



How to...Write a News Article

Research

It is vital that stories are well-researched. Here are some tips;

- Remember the saying 'there's two sides to every story', and make sure you contact both sides. For example, an article about a student being beaten up at a student union venue must have a comment from the student's union. A story about poor standards of halls of residence must have a comment from college, etc...
- Make sure that quotes are written verbatim, that they are attributed to the correct person, and that you have their permission to use it.
- Double-check facts such as names and places, including the spellings. Everything must be factually accurate so don't guess or assume anything.
- Familiarise yourself with the KCLSU (www.kclsu.org), KCL (www.kcl.ac.uk), ULU (www.ulucol.ac.uk) and NUS (www.nusonline.co.uk) websites; they're good sources of background information and contact details for stories. The BBC (www.bbc.co.uk) is also good for getting the facts and background information on a long-running or high-profile issue (e.g. top-up fees)

Writing

The opening paragraph is the most important in any article. It must grab the reader's attention. It should therefore be

- Short; usually no more than two sentences
- Clear and concise; no need for long words or complicated syntax
- It must convey the angle of the story, which should be the most interesting, or preferably shocking, part of the story. This is often best conveyed by a quote.

An example of a first paragraph would be;

In a shocking twist of events, roar Editor Pete Ellender has sacked his News Editor Lauren Thompson for her militant feminist views. "I just can't work with such a nutter", he claimed.

The second paragraph should go on to give background information on the story, for example;

roar is the King's College Student Union magazine and is run by a team of around thirty students. Although the roar team has previously claimed to be "incredibly close... we're all really good friends", this illusion was shattered last week. In an unprecedented outburst, the normally mild-mannered Pete Ellender embarked upon a tirade of abuse towards his News Editor, demanding that she "never enters the roar office again".

The remaining paragraphs should fill in the rest, for example,

The incident came after weeks of Ms Thompson provoking her team members by voicing her radical views about the role of men and women in today's society. She was reported to have said in a recent roar Editorial Board meeting "If only there were more women on the team, we wouldn't have all these problems..."

General pointers

Whilst Roar is on the whole a light-hearted magazine designed to entertain students, the news section is slightly different. It's important to remember the following;

- News is about informing people about what's going on in and around King's College. It is not a national or international magazine.
- Roar is, in principle, editorially independent. We are allowed, indeed supposed, to scrutinise College and the Students' Union, however stories must be checked by the VP Communications. It is therefore particularly important that we remain objective, hence why we must always contact both sides of the story and be seen to be 'balanced'.
- You should never use the first person in a news story. What you think, frankly, doesn't matter. Our job is to report on the facts in as an objective, detached manner as possible. Don't write something like "I went along to the Make Poverty History demonstration and found it all jolly interesting"; of course you went, you're reporting on it, and whether or not you enjoyed it is irrelevant.
- The tone of articles should be, on the whole, quite serious. This doesn't mean boring; we are a student magazine and so it's fine to use words like 'outrage', 'shocking' etc. Sometimes an amusing story may warrant a more light-hearted and ironic tone, but check with your editor before you write a piece in that style.
- Mirror Editor Hugh Cudlipp once said "news is something somebody somewhere doesn't want you to know". Often it will be difficult to extract the relevant information out of people but you must persist. If people don't get back to you or refuse to cooperate with you, it usually means you're onto something. Try another route, ask somebody else.
- Often it's not actually writing a news story that's difficult, it's finding them. Perhaps the most important thing you can do as a news writer is keep your ear to the ground. And lastly, if you ever have any problems researching or writing a story, just ask your editor for help.