
Analyzing the inverted pyramid news story

On the left is a typical inverted pyramid news story. On the right are some things you should note about the way it is written. Try to apply these practices to the stories that you write.

FBI questions two about park death



The FBI has begun questioning two of its most wanted fugitives about the unsolved death of a Memphis woman in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

An FBI spokesman, however, was careful not to declare Howard Williams, 44, or his wife, Sarah, 36, suspects in the death of Gladys Roslyn. Roslyn's skeletal remains were found by hikers in the park more than two years ago.

"At this point, they are being regarded as material witnesses, and that's about all that we can say about the case," Larry Tims, assistant special agent in charge of the local FBI office, said Tuesday.

Clark Summerford, a lawyer for the couple, confirmed that the FBI is seeking information from them about the woman's death, but he, too, emphasized that the FBI was not about to charge them with any additional crimes.

"As far as I know, the FBI has no evidence directly linking the Williamses with this woman's death," Summerford said.

The Williamses were captured last week after more than a decade on the run. They were spotted by a local truck driver who said he had seen them on "America's Most Wanted," a television show that features stories about fugitives from justice. The Williamses escaped from a Massachusetts jail more than 10 years ago, after they had been convicted of armed robbery of a bank in Salem, Mass.

• **The lead paragraph** summarizes the story and gives the latest and most important information to the reader. It is also **one sentence** and less than 30 words.

• **The second paragraph** builds on the lead paragraph with additional information. By the end of the second paragraph, the reader has most of the major information of this story.

• Note the use of the **direct quotes** in the third and fifth paragraphs. They reinforce information that has been presented previously. The direct quotes also add life to the story; they let the readers know that this story is about real people.

• **The last paragraph** gives the reader some background information on this story. We can assume that the information has already been published, but this paragraph informs the readers who haven't heard about this incident and reminds those who have.

Note the following about the story:

- simple, straightforward writing
- short paragraphs
- most information is attributed to a source
- the use of AP style
- the structure of the direct quotations: quote, speaker, verb

This handout is adapted from James Glen Stovall, *Writing for the Mass Media (6th ed.)* and available from www.JPROF.com