

# *Let Your Fingers Do the Talking:*

**Writing Effective News Releases**

*David Fox*



**National Low Income Energy Consortium  
21st Annual Conference  
Nashville, TN**



## Define Objectives and Capitalize on Opportunities



- What do you want to accomplish?
- Recognize and seize opportunities



# Recognizing/Seizing Opportunities

## Home-heating aid for low-income families available

Community Action Council is taking applications to provide assistance to low-income households in meeting the cost of home heating through the Low Income Family Assistance Program.

Applicants must have Social Security numbers and birth dates for each member of the household. A recent heating bill or bulk fuel receipt.

Applications may be made at [Address] Ave., from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

## HEAP Applications Still Being Accepted

Area Seniors are reminded the County Office for the Aging is still accepting applications for the 2002-03 Home Energy Assistance Program. County residents age 60 and older that have not applied for assistance under the program that began October 1, 2002 can apply by mail. Recipients of foodstamps and public assistance will receive an automatic payment and need not apply. Those heads of household under age 60, who do not receive public assistance or food stamps, should contact [Agency Name] Inc. for an appointment.

Under the program, eligible individuals can receive one-time only payments ranging from \$40 to \$400. HEAP payments vary depending on household income, vulnerability and type of heating.

Following are the income eligibility guidelines for this year's HEAP program:

Household Size	Monthly Income
1	\$1,678
2	\$2,194
3	\$2,710

County residents age 60 or over who are first time applicants may request a mail-in application by contacting the Senior Services Office in your area.

## Is this the coverage you want?



January 11, 2006

## Millions hit by shortfall in heating aid

As fuel prices have soared, federal funding hasn't budged



The Energy Information Administration's latest short-term outlook estimates that heating oil customers can expect to pay 23 percent more for fuel this winter than they did a year ago.

Joshua Roberts / Reuters file

By John W. Schoen  
Senior Producer  
MSNBC

With winter not yet half over, the surge in the cost of heating a home has already begun to stretch consumers' budgets to the limit – and beyond. Sales of wood stoves have surged. In the farm belt, they're burning surplus corn to keep warm. And a scarcity of funding for fuel assistance has squeezed millions of low-income families, as money budgeted for groceries or medical supplies is now being consumed by higher heating bills.

For Linda Kelly, a Quincy, Mass. mother of three, higher heating costs kicked in last October, just after her husband's health plan doubled the co-payments on the family's prescription drug coverage. Kelly suffers from multiple sclerosis and one of her daughters is diabetic. So without help paying the heating bill, the family faces some tough choices.

"Maybe (my daughter) won't test as often as she should using the strips," she said. "Maybe I'll go an extra day, miss one pill during the week. You do what you can."

To make ends meet, Kelly first turned to the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, as she's done for the past five winters. Under the 23-year-old program, assistance is available for a typical family of four earning less than \$30,000 a year. But this winter, with energy prices soaring, funding for the program just hasn't kept up.

"When I was first on it, it was around \$700 you got for the season," she said. "That's when (heating) oil was selling for 60 or 70 cents a gallon. Now it's \$2.59 a gallon, and we only get \$525. So that doesn't even fill a tank."

This winter, help for the Kelly family came from an unlikely source — the government of Venezuela. With federal funding unable to meet the needs of millions of families, Kelly's Democratic Congressman, William Delahunt, turned to Venezuela, which arranged — through state-owned Citgo Petroleum — to sell millions of gallons of heating oil at below-market prices to low-income families in Massachusetts and New York. State officials in Maine and Rhode Island are working on a similar plan to buy discounted oil from Citgo.

# Or do you prefer this?



## Fox's Law

The fact that you exist is not news.

### Corollary

The fact that you are doing what you are expected to do is not news.



## **Fox's Second Law**

Earned media (news coverage) must be earned.



## What Interests the Media

- Timeliness.
  - Opening date for accepting applications.
  - Summary after first month of assistance.
  - End of shutoff moratorium.
  - Record cold -- and hot -- temperatures.
  - Congressional activities regarding LIHEAP.
  - Tragedies (e.g., fire in the home of a recipient)
- Reporters want stories of real people.



# **The Dreaded News Release**



## Releases That Go Unused

- Do not contain news or are otherwise uninteresting.
- Lack a “hook.” You must have a compelling message.
- Contain grammatical or spelling errors.
- Are sent too far in advance or too late for coverage.



## Elements of Effective News Releases

- Date.
- Contact name for additional information.
- The text must be easy to read with lots of white space: short paragraphs of text.
- Use quotes.
- Immediacy.



## **Fox's Third Law**

One of the best ways to not get a story used is to bore the editor to tears.



## **Example of a Horrid – and Sadly, Real – Lead**

The board of directors of the Coalition of Airline Pilot Associations (CAPA) held its regular meeting Tuesday and voted unanimously to oppose any increase by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in extended-range twin-engine operations (ETOPS).



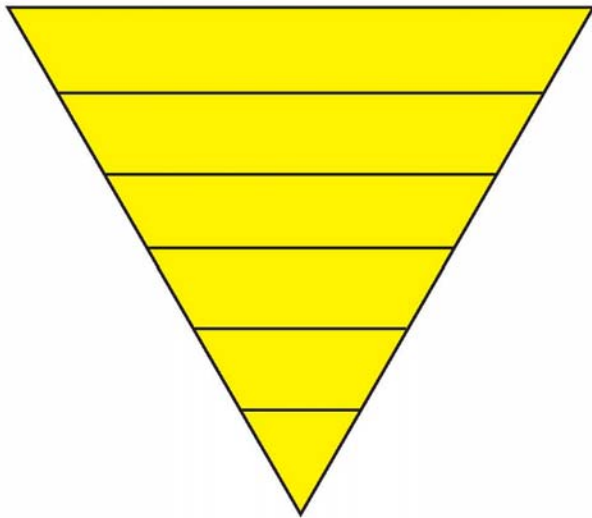
## *Make the information more compelling!*

Airline passengers would face greater risk if the government increases the maximum flying time it allows for twin-engine aircraft to reach emergency landing sites, a coalition of independent pilots' unions warned today.

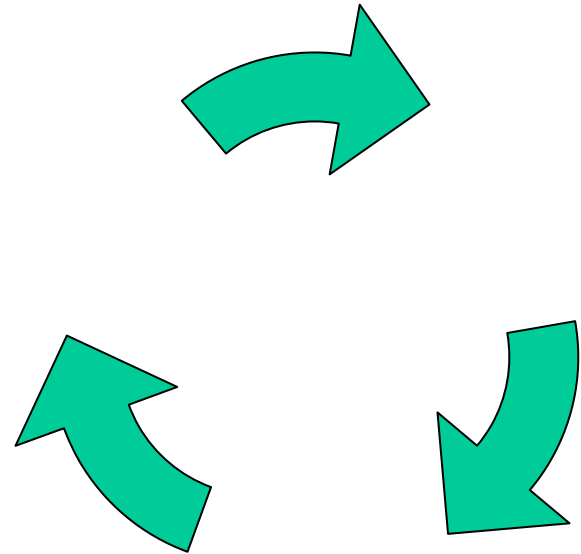
The Coalition of Airline Pilot Associations is urging the Federal Aviation Administration to reject a proposal to permit twin-engine airplanes to operate up to 3½ hours from the nearest airport.



## Styles of Newswriting



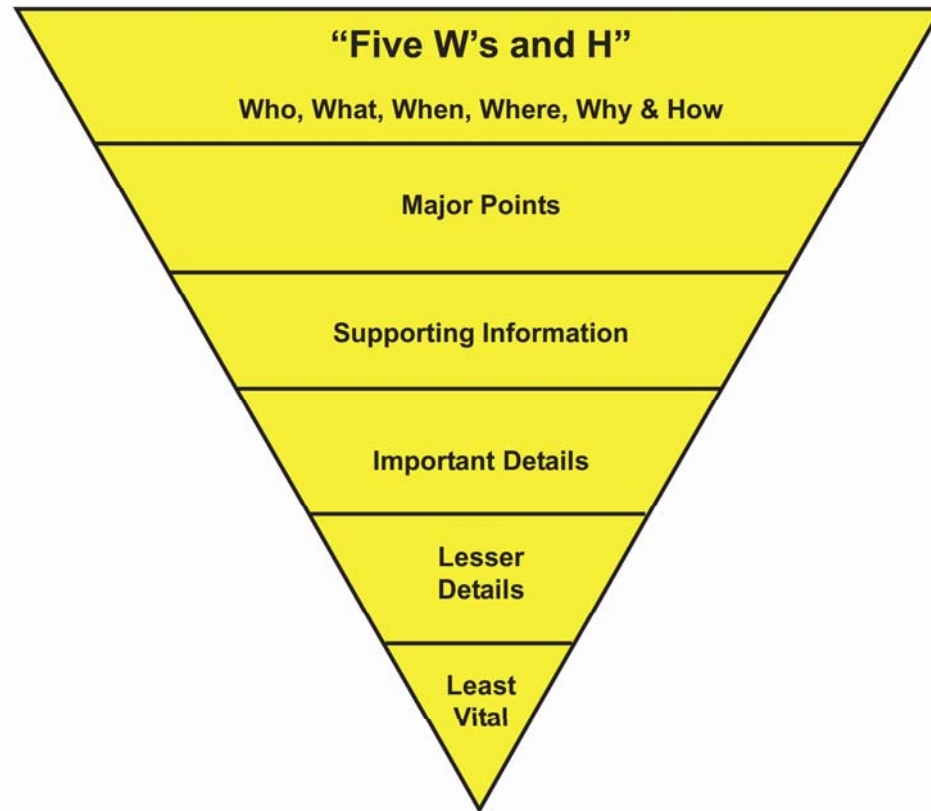
Inverted Pyramid



Organic Unity



# Inverted Pyramid – The Basic News Style





**Who**

**What**

**When**

**Where**

**Why**

**How**

*So what?*



## For example ...

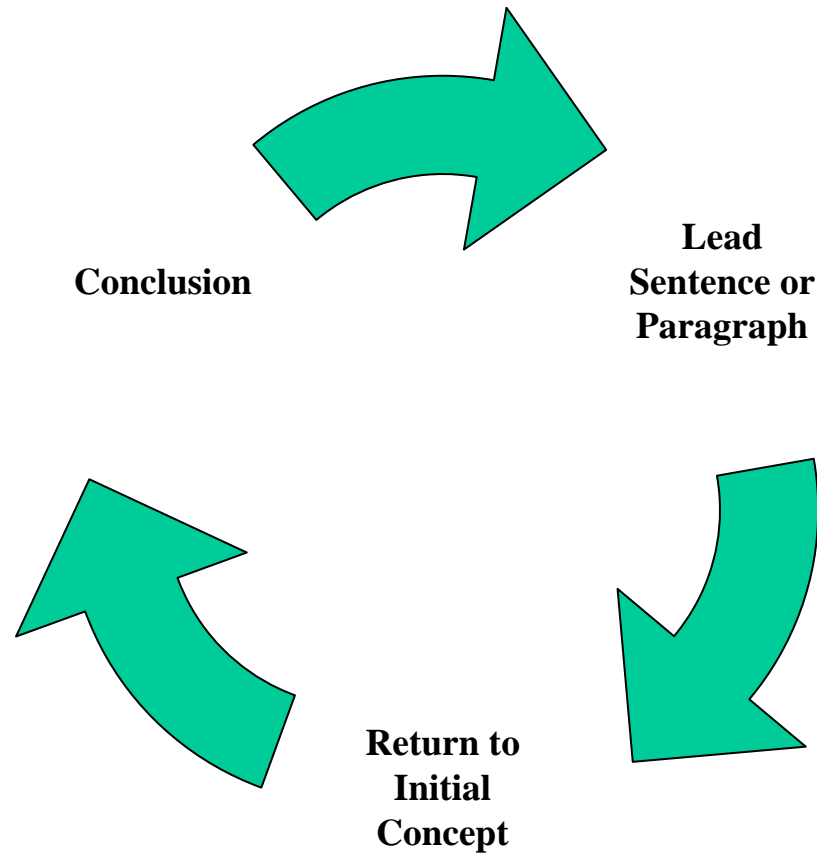
With winter not yet half over, the surge in the cost of heating a home has already begun to stretch consumers' budgets to the limit – and beyond.

Sales of wood stoves have surged. In the Farm Belt, they're burning surplus corn to keep warm. And a scarcity of funding for fuel assistance has squeezed millions of low-income families, as money budgeted for groceries or medical supplies is now being consumed by higher heating bills.

For Linda Kelly, a Quincy, Mass., mother of three, higher heating costs in last October, just after her husband's health plan doubled the co-payment on the family's prescription drug coverage. Kelly suffers from multiple sclerosis and one of her daughters is diabetic. So without help paying the heating bill, the family faces some tough choices.



# Taylor Method – Theory of Organic Unity





## For example ...

Shawn Bussey got to spend Christmas at home. For most eastern Iowans, that's the norm. For 5-year-old Shawn, it was a very special day.

Just over a year ago, the Buchanan County boy was playing with lighter fluid and matches when the worst happened. A match ignited the fluid, and he suffered second- and third-degree burns over 70 percent of his body – on his face, chest, arms, hands, legs and groin. Doctors thought he wouldn't survive. But despite the massive burns, he fought through pain and repeated surgeries. Shawn spent 13 months in a burn center and area hospital. But this week, Shawn was allowed to come home for the first time and spend Christmas with his family.

Shawn doesn't say much about what happened. It's painful to talk – and probably painful to remember. But as he unwrapped some of his presents while his mother looked on, tears of joy in her eyes, Shawn giggled at the surprises. Then he smiled and hugged his mom.

After all, this was a special day. Shawn Bussey got to spend Christmas at home.



*Building Bridges*

## **National Low Income Energy Consortium**

**6324 Beryl Road  
Alexandria, VA 22312  
Phone 703-642-9070  
Fax 703-916-7850**

**[www.nliec.org](http://www.nliec.org)**

**[dfox@nliec.org](mailto:dfox@nliec.org)**