

## **Understanding Newspaper Headlines**

### **What is a Headline?**

The headline of a news story is the short summary which introduces the story at the beginning of a TV or radio news broadcast, or which appears above articles in a newspaper or on a website.

Headlines are not full sentences but short summaries designed to attract attention.

### **Grammar rules for writing newspaper headlines**

Parliament confirms new stray dog policy  
Lion escapes zoo

#### **1. Use present simple tense for past events**

Parliament confirms new stray dog policy

Lion escapes zoo

#### **2. Leave out auxiliary verbs**

New policy decided by Parliament (New policy has been decided by Parliament)

Lion escapes zoo – ten killed (ten people have been killed / were killed)

Four stranded in sudden flood (four people have been stranded / were stranded)

Temperatures rising as climate changes (temperatures are rising)

#### **3. Use infinitives for future events**

Parliament to decide new policy tomorrow

President to visit France for further talks

#### **4. Leave out articles (a, an, the)**

Prime Minister hikes Alps for charity (The Prime Minister hiked the Alps)

Man releases rabid dog in park (A man released a rabid dog in a park)

#### **5. Leave out “to be”**

Residents unhappy about new road (residents are unhappy)

Family of murder victim satisfied with court decision (family of murder victim is satisfied.)

## **6. Leave out “to say”**

Mr Jones: “They’re not taking my house!”

Bush on Iraqi invasion: “This aggression will not stand.”

Reported speech is usually represented by a colon, or a hyphen, with the subject introduced with ‘on...’. This includes leaving out other verbs such as comment, tell, argue, announce, shout – unless the act of speaking needs emphasizing, for instance to demonstrate a promise or official policy.

## **7. Replace conjunctions with punctuation**

Police arrest serial killer – close case on abductions

Fire in bakery: hundreds dead

As with reporting speech, commas, colons, semi- colons, hyphens and so on can replace all conjunctions, or some joining verbs, to join clauses. Commas may also be used to join nouns (more common in American English).

Man kills 5, self

## **8. Use figures for numbers**

9 dead in glue catastrophe

7 days to Christmas – shoppers go mad

### **Tips and Reminders No headline may start with a verb.**

Headlines are complete sentences or imply complete sentences.

A linking verb can be implied rather than spelled out.

If a story is about past or present events, write present tense verbs.

### **If a story is about future events, use the infinitive verb (to leave, to work).**

To be verbs, such as is, are, was and were should be omitted.

Don't use the articles a, an and the. They waste space unnecessarily.

A new fire engine helps make the houses safer New fire engine helps make houses safer