Manica's inspiration actually came from a fellow frequent flyer, the monarch butterfly.



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And then it goes on to describe how butterflies are a key element in the bar, as well as in the menu. And then again, it closes with a quote. This time, the quote is still from Manica, but it's gotten into that third part of the triangle that we talked about. We're not talking about the menu, which is obviously interesting. It's important because it's cocktail lounge, but originally, this piece is talking more about the decor, okay?

So here, he says, "We liked the idea that the menu would be more than a list of drinks," Manica says, "that it would tell a story, and that story of course is tied to the monarch butterfly." So that's how it comes back. So you'll see that this piece, while it talks about the menu, the cocktails, the decor, why he did it, how the name happened, it's all very brief, and it's all very, very tight.

So I've got one more example here for us to look at quickly, and this one is actually a little bit longer. Oh, that's not what I was trying to do, but it's very interesting to know we can do that. All right, there we go, streaming music. Okay, so you should now be seeing something that says "streaming music, a Danish band heads down underwater. "

Now, this one, like I said, is a bit longer, and it's quite interesting and unusual what this man does. And I feel like on the one hand, that has a little bit to do with why it's longer. I hope that looks the same for you guys. I'm trying to make it larger for me, so I can read it to you. Okay, so we start with, "Of the roughly 700 performers at this month's Sydney Festival, Australia's largest annual celebration of the arts, one group, in particular, will be hoping to make a real splash."

Now, this is a pun because they're performing underwater, okay? So puns are often featured in these short pieces to reinforce the point, okay? So "The Danish avant-garde band Between Music will be performing its hour-long set, AquaSonic, fully submerged under water with each musician..." okay, "...encased in an individual glass tank."

Okay, so who, what, where, when, why. Who is the Danish avant-garde band Between Music. What, they are performing underwater their hour-long set, AquaSonic. Where, at the Sydney Festival, Australia is the largest annual celebration of the arts. When, I believe they said this month, okay? And why, why? We're not sure yet, right? I guess the why is because it's interesting and different, but we would expect that to come.

Next, interestingly about...like I said, this piece is a little bit longer. This is more like 200 words, okay? They don't dive into a quote right away, but they do spend a whole paragraph, both telling you the why and a little bit more about the how, okay? So "The ensemble's



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cocreatorrrs, Robert Karlsson and Laila Skovmand, spent 10 years developing the show. Skovmand designed a haunting, mermaid-like vocal style by learning to sing through an air bubble in her mouth. By sucking the bubble in, she can sing the next note. It has been a long process, she admits, involving lots of practice “with my head submerged under water.””

So that’s more of the how, okay, but they don’t yet get to the why. And so sometimes, this happened, and this is what happens more in longer pieces that the why is not spelled out so much and so clearly until the end. And so throughout the rest of the piece, they talk a lot more about the how. They described what it’s gonna look like. You know, for instance, they say each performer surfaces every 30 to 60 seconds to breathe at pre-determined points in the piece.

And then they talk more about the why here. “This may sound like a gimmick, but Skovmand says otherwise. “We are definitely not a novelty act,” she said. This is a culmination of decades of experimentation, passion, and commitment.” And at the end, she says, “It should be most interesting. No one will be underwater though,” all right?

So this is an example of kind of a transition between a news brief and more of a business profile type thing that we’re gonna talk about next. But because this is a, specifically, phenomenon, and a calendar event, I wanna talk about it here in our news brief setting. But still, you’ll see that this follows the same sort of format.

All of the basic information gets out of the way right upfront. And then, they start talking in more detail about the how. They give a lot more details about the what, okay? And the why is really always at the end. Usually, it’s meant more at the beginning, but that why always wraps up. So do you remember when we looked at the piece about the House of Spirits? There as well, that ‘why’ came back in the end with that quote from the director, okay? And he said, “The house is full of mysterious oddities,” right, and that they had grown very fond of the place and the woman who created it.

So this is really the format that you’re gonna see and use again and again for these news briefs, okay? You get those five Ws out of the way at the beginning. You have a quote from the source that explains the why. You spend the next paragraph going into really specific details, often numeric details, about what’s in the room, or in the house, in this case. In the case of the bar, they talk more about the design elements of the bar.

Then you have something that expands more while going back to the why. So in the music piece, remember, most of the whys was discussed at the end. Here, that last paragraph is used



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to talk about why it was featured in the film itself. In the spirits piece, he talked about how he brought that monarch to bear in the cocktail menu in every feature of the establishment, okay?

And so that is a news brief right there. That's 150 words, and that's how it looks in a travel setting. So I said we were gonna talk more about how to pitch it, and I'm gonna wrap that up quickly. Let's go back to our slides here for a sec. So how do you pitch this? This is interesting because they're quite short. And if you saw the newsletter in the blog post about this today, you'll notice that I said that I often see pitches for these. I see people pitching, whether it's 150 words, or 250 words, or 350 words, that pitch ends up being longer than the piece itself. And that's a big no-no, because that's a signal to editors that you're not capable of writing the piece adequately, at length, because you can't get your point across quickly in your pitch.

So you need to keep your pitches incredibly short, and it can be as simple as that same first sentence that you would have in the piece, where you're talking about who, what, where, when, why. That can be your pitch, and then a little bit about yourself, and then would you be interested in this piece.

So if you are just gonna write a front-of-book pitch just as a pitch, then that's what you should do and nothing more. You don't really need to talk about what the format of the piece is gonna be. You can say if you have access to interview the person, if it's somebody who might be hard to get in an interview with, for instance.

In the case of that haunted house piece, I'm sure that it really hinged on being able to interview Helen Mirren and those directors. That would have been really hard to pitch that piece. That's something that would be covered in Condé Nast, in something that size, with that full image that they had about it, for what Condé Nast, like Sydney, in terms of exclusivity, without having access to the people. If you are only gonna interview the people of the house, they would say, "Well, we could do that ourselves," or, "I don't know if we really need that piece."

So the one other thing that might happen when you're pitching this, is that you might just effectively write most of the piece and have that be your pitch. And so in that case, you can say, you know, "I wanted to pitch you, blah, blah, blah, a title for your front-of-book section. I'd included the piece here for your view. Let me know if you'd be interested in publishing it." And then you'll include your whole 150 words directly after that sentence, okay?



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So that is how you go about pitching these. You know, apart from what Marge said about how far in advance you should pitch them, you definitely can, if it's something that doesn't have quite as clear of a time peg, you can be a little bit more flexible when you pitch them, but the whole idea is that it should be news. It should be tied into something.

So having something be featured in a movie – this is one of the reasons that I wanted to use that haunted...the Winchester Mystery house – is a really great time peg these days. I'm seeing a lot of things in the front-of-book sections in the magazines that are travel pieces tied into a movie, or television show. So that's a really great time peg to use because it's, you know, something you can find out in advance, and then know what date the movie is coming out.

But for other things, you know, if it's the hotel or attraction opening, you need to really make sure that it's something that you know about, that the magazine editor doesn't, or that you have some sort of access that they don't like how I mentioned, that having the access to Helen Mirren and the directors of the movie for that piece was probably really instrumental in that particular writer doing it. So that's what we've got for you today.

So thank you guys so much for joining me.