


 Research Article

Behind the Bylines: News Writing Skills of Cagayan State University Lal-lo Campus Journalists

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Abstract

This embedded mixed-method research examined Cagayan State University (CSU) Lal-lo campus journalists' proficiency in News Writing by integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component involved assessing students' news articles through an expert-validated rubric based on a five-point scale, focusing on headline construction, lead writing, overall organization, and use of references, all aligned with Associated Press (AP) standards. Analysis of inter-rater reliability indicated acceptable to strong agreement among the three evaluators, as reflected in both Cronbach's Alpha and the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient. For the qualitative aspect, evaluators' written comments within the rubric were analyzed to gain in-depth insights into the students' writing skills and challenges. The data were treated using descriptive statistical methods alongside thematic analysis. Results showed that student journalists generally displayed adequate skills in news writing, particularly in demonstrating clarity, accuracy, ethical considerations, and basic formatting in headlines and attribution following standard guidelines. However, they encountered challenges in crafting concise and effective leads and in sustaining consistent structure throughout their articles. The findings further indicated that students had difficulty identifying appropriate news angles, organizing ideas logically, and applying the conventional inverted pyramid structure. Lead writing emerged as a key area needing improvement, reflecting limitations in recognizing essential facts and determining news value. Additionally, their outputs revealed issues related to completeness, verbosity, grammatical accuracy, angle selection, and identifying suitable lead types. In response to these concerns, the study recommends implementing targeted instructional strategies, such as regular lead-writing exercises, headline revision workshops, peer evaluation activities, and focused grammar instruction to strengthen students' overall news writing abilities.

Keywords: Cagayan State University, Campus Journalism, News Writing, Journalists, Writing Skills

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1. INTRODUCTION

Journalism plays a vital role in building well-informed societies by delivering accurate, timely, and relevant information. Beyond this, it functions as the “fourth estate,” acting as a watchdog and a venue for public discourse that supports civic engagement and democratic participation. As emphasized by António Guterres in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 16, a free and independent press is fundamental to establishing fair and unbiased institutions and is crucial for advancing peace, justice, sustainable development, and human rights (Whitehead, 2023). Effective news writing, developed through journalism education and professional experience, relies on organized and principled communication guided by established journalistic standards that promote clarity, objectivity, and accountability.

Within Philippine schools, campus journalism contributes significantly to the development of ethical standards, critical and creative thinking, and personal discipline among students. This is supported by Section 2 of Republic Act No. 7079, also known as the Campus Journalism Act of 1991, which encourages

responsible and free journalism at all educational levels. Although campus journalism today is often associated with press competitions, student publications remain more than extracurricular activities; they serve as learning platforms where students enhance writing abilities, media ethics, and analytical thinking (Chavez et al., 2024).

At CSU Lal-lo, campus journalism is demonstrated through the active operation of its official student publication, *The Innovator*, which has earned multiple recognitions in regional and Luzon-wide higher education press conferences. Despite these achievements and the success of student journalists in competitions, an informal interview with the campus publication adviser revealed that only a limited number of student writers possess strong and consistent news writing skills. Many outputs show inconsistencies in organization, lead development, sourcing, and language use, which are elements essential for clear and effective news reporting. Although training initiatives exist to uphold publication standards, participation is often limited to those preparing for competitions. As a result, many students receive minimal exposure to foundational news writing instruction, leading them to rely on trial-and-error methods or outdated formats that do not align with current journalistic practices. These issues also extend to cohesion and clarity, including the use of pronouns, connectors, repetition, and related expressions to maintain focus and flow.

This context highlights an existing research gap, particularly the lack of localized, evidence-based studies that closely analyze the structure of campus news writing within universities. While journalism has been extensively examined as a discipline, much of the research focuses on mainstream media, media literacy, or teaching strategies, with limited attention given to student-generated content. Empirical assessments of campus-produced news articles remain scarce. In response, this study investigates the structural features of news articles written by student journalists at CSU Lal-lo Campus, aiming to identify recurring patterns and common weaknesses in news writing. Ultimately, it seeks to provide improvement of campus journalism practices and strengthen journalism education in the university setting.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. Skills of Student Journalists in News Writing

In journalism and news writing, producing clear and organized content depends on a solid command of language and grammar. According to Deiparine et al. (2024), college student journalists still face ongoing grammatical challenges despite receiving formal instruction. These problems often involve misuse of punctuation, spelling mistakes, weak syntactic structure of sentences, and incorrect diction. These recurring errors indicate their grammatical or linguistic competence is not yet fully developed, which affects both the clarity of their work and how well they communicate information. In a similar way, involvement in campus journalism can improve students' awareness of proper grammar use (Chavez et al., 2024). However, the study also pointed out that lasting progress in writing skills and academic English requires continuous practice and guidance. Ongoing training and mentorship are essential in strengthening both their writing ability and confidence.

Beyond grammar, effective writing in academic and journalistic contexts also depends on discourse competence, or the ability to organize ideas in a clear and coherent manner. In their 2022 research, Wang and Xie examined how university students learning English as a foreign language manage discourse features in writing. Their findings revealed that while students were generally capable of using linking devices such as transitions and connectors, they often struggled to maintain coherence and sustain focus on the central idea throughout their compositions. Comparable results were reported by Damit and Dano-Hinosolango (2022), who observed that although students demonstrated competence at the sentence level, they experienced difficulty in producing writing that is logically organized and easy to follow. The researchers suggested that these challenges can be addressed through targeted writing instruction. In journalism, this means going beyond factual accuracy to ensure that information is presented in a structured and reader-friendly manner. Therefore, strengthening discourse competence should be an essential component of journalism education and training.

Wang (2023) explained that news writers tend to use strong emotional words, cite credible sources, and choose their language carefully in order to influence how the public understands certain issues. Similarly, Aporbo (2023) emphasized that journalists manage their word choices, sentence forms, and

degree of certainty to express their ideas clearly while maintaining a balance between positive and negative tones. In addition, Facchinetti (2021) highlighted that digital news is no longer limited to text, as images and layout design also play a role in guiding how readers interpret the content. Taken together, these ideas show that discourse analysis is valuable because it helps reveal hidden meanings and possible biases in news reporting.

1.1.2. Common Struggles and Errors of Students in Writing News Articles

Deiparine et al. (2024) noted that students often experience difficulties in writing, from simple orthographical errors to more advanced issues with diction and grammar. Likewise, Dewi and Misdi (2017) found that students frequently make errors in verb usage, omit necessary prepositions, and misuse articles, with punctuation mistakes being the most common. On the other hand, learners can achieve noticeable progress when they focus on lessons of structural and stylistic writing (Englishtina et al., 2024). Carefully planned teaching strategies can raise the quality of student journalism and improve writing clarity (Hong et al., 2023).

In addition, news articles written by the students often show weaknesses in both language use and organization. These include grammatical and vocabulary errors, along with mechanical issues such as misspellings and incorrect punctuation, which can reduce the clarity of the message. The natural ambiguity of language, especially in headlines, may lead to confusion and weaken the intended meaning (Deiparine et al., 2024).

To produce clear, engaging, and well-organized news stories, student journalists need to follow effective writing practices. Formulating a strong headline, one important aspect, clearly mirrors the main idea while capturing the interest of readers. This is further explained by Manu et al. (2022), whose study on editorials stresses the importance of careful word choice in headlines. Similarly, structured instruction plays a key role in improving writing skills. Moreover, training anchored to specific needs aids students in expressing their ideas in a clearer and more confident way, especially among secondary school learners (Englishtina et al., 2024). As writers stay significant and socially responsible, collegiate-level news reporting must use the proper language mechanics that engage readers (Wang, 2023). Altogether, these practices help produce effective and meaningful news articles.

Furthermore, Dahlen et al. (2024) reported that both students and teachers had positive responses to source-based writing workshops combined with focus group discussions. This suggests that instruction should go beyond basic information literacy skills, such as looking at and evaluating references. While these competencies are imperative, learners must also be acquainted with and competent in the use and effective integration of information in their compositions or written discourse. Their study further recommends training, particularly intermediate writing courses, as a practical way to develop these higher-level skills.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

Employing an Embedded Mixed-method Design, this study evaluated the skills in news writing of Cagayan State University (CSU) Lal-lo campus journalists, involving mainly numerical data through evaluation scores, embedded with qualitative data through evaluators' remarks. For the quantitative part of the study, the raw news written by the students was examined using a rubric that covered four structural components of a news article: headline, lead, overall organization, and use of sources. Three-expert campus journalism evaluators also provided written comments alongside the scores. The ratings were averaged to identify each student's strong and weak points. For the qualitative part, the evaluators' comments were examined to find recurring ideas related to strengths, limitations, and common mistakes. Using both methods allowed the researchers to obtain a deeper understanding of the students' skills. The numerical results showed their level of performance, while the written feedback explained the specific challenges they encountered.

2.2. Participants

The participants came from the official student publication of CSU Lal-lo Campus, known as *The Innovator*, for the Academic Year 2025-2026, which conducts a training program called JOURNALink. This publication is already well-established and includes members assigned to different sections such as news, features, opinion, development communication, sports, broadcast, and multimedia. The participants held various roles, including writers, editors, photojournalists, broadcasters, and section heads. Even with different tasks, all of them were involved in news writing, either by producing articles, contributing occasionally, or editing content. Some participants had prior experiences from high school journalism, while others were beginners in their first year. Despite these differences, all showed interest in improving their writing abilities, with experienced members recalling heavy workloads in the past and new members learning the basics of the field.

Participants were chosen through purposive sampling from a total of 59 publication members. From this group, 21 individuals (9 males and 12 females, aged 18 to 21) met the set criteria. These criteria included being official members engaged in news writing, attending *The Innovator* training program, joining the English category, and providing signed consent. Those who were absent during the seminar, served as managerial editors responsible for organizing the activity, or wrote in Filipino, were excluded from the study.

2.3. Research Instruments

The study used a researcher-made analytic rubric to assess the students' news articles. The rubric followed a five-point scale: 5-Outstanding, 4-Very Satisfactory, 3-Satisfactory, 2-Fairly Satisfactory, and 1-Did Not Meet Expectations. It focused on four main components: headline, lead, body organization, and attribution. The Headline was judged based on its accuracy, clarity, and connection to the lead and the full story. The Lead was evaluated on how well it presented the most important details, particularly the 5Ws and 1H. The Overall Body Organization was assessed in terms of structure, use of the inverted pyramid, logical flow, and paragraph development. Attribution or Referential Structure was examined based on how proper information was credited to reliable sources following journalistic standards. Clear descriptions for each level were included to help evaluators give consistent ratings. Each criterion had a maximum score of five, and the overall performance was computed by averaging the four areas. These scores served as quantitative data, while the evaluators' written comments were used as qualitative data for triangulation.

For the qualitative analysis, coding sheets were used to review the feedback provided by the evaluators. These sheets helped organize and identify patterns in the students' strengths and errors in writing. To ensure the tools met professional standards, three experts in assessment, research, journalism, and communication reviewed both the rubric and the coding sheets. They checked the clarity, completeness, and suitability of the criteria, descriptors, rating score/scale, and other categorical data. Comments and/or suggestions received from the expert validation were considered in refining the instruments before final use.

2.4. Procedures

In an organized and ethical manner to ensure reliable results, the data was gathered first by seeking a request for a formal approval to conduct the research on the campus through the campus chief executive, including the campus coordinator for student welfare and development, and the advisers of the official student publication, to make sure it reached the proper offices. Upon approval, the researcher convened the publication members to orient them on the study's purpose and invite them to participate voluntarily. Prior to the data collection, all participants signed the consent form. Explained carefully in this document are the scope of the research, possible risks and benefits, confidentiality measures, and withdrawal mechanisms, should the participants want to, so that the standards in research ethics were followed while the rights of the participants were respected.

The study then proceeded with a one-hour news writing activity involving the student journalists. Their written outputs, which were not edited or proofread, were used as the main data for analysis. After collecting the materials, the researcher submitted them for evaluation by journalism experts. Using the

approved rubric and coding sheet, each article was reviewed based on its lead, organization, attribution, and headline. To improve the consistency of results, three independent evaluators assessed each output. Any differences in their ratings were discussed and resolved through collaborative review and comparison of scores. The evaluators consisted of licensed professional teachers, including two advisers of award-winning school publications at local and national press conferences in the Philippines. One of these advisers holds a doctorate in Educational Management, while the other one holds a master's degree in English. Completing these three raters is a legal researcher and journalism trainer who is also a master's degree holder in Educational Management.

One possible issue in the process was the participants' hesitation due to fear of criticism. In response to this, the researcher coordinated with publication advisers and carefully explained to them that the study aimed to support learning and skill development, encouraging participants to take part openly and honestly.

2.5. Data Analysis

The collected articles were evaluated using a rubric to determine the participants' writing skills. A five-point scale was applied: 5-Outstanding, 4-Very Satisfactory, 3-Satisfactory, 2-Fairly Satisfactory, and 1-Did Not Meet Expectations. The assessment covered key elements of a news article, such as the headline, lead, organization of the body, and use of sources (attribution), along with their corresponding percentage scores. To check the consistency of the evaluators' ratings, the reliability among the raters (inter-rater) was calculated. The results among the three evaluators, as presented in Table 1, indicated acceptable to strong agreement. For example, in evaluating the headlines of the news writers, Cronbach's Alpha (α) with 0.811 and Intraclass Correlation Coefficient with 0.817 both reflected a "good" level of consistency, showing a high level of agreement.

For the lead component, a slightly lower but acceptable range of reliability scores (Cronbach α =0.750; ICC=0.749) was revealed. The organization of the news articles indicated stronger consistency (Cronbach's α =0.811; ICC=0.803). In contrast, attribution had the lowest scores (Cronbach α =0.712; ICC=0.714), but these are still considered acceptable. Overall, the results suggest that the rubric is a reliable tool for assessing news writing, as it produced generally consistent ratings among the evaluators.

To further analyze the students' outputs, a thematic analysis was used to identify common patterns and structural errors. This qualitative method aims to detect repeated ideas and deeper meanings within the data. The process started with familiarization, where the data were carefully reviewed. Next, initial codes were developed by identifying and labeling important details from the articles. These codes were then organized into broader categories, which helped reveal recurring themes. The themes were examined to ensure they accurately reflected both specific parts and the overall dataset. Finally, each theme was clearly defined and given a name based on its connection to the research problem.

Table 1. Reliability Results of the Evaluation Rubric among the News Article Evaluators

	Results	Remarks
Headline Writing		
Cronbach α	0.811	Good
ICC (Average Measures)	0.817	Good
Lead Writing		
Cronbach α	0.750	Acceptable
ICC (Average Measures)	0.749	Acceptable
Overall Body/Organization		
Cronbach α	0.811	Acceptable
ICC (Average Measures)	0.803	Acceptable
Attribution/Referential Writing		
Cronbach α	0.712	Acceptable
ICC (Average Measures)	0.714	Acceptable

3. RESULTS

3.1. News Writing Skills in Headline Structure

Table 2 shows that the student journalists achieved an overall satisfactory level in headline writing ($X = 3.16$, $SD = 0.85$). A considerable number of students, eight in total (38.1%), were rated fairly satisfactory, which strongly affected the overall outcome. This percentage is higher than the 33.3% who reached a satisfactory level. Moreover, one campus journalist received an outstanding rating, while another did not meet the expectations in headline writing. The relatively high standard deviation of 0.85 indicates clear differences in the students' skills in writing headlines.

The evaluators' comments indicate that many students were able to write their headlines clearly, accurately, and consistently reflecting the major gist of the news article as encapsulated in the lead. This strength appeared repeatedly in the feedback, with some outputs described as "clear and accurate... aligned with lead" and "precise, compelling, and closely matched to the story," based on Evaluator 1's remarks on Journalist 1 and Journalist 2. Aside from clarity, some students also showed developing ability in writing attention-catching headlines through effective word choice. Although this was not observed in all cases, there were clear examples. For instance, Journalist 3's headline was described by Evaluator 1 as "precise and engaging," while a similar comment on Journalist 4's output was given by the second evaluator.

Table 2. Campus Journalists' Performance in Writing the Headline of News

Rating	Frequency (n=21)	Percentage
Outstanding (4.50 to 5.00)	1	4.8
Very satisfactory (3.50 to 4.49)	4	19.0
Satisfactory (2.50 to 3.49)	7	33.3
Fairly satisfactory (1.50 to 2.49)	8	38.1
Did not meet expectation (1.00 to 1.49)	1	4.8
Mean = 3.16 (Satisfactory)		
SD = 0.85		

3.2. News Writing Skills in Lead Structure

Table 3 shows that the students' ability to write leads was generally rated as satisfactory, with an average score of 2.89 ($SD = 0.74$). A large portion of the group fell within the "satisfactory" (42.9%) and "very satisfactory" (33.3%) categories. Based on the evaluators' feedback, many students were able to present the essential facts of a story clearly in their leads. Their work was often described as "clear and informative" or as effectively giving the needed details, as reflected in Evaluator 1's remarks on Journalist 2 and Journalist 10.

One noticeable strength among the students is their ability to clearly state the "who" and "what" in the opening paragraph. Evaluator 2 frequently highlighted this, noting that Journalist 2's lead clearly identified the main actors, their actions, and the significance of the event, while Journalist 3 successfully introduced the key figures, actions, and purpose. Some students also showed skill in providing context early in the lead. For example, Evaluator 1 commended Journalist 3 for including important details, and Evaluator 2 observed that Journalist 19 clearly presented both the main actors and the outcome. In addition, many leads already reflect the inclusion of key elements of the 5Ws and 1H. Evaluator 3 pointed out that several first paragraphs already contained details such as who, what, where, and when, particularly in the outputs of Journalist 2 and Journalist 3.

Table 3. Campus Journalists' Performance in Writing the Lead of News

Rating	Frequency (n=21)	Percentage
Very satisfactory (3.50 to 4.49)	7	33.3
Satisfactory (2.50 to 3.49)	9	42.9
Fairly satisfactory (1.50 to 2.49)	5	23.8
Mean = 2.89 (Satisfactory)		
SD = 0.74		

3.3. News Writing Skills in Overall Body Structure

As shown in Table 4, the students reached a satisfactory level (mean = 2.97; SD = 0.61) in organizing the body of the articles. Over half of them (52.4%) were rated “satisfactory,” while 28.6% received “fairly satisfactory” and 19.0% “very satisfactory.” However, the findings also indicate that some students still struggle with creating smooth transitions, arranging details properly, and maintaining a steady flow of ideas. Although they understand the basic format of news writing, many still find it challenging to produce a fully coherent and connected narrative.

The evaluators’ feedback highlighted paragraph organization as a clear strength. Journalist 3’s work was described by Evaluator 1 as clearly and properly organized and easy to follow, while Journalist 7’s work, as per Evaluator 2’s comments, presented paragraphs that were appropriately structured and informative. The students also showed skill in presenting information in a logical order. Remarks such as “generally organized with supporting details” and “logical flow” suggest that they are familiar with standard formats like the inverted pyramid. Additional comments, including the effective use of background details, initiatives, and quotations arranged logically, further indicate that many students are developing a solid understanding of proper news organization.

Table 4. Campus Journalists’ Performance in Organizing the Body of News

Rating	Frequency (n=21)	Percentage
Very satisfactory (3.50 to 4.49)	4	19.0
Satisfactory (2.50 to 3.49)	11	52.4
Fairly satisfactory (1.50 to 2.49)	6	28.6
Mean = 2.97 (Satisfactory)		
SD = 0.61		

3.4. News Writing Skills in Referential or Attribution Structure

Table 5 shows that the students’ use of attribution reached a satisfactory level, with a mean score of 3.11 (SD = 0.68). The majority of participants (52.4%) were rated “satisfactory,” while 28.6% received “fairly satisfactory” and 19.0% were marked “very satisfactory.” Based on the evaluators’ comments, students were generally able to use attribution correctly and consistently. This is reflected in observations such as the proper linking of sources to statements and reliable referencing/attribution within paragraphs. Evidently, evaluators remarked “consistent attribution throughout the paragraph” (on Journalist 3’s output by Evaluator 2) and that “sources are properly cited and linked to statements” (on Journalist 3’s output by Evaluator 1). Also, Journalist 3’s attribution was described as “neutral and accurate” by Evaluator 3.

The feedback also indicates that students were able to introduce their sources clearly. Evaluators noted that the “speaker is clearly introduced” (on Journalist 2’s output by Evaluator 1) and that “source identification is adequate and understandable” (on Journalist 5’s output by Evaluator 3). Comments frequently mentioned the use of credible sources. In addition, Journalist 4’s work was observed by Evaluator 2 with “attribution [that] is placed appropriately after the quote.”

Table 5. Campus Journalists’ Performance in Writing the Attribution/Reference of News

Rating	Frequency (n=21)	Percentage
Very satisfactory (3.50 to 4.49)	4	19.0
Satisfactory (2.50 to 3.49)	11	52.4
Fairly satisfactory (1.50 to 2.49)	6	28.6
Mean = 3.11 (Satisfactory)		
SD = 0.68		

3.5. News Writing Skills Summary

As presented in Table 6, the overall assessment of the students’ news writing abilities across the four structural components resulted in a satisfactory rating, with a mean score of 3.03 (SD = 0.72). Among the areas assessed, headline writing and attribution received the highest mean scores of 3.16 and 3.11, respectively. On the other hand, lead writing had the lowest average at 2.89, while the score for body organization (2.97) fell between the highest and lowest results.

Table 6. Campus Journalists' Overall Performance in Writing News Articles

Criteria	Mean (SD)	Description
Headline structure	3.16 (0.85)	Satisfactory
Lead structure	2.89 (0.74)	Satisfactory
Overall body structure	2.97 (0.61)	Satisfactory
Attribution structure	3.11 (0.68)	Satisfactory
Overall Mean = 3.03 (Satisfactory)		
SD = 0.72		

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. News Writing Skills in Headline

The results show that the student journalists performed at a satisfactory level in writing headlines. This suggests that they already understand the basic rules of headline writing, especially in presenting the main event of the story. However, their skills are not yet consistent, particularly in choosing the right angle, and there are still some issues in style and mechanics. A larger number of students reached a fairly satisfactory level compared to those who were only satisfactory, which means many can already produce acceptable headlines. Even so, they still need to improve their ability to create headlines that are not only correct but also interesting and in line with standard journalistic practices.

The differences in their performance also show that some students can write clear, short, and effective headlines, while others struggle with important elements like accuracy, conciseness, and impact. This situation is similar to the idea of misleading headlines that do not align with the primordial idea of the article (Sepúlveda-Torres et al., 2023). Headlines can pave the way to misalignment when diction or word choice does not clearly reflect the main message of the story, which can lead to reader confusion and misunderstanding (Jang et al., 2022).

Even though writing guides, according to Downing (2024), provided clear rules, like the usage of active voice and simple subject–verb structure, avoiding superfluous words, and ensuring that news headline matches the content, and Albino (2021) corroborated that instruction can convalesce writing skills, researches on effective application of these principles in daily journalism practices by the collegiate student journalists are still limited. Apparently, news headlines are important in shaping readers' understanding, as an effective headline clearly conveys the main idea and prepares the reader for the lead (Center for Media Engagement, 2024).

4.2. News Writing Skills in Lead

The students' satisfactory performance in writing aligns with earlier research. Many campus journalists already demonstrate fundamental abilities, such as writing leads with clarity and selecting appropriate facts (Villanueva, 2024). However, the number of students who did not meet the targeted skills and the extensive range of scores suggest that more targeted instruction is still necessary. This calls for further guidance that can aid the budding journalists in improving advanced skills, including creativity, ardent persuasive constituents, and enhanced discourse competence in terms of organized composition.

Evaluators' comments also revealed that student journalists are beginning to arrange the most crucial details starting in the first paragraph or the lead. This means they still develop an understanding that a news lead should not only involve the major information but also provide an overview of the situation. Although some leads remain incomplete, the students' repeated attempts indicate gradual improvement in applying the correct structure. Writing guides support this idea, like the editorial guide of Elsevier (2024), which stated that effective leads should present essential details while also giving enough context to explain the significance of the event.

Previous studies also support these observations, such as Tallungan and Basconcillo (2022), who corroborated that student journalists often begin with the main subject and action, including the details that answer the "when" and "where" questions for the lead. Similarly, seasoned and expert writers in Philippine mainstream newspapers commonly employ conventional leads that summarize the details, answering the

“5Ws and 1H” (Astrero & Torres, 2020). This method helps subscribers quickly understand the major information before continuing with the rest of the article.

4.3. News Writing Skills in Overall Body Structure and Organization

The student journalists were revealed to have satisfactory abilities in the organization of their news articles. Most of them abide by the inverted pyramid format, involve supporting details, and arrange ideas in a logical order. However, the moderate results suggest that they still face difficulties in making their writing flow smoothly, selecting the most important details, and using clear transitions between ideas. Although students understand the basic structure of a news story, many still find it hard to produce writing that is well-connected and easy to follow. This issue is also seen in previous studies. Damit and Dano-Hinosolongo (2022) found that while campus publications performed fairly well, students still needed support in organizing ideas and connecting parts of their stories. In the same way, Villanueva (2024) reported that some student journalists showed strong writing skills, but others had problems with coherence and structure. Solis et al. (2021) also pointed out that students needed more focused instruction to improve clarity in their writing. Even outside journalism, Wang and Xie (2022) observed that EFL learners in universities often struggle with overall coherence, even in grammatically correct sentences. These indicate that campus journalists can write a news article with rudimentary structures, but still have difficulty turning it into a smooth and engaging piece.

Feedback from evaluators shows that many students are improving in organizing paragraphs, and some are beginning to use transitions to make their writing easier to read. Current journalism teaching also emphasizes presenting the most important information first, followed by supporting details arranged by importance (Johns & Taylor, 2024; Fiveable Content Team, 2025). Nevertheless, recent studies show that students find maintaining focus and fully developing their ideas to be a struggle, even though they can identify key details and follow a simple structure. In a study of student articles in the Philippines, Deiparine et al. (2024) found that limited vocabulary and weak writing mechanics affected clarity, even when their stories were organized. Furthermore, grammar and mechanical errors often made the main idea unclear, showing the need for more focused guidance. Similar concerns were found in Villanueva’s (2024) study, where some students, especially those with less experience, still needed improvement. On the other hand, programs that provide structured training, such as the materials developed by Flores and Uy (2022) and the short-term training by Albino (2021), have shown that guided instruction can help students improve how they select and organize content.

4.4. News Writing Skills in Referential or Attribution Structure

The students’ satisfactory performance in using attribution shows that they generally understand the importance of properly identifying sources in news writing. However, the lower ratings indicate that some students still have trouble with how attribution is written, where it should be placed in a sentence, and how to correctly use direct and indirect quotations. Comments from evaluators suggest that students are becoming more aware of the proper way to cite sources in journalism. Research supports the importance of accurate attribution, as incorrect or unclear use of sources can weaken the credibility of a news report (Porlezza, 2023). Other studies also show that although journalists aim to use proper attribution, there are still inconsistencies in how sources are presented in actual practice (Hertzum, 2022). In recent years, especially with the rise of artificial intelligence, clear and transparent attribution has become even more important in maintaining trust in news content (Luttrell et al., 2025).

Evaluator feedback also shows that many students can already identify sources clearly, which reflects progress in clarity and transparency. Their ability to place attribution properly in sentences also shows an improved awareness of readability and writing style. However, studies indicate that college student journalists often lack confidence in applying attribution rules. Bobkowski and Younger (2020) found that students use different standards when judging sources, which leads to inconsistency. Tejedor et al. (2021) also noted that students struggle when dealing with misinformation. In addition, Matsiola et al. (2023) found that students’ confidence depends on their background knowledge and how difficult they find the task. Furthermore, research by Luo et al. (2022) and Hämäläinen et al. (2021) collectively revealed that schools

often find it difficult to apply these principles correctly in their writing in spite of understanding the importance of transparency.

4.5. News Writing Overall Performance

The overall performance of the student journalists shows that they have a basic understanding of news writing, but they still need more practice and guidance to improve their skills. Among the different areas, headline writing and attribution were the strongest. However, studies show that writing effective headlines remains difficult for many students. According to Flores and Uy (2022), learners call for enhanced scaffolds in tasks like headline writing, while Albino (2021) found that even short-term training does not fully improve students' confidence in this skill. Patrimonio and Machutes (2023) described headline writing as very challenging, and Chavez et al. (2024) observed that confidence develops only after repeated practice. Other studies by Birch (n.d.) and Wallestad (2023) also show that summarizing a story in a few clear and engaging words is a skill that many students struggle to develop. This means that mastering headlines takes more time, even when they have already improved in general news writing.

In contrast, lead writing appears to be the area that needs the most improvement. This indicates that students find it difficult to write effective leads, which are important for presenting key information clearly at the beginning of a story. The lower scores suggest that students struggle with identifying what is most important, summarizing details, and maintaining clarity in the opening part. Since the lead sets the direction of the entire article, this remains a key area for development. Meanwhile, students show moderate but improving skills in organizing the body of their articles. Students show an understanding of basic formats such as the inverted pyramid, but they still struggle with maintaining coherence, using smooth transitions, and arranging information based on importance. This indicates that although they can produce acceptable story bodies, they require additional practice to enhance clarity and overall flow. These results are in line with previous studies that report students showed improvement only after receiving targeted support, particularly in writing leads and transitions (Morales, 2023), and that while student journalists generally perform well, their higher-level organizational skills still need further improvement (Villanueva, 2024).

4.6. Implication for Educational Practice in Campus Journalism

The following practical actions can be applied in campus journalism and school paper management, as suggested by the aforementioned findings:

1. Campus journalism teachers and student publications should organize regular lead-writing exercises that focus on identifying the news angle, arranging the 5Ws and 1H in order of importance, and exploring different types of leads. Short, timed writing activities may also be included in classes or newsroom routines. In addition, discussions may be strengthened by focusing on common problems in lead writing, such as unnecessary length, contextual deficiencies, and a lack of details.
2. Student journalism seminar organizers should implement headline editing sessions where students can improve lengthy and ambiguous headlines. They may also require students to create several headline options for each article to improve clarity, conciseness, and correct formatting based on standard guidelines like the Associated Press style.
3. Student publications should include peer-review activities in their training programs to help check the flow of ideas, use of transitions, and consistency of the story angle. Activities such as outlining and analyzing sample news articles can also be used to demonstrate proper organization and paragraph development.
4. Training programs should also include exercises on quoting and paraphrasing. These can use sample interview materials along with checklists to ensure correct attribution before articles are submitted for editing.
5. Instructors handling journalism-related seminars should include short reviews of grammar and writing mechanics, such as punctuation, subject-verb agreement, sentence order, and pronoun use. Regular feedback through rubrics and small-group mentoring may also help students who repeatedly encounter structural errors.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study conclude that campus journalists write news with fundamental yet still emerging proficiencies, as gleaned in their general “satisfactory” performance in news writing. Among these areas, the participating campus journalists showed stronger performance in writing headlines and using attribution, demonstrating clarity, accuracy, and awareness of ethical standards, along with a basic understanding of style guidelines. However, they still experience difficulties with consistency, brevity, and structural accuracy, especially in language use and alignment with the lead.

Lead writing was identified as the area that needs the most improvement. While students can recognize key facts and understand news value, they often struggle with completeness, wordiness, grammar, choosing the correct angle, and identifying the appropriate type of lead. Although they are familiar with the inverted pyramid structure, they still struggle with the proper order of ideas, transitions, clarity, development of information, and tone consistency.

These findings suggest a need for a more organized and focused training program that is based on specific competencies. Such a program can help improve students’ technical skills, structure, and writing style. The campus publication and administration may support a semester-long development program that focuses on the main parts of news writing. They may also provide updated style guides, such as the AP Stylebook and in-house manuals, along with access to digital writing tools. Inviting media professionals to conduct workshops and provide feedback may further strengthen students’ practical skills.

With the conclusive findings, this study still reveals several limitations. First, the number of participants was relatively small since it only involved members of one campus publication, which may limit how far the findings can be applied to other groups. Second, the writing outputs were produced within a one-hour activity, which may not fully represent the students’ usual writing process. Since the articles examined were not edited, some of the identified issues in structure and grammar might normally be corrected during the editing stage. Lastly, the evaluation relied on a rubric-based assessment, which may not fully capture other important aspects of journalism, such as audience engagement and relevance of content.

Future studies may address these limitations by including a larger and more varied group of student journalists from different schools to allow broader comparisons. Long-term research may also be conducted to observe how students’ writing skills develop over time, especially before and after training programs, mentoring sessions, or newsroom experiences. Experimental studies may also examine how specific teaching strategies, such as lead-writing workshops, newsroom simulations, peer editing, and digital journalism training, affect students’ performance. In addition, future research may analyze published campus news articles to better understand how student writing improves after editing and publication.

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