



# *Translating headlines for the Web*

by

Teresa Schmedding

News Editor

Daily Herald, suburban Chicago

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Newspaper Management Handbook



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## *About the author*



Teresa Schmedding, news editor of the Daily Herald in suburban Chicago, oversees a copy desk staff of 40 and supervises local news postings at night on [dailyherald.com](http://dailyherald.com). Schmedding also is on the executive committee of the American Copy Editors Society and has conducted training sessions around the country. A 1989 graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism, she currently is enrolled in Mizzou's newspaper management master's program.



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Internet headlines serve the same basic function as headlines in newspapers - informing readers. But what stops a reader's eye in print will not engage a reader online. Here are some tips for translating headlines from print to the Web.



# *Keep it short*

## WORLD »

- Bush Urges Sudan to Continue With Peace Talks
- U.S., Britain and France Draft U.N. Resolution on Iran's Nuclear Ambitions
- Bolivia's Energy Takeover: Populism Rules in the Andes

## U.S. »

- Faulty Testimony Sent 2 to Death Row, Panel Finds
- New Orleans Mayor Unveils a New Evacuation Plan
- Prosecutor in Duke Case Is Winner in Election

## WASHINGTON »

- Bush Urges Sudan to Continue With Peace Talks
- F.B.I. Director Is Bombarded by Stinging Questions at Senate Hearing

## BUSINESS »

- EMI Holds New Talks for Rival
- An Ugly Side of Free Trade: Sweatshops in Jordan
- Sympathy as Hard to Find as Oil

## TECHNOLOGY »

- Market Place: Profit Falls as Sales Rise at Verizon
- Microsoft Teams Up With Hollywood to Offer Original Web Shows
- Advertising : Best Cellphone Company? All of Them, to Hear Them Say It

## SPORTS »

- Nets 92, Pacers 86: Carter's 34 Leave Nets a Step From Advancing
- Nationals 6, Mets 2: Mets Lose the Game; Randolph

**Myth:** The Internet has an infinite amount of space, so we can write longer.



A screenshot of a newspaper website homepage. The top navigation bar includes links for JOBS, HOMES, CARS, CLASSIFIEDS, SHOPPING, and FIND A SERVICE, along with a search bar powered by Google. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with categories: Home, Nation/World, Metro, Sports, Entertainment, Living, Travel, and Business. The main content area features several articles. The first article is titled "WANTED: BAD DOGS" with a sub-headline "Grrr. Oh boy Oh boy, I've got mail" and a photo of a mail carrier and a pug. The second article is "Triple murder suspect nabbed" with a sub-headline "Man caught in Gwinnett seen on 'America's Most Wanted'". The third article is "Teen, neck broken, found alive" with a sub-headline "Teacher, wannabe pro-wrestler charged with attempted murder." The fourth article is "Trolleys hit road in Atlanta" with a sub-headline "Service takes riders in loop between aquarium, Underground." The fifth article is "Officer's death not in vain" with a sub-headline "Church covers local police officers' backs with insurance." There is also a "MORE HEADLINES" section with links to "Johnson Ferry Road detour" and "Body found in burned car". On the right side, there is a "newsbuzz" section with a photo of a woman and a list of news items: "ABC axes 'Commander in Chief'", "Who to kiss off? IDOL BLOG", "Braves top Rockies 5-4", "Two 'Sopranos' actors charged", "Rapper Big Hawk slain", "Paris, Stavros apparently split", "Find Atlanta's cheapest gas", and "Can't find Louisiana? Test yourself". At the bottom, there are three promotional banners: "ajc CLICK HERE Any AJC subscription, as little as \$10 per month!", "Weekly Ad Online Look inside", and a target icon.

**Fact:** Users read 25% slower on computer screens than they do in print. A good rule of thumb to follow is that online headlines should be half the length of print.



# Stress the left

Myth: Readers scan headlines online much as they do in print.





**Fact:** Eyes of Web users bounce around on a page and rarely do they read an entire line of a headline (less than 16% read word for word). If you do not capture them with the first or second word, they will not read the item.

If readers are not interested in “Ex-NYC mayor” and “Judge rules” they may skip these stories.

Updated: Tuesday, May 2, 2006, 9:41 pm CDT

### **Ex-NYC mayor campaigns for Nussle**

Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani said Monday that the United States must deal practically with immigration rather than taking extreme actions which drive the problem underground, and he added that making it a crime to be in the country illegally would make the nation less secure.

**By Ed Tibbetts and Charlotte Eby**

### **Judge rules against delaying ban on TouchPlay**

DES MOINES — After TouchPlay owners lost a last-ditch legal battle Tuesday to keep the video lottery devices turned on, some Iowa lawmakers said they will make a final effort to keep the affected businesses out of bankruptcy.



# *Keep it lively, yet sophisticated*

**Myth:** Your Web site should read like an episode of the Simpsons to attract young readers.





**Fact:** While the Internet is more interactive and can be more informal, readers will tolerate only small doses of humor, and the top two age groups online are 35-44 and 45-54. Only 5% of online readers are 18-24.

**feature story:**  
*Your Mom's got issues*



***Kolb's friends say they are shunned, ostracized***  
By Axel Larson, Your Mom Intern

Sarah Kolb's future may have been decided Feb. 22 when she was convicted of first-degree murder in the death of her classmate, Adrienne Reynolds.

Cory Gregory's fate is likely to be settled when his trial on the same charges begins May 1 in Peoria, Ill. [Read More >>](#)

# *Tease and taunt*

**Myth:** You can tease users into clicking on an item by being coquettish in your headlines.

## **Is the Queen healthier than George Bush?**



The English are known by stereotypes that suggest poor health, including downing pints in pubs and eating greasy fish and chips. Well, so much for ste... [FULL STORY](#)



**Fact:** Studies show readers do not like headlines that force you to click on something by teasing, but do like ones that help you evaluate whether you want to. Readers will see through the hype and avoid Web sites that are heavy on the hype. Irritated users will close out of a Web site rather than use the back button and give your site another chance. Teasing does work in polls, surveys or quizzes.



58

[more...](#)

#### Why the British are healthier than Americans



The English are known by stereotypes that suggest poor health, including downing pints in pubs and eating greasy fish and chips. Well, so much for ste... [FULL STORY](#)



# Combine with visual

Myth: The Web  
is all about  
visuals.  
Creative art is  
enough to draw  
a user.

Two newspaper promotional graphics. The left one is for a Sudoku challenge, featuring a cartoon penguin and text about a contest on May 4th. The right one is for a 'Red Eye' event, featuring a young girl in an American flag cape and text about a 'We are America' march.



**Fact:** Design is important but cannot make up for bad writing. More than in print, it's critical online art and words work together. Writers have to know if the picture will appear on the first page or if the headline will stand alone.



**Health & Fitness**  
Dishing up the next diet fad



# Dump the puns

Myth: Writers often rely on puns or metaphors to liven up headlines. These work even better on the Web.

## No drought about it



Robert Koss moves his yard along Keutz Road in St. Charles Township Tuesday afternoon. Weekend rains made the grass grow quickly along with the dandelions. "This isn't grass, it's organized weeds," Koss said.

### Dust Bowl comparison washed away

By Dave O'Beirick

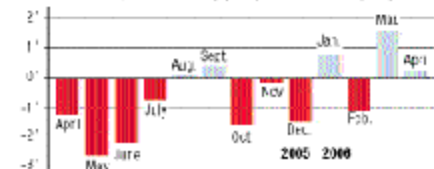
Some suburban settings, brought to life with recent moisture, catch the morning sun Tuesday.



Some suburban settings, brought to life with recent moisture, catch the morning sun Tuesday.

### Recent rains end drought

Above-average rainfall in March and April helped replenish water levels reduced by lower monthly precipitation over the past year.



Source: Illinois State Water Survey



**Fact:** The format for Web pages does not lend itself to pun/metaphor headlines. Unlike print, the item may not appear with the picture or subhead. Be clear first, clever second.



### **The drought is over - dandelions don't lie**

Ahhhhhhhhhhh. Like a parched farmer having just chugged a satiating drink of water, Illinois' fertile fields and suburban lawns breathed a sigh of relief Tuesday. [FULL STORY](#)





# Know your audience

**Myth: Online users log onto your Web site for the same reason they read the paper.**

## Three-day planner

### Today

West Aurora High School art students will display their creative talent at the annual **spring art show reception** from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the auditorium foyer, 1201 W. New York St., Aurora. The show includes entries from freshman through seniors and includes sculpture, jewelry, ceramics, painting, drawing, mixed-media, photography and computer art. . . . The annual **Wauboosee Community College spring pottery sale** sponsored by the ceramics club is from noon to 9 p.m. Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Thursday, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday in the ceramics studio in

Building X at the Sugar Grove campus, Route 47 at Wauboosee Drive. For details, call Doug Jeppesen at (630) 466-7900, ext. 2505. |

**“Rolling Down the River” Business-to-Business Expo** is from 2 to 8 p.m. at the Pheasant Run Resort Mega-Center, 4051 E. Main St. in St. Charles. The free event is presented by chambers from Bartlett, Batavia, Elgin, Geneva, South Elgin, St. Charles, Warrenville and West Chicago. For information, call Deborah Scott at the St. Charles Chamber of Commerce at (630) 584-8384. |

The **Geneva Business Commission** meets at 8 a.m. at City Hall, 22 S. First St., Geneva. |

### Thursday

John Lynn, world traveler and lecturer, presents **“Life on the Lewis and Clark Trail”** at 7 p.m. at the Batavia Public Library, 10 S. Batavia Ave. Lynn narrates the epic story of the crossing of the Continental Divide by Lewis and Clark. He will describe his own bike ride over a 400-mile route through Montana and Idaho, including the scenic Lolo Trail across the Bitterroot Mountains. For details, call (630) 879-4777. |

The **National Day of Prayer** is observed with a prayer service at noon at the Kane County Courthouse, 100 S. Third St., Geneva. |

The **Sugar Grove Library**

**Board** meets at 7 p.m. at the library, 54 Snow St. |

### Friday

The **St. Charles East High School Student Art Show** at Norris Gallery at the Norris Cultural Arts Center, 1040 Dunham Road, St. Charles. A juried exhibition of artwork by students. Gallery hours are Monday through Friday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is free. For information, call (630) 584-7200 or visit [www.norrisculturalarts.com](http://www.norrisculturalarts.com). |

The **Batavia Citywide Garage Sale** is from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Maps are available at the Batavia Government Center, 100 N. Island Ave. Fees charged to sellers help pay for the Batavia July 4 fireworks.



**Fact:** Whether or not that's true depends on your market, but it is unlikely. Know who is accessing your site and why. Play your heads to that angle, whether it's entertainment, analysis or local news.

#### Successful no-decision for Marshall



Not long ago, when people talked about young pitchers carrying the Cubs, they were talking about Kerry Wood, Mark Prior and Carlos Zambrano. With Zamb...  
[FULL STORY](#)

#### Bears hoping for one big 'Yea'

Bears coach Lovie Smith has made his tiny hometown of Big Sandy, Texas, familiar to football fans in and around the City of Big Shoulders, and Danieal... [FULL STORY](#)

#### ARTS »

##### String Quartets Reveal the Private Shostakovich

"The confessional nature of certain quartets is impossible to ignore," says Anthony Tommasini.



##### Review: 'Stardust' on TCM

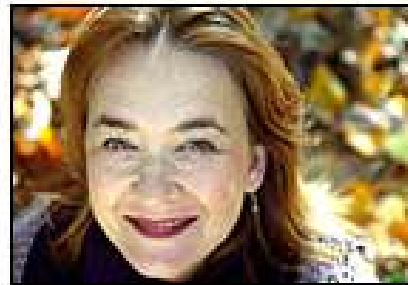
The hypnotic, affectionate new documentary lets Bette Davis speak for herself.





# *Write for your format*

**Myth:** If you take print heads, cut them in half and place emphasis on the first two words, you're headlines will pull readers in.



## Q&A TRANSCRIPT **What's Cooking?**

Dish on spring recipes and entertaining with Kim O'Donnel.



**Fact:** You have to write to your individual format. Does your Web site have headlines with blurbs? Headlines alone? Here are some examples. See how the headlines play differently.

A screenshot of a web page layout. On the left, there is a "Cover Story" section with a large photograph of a city skyline and a large crowd of people. The headline reads "Immigration: How much do we care?". Below the headline is a "Read story" button. On the right side, there is a poll titled "Did the immigration rallies yesterday affect you?". The poll options are: "Not really.", "A bit. A few places closed; traffic was light.", "Yes. I saw the impact.", and "Yes. Every news story, web poll was about this ...". Below the poll options is a "Vote" button and a "View results" link.

**Cover Story**

# Immigration: How much do we care?

[Read story](#)

Did the immigration rallies yesterday affect you?

- Not really.
- A bit. A few places closed; traffic was light.
- Yes. I saw the impact.
- Yes. Every news story, web poll was about this ...

[Vote](#)

[View results](#)



#### UPDATES FROM THESTATE.COM

- [Sanford vetoes Lexington heart center](#) - 5/02/2006 03:01 AM EDT
- [South Carolina lottery numbers](#) - 5/02/2006 01:31 PM EDT
- [YGA Today | Debate on cig tax, tuition credit on tap in House](#) - 5/02/2006 12:45 PM EDT
- [YGA Today | Senate kicks off property tax talk](#) - 5/02/2006 12:36 PM EDT
- [Jury: Wal-Mart not negligent in fondling of girl](#) | [Comment?](#) - 5/02/2006 12:33 PM EDT
- [Watch Riverbanks Zoo critters online](#) - 5/02/2006 11:44 AM EDT
- [Three fugitives sought by Richland County task force](#) - 5/02/2006 10:27 AM EDT
- [Traffic update 3 | Wrecks on I-20 east and west](#) - 5/02/2006 08:31 AM EDT
- » [More breaking news](#)

#### FROM THE STATE

#### FROM THE STATE



#### 'It used to be a good area'

**Residents near Farrow Road concerned about recent crime in their community**

Isiah Williams sits in front of his business on Farrow Road. (Tim Dominick, The State)

[Comment](#)

#### Bill opens door to virtual schools

Statewide charter school district is seen as step toward online education | [Comment](#)

#### Boycott has mixed results in Midlands

Absenteeism was higher for some businesses, schools, but participation was generally light | [Comment](#)

#### Lawyer says victim deserves millions

Attorney for girl fondled at Wal-Mart says teen continues to suffer effects | [Comment](#)

#### Happy days were there again

Democrats find a lot to cheer about at biennial Galivants Ferry stump meeting | [Comment](#)

#### Citadel's 'The Boo' dies at 89

Retired Lt. Col. Thomas Nugent Courvoisie inspired novelist Pat Conroy to write | [Comment](#)



### Bottoms up



[Hot summer pants](#)

News Updated 11:14 PM CDT May 2, 2006



Practicing against the skyline. (RedEye)

### [Freestyle walking?](#)

Forget the bus -- getting from Point A to Point B can be a creative adventure. Who are these "traceurs," whose main mode of urban travel is by air?

- [Painful secrets of the sport](#)

### [Plane down off Russia's coast](#)

An Armenian plane carrying at least 100 people crashes into the Black Sea with no survivors.

- [Jet skids off O'Hare runway](#)

### [Man executed on invalid evidence](#)

Four of the nation's top arson experts conclude Texas executed Cameron Todd Willingham in 2004 based on invalid evidence.

- **Special:** [Tribune's 2004 report](#)
- **Flash:** [History of the case](#)

### [Seminarian sentenced in fatal crash](#)

### [Old Orchard slayer sentenced](#)

### [New accusations in hiring scandal](#)

### [Teen, neck broken, survives 30-hour ordeal after attack](#)

### [Obama added to Conan guests](#)

### [2 'Sopranos' arrested](#)



## Next Challenge: Converting Protests to Political Clout

By Teresa Watanabe and Nicole Gaouette

**ANALYSIS:** Immigration activists must now figure out how to translate the passion of the streets into lasting political gains.

- **A Demonstration of Peaceful Power**

- **Throngs Show Their Potent Role in Economy**

 **PHOTOS:** Protests Grip L.A. | National Impact

 **VIDEO:** Protest Scenes From the Street

Headlines for the Web can no more be written in a vacuum than headlines for print. Where the story will run and how it will run is just as important online.



In the news ...

### [A choppy reception](#)

The St. Anthony's Triathlon is designed as a grueling race, but for some participants this year it became downright frightening.

 [Read story](#)

### More Headlines

-  [Fire code violations evict 40 families](#)
-  [Vouchers may not be dead](#)
-  [Money doesn't buy us health, study shows](#)
-  [Schools win as state rolls out new budget](#)
-  [Texas 7, Rays 5 \(Final\)](#)
-  [Disney to offer tamer version of Mission Space ride](#)

[Times photo: William Dunkley]  
Participants of the annual St. Petersburg triathlon prepare to enter the Vinoy Basin despite the dangerous and choppy waves.

### Read Your Local News

Select a city



# FYI

Poynter's Eyetrack III ([poynterextra.org/eyetrack2004/index.htm](http://poynterextra.org/eyetrack2004/index.htm)) studied eye movements on news pages. People spend only 51 seconds on average with pages with headlines only; they spent 70 seconds viewing pages with headlines and blurbs. But the study showed only half looked at the

#### Criterion race canceled in Arlington Hts.



The Arlington Heights couple behind the village's Criterion bike race put the brakes on the event this year. "It's been a labor of love," said Karen I...

[FULL STORY](#)

#### Spirit of Riverwalk



People strolled along the Riverwalk in downtown Naperville as usual Monday afternoon, giving little notice to the group gathered around a sculpture of... [FULL STORY](#)

#### New

#### Seminarian won't serve time for fatal DUI crash

As soon as Robert Spaulding entered the Lake County courtroom, two women seated in the front row ros... [FULL STORY](#)

#### No injuries in O'Hare mishap

A 50-passenger American Eagle jet veered off an O'Hare runway Tuesday afternoon following an apparen... [FULL STORY](#)

[Today's EZ Links](#)

blurbs - the rest just looked at the headline.





# *Sources*

Poynter

Sun Microsystems

Newspaper Association of America



# *More Handbook Topics*

*For Handbook cards on these topics, contact the NNA*

- ◆ Front page design
- ◆ Motivating the newsroom
- ◆ Libel
- ◆ Covering meetings
- ◆ Special sections
- ◆ Advertising commissions
- ◆ Pressroom safety
- ◆ Returning injured workers