JOURNALISTIC WRITING TEMPLATE
(Adapted from Tracy Dahlby and Kathleen McElroy)

Before you start writing your story, you should have reread your reporting notes numerous times to ensure you have a grasp on the story. Decide what the news is and why it matters. Essentially, figure out your nut graph, then determine which kind of lead the story needs.

PRELUDE

LEDE
- Should the news be delivered directly or indirectly?
- If you’re going for a feature or indirect lead:
  - Does it capture the essence of your story?
  - Does it engage the reader?
  - Do you use an anecdote, recollection, observation or a detail?

NEXT PARAGRAPH
- Do you follow the lead with a direct quote or the nut graph?

NUT GRAPH
- Is the nut graph one of the first four paragraphs?
- Does the nut graph:
  - Encapsulate the meaning of the story?
  - Does it tell readers why this story is important and timely? Is this story a window into a world that we should know?
  - Does it explain where the story comes from, where it might be going and what’s at stake
  - “Billboard” the story’s key elements, be they political, social, economic, cultural, simply human or all of the above?

CONTEXT/BACK STORY/HISTORY
Depending on the length of the story, spend a sentence, a paragraph or several paragraphs discussing the story’s historical context.
  - Out of what “back story” does your story grow?
  - Should this be part of the nut graph?

HINGE
Signals to readers that the prelude is over by using a quote, paraphrase or statement that acknowledges, sharply (poignantly or dramatically in a human-interest story), what has gone before and hints at what’s ahead.
BODY OF STORY: BUILDING BLOCKS

- Break your story into blocks of information that each focus on one point, especially the ones you’ve billboarded at the beginning of the story. Every block should reinforce the main point of the nut graph.
- Each block can be two, three, four paragraphs – maybe even more. But the key is each block is emphasizing only one detail. Each story you write should have at least three or four blocks that readers needs to know.
- Begin each paragraph with a crisp clear topic or transition sentence.

1. BLOCK/SUBPLOT: ____________________________
   ONE point you’re trying to make (attributed)
   Elaboration on this point: Reporting shows x, y and z; paraphrasing;
   statistics, facts and figures
   Quote that supports the point and further enlightens reader

2. BLOCK/SUBPLOT: ____________________________
   ONE point you’re trying to make (attributed)
   Elaboration on this point: Reporting shows x, y and z; paraphrasing;
   statistics, facts and figures
   Quote that supports the point and further enlightens reader

3. BLOCK/SUBPLOT: ____________________________
   ONE point you’re trying to make (attributed)
   Elaboration on this point: Reporting shows x, y and z; paraphrasing;
   statistics, facts and figures
   Quote that supports the point and further enlightens reader

ENDING AND KICKER
Close your story by resounding the main theme to emphasize how your story has developed it.

- Suggest, however briefly, where the story goes from here
- Does the story end with a kicker quote or some final information/scene/observation that resounds the main theme, harkens back to the lead or gives readers something to keep thinking about after they’ve finished the story?
- What’s the best quote to use at the end? Often you have to choose between the first quote and the kicker quote.
- Think of the first quote as the “wow – wtf?” The kicker quote is like that last cool lyric in a song.
- Don’t end the story like an essay. The words like “in conclusion” or “lastly” usually don’t have a place in news stories

NOW READ THE STORY TO DETERMINE ITS REPORTING HOLES:

- WHAT ARE THE GAPS IN THE STORY THAT YOU’VE FAILED TO ADDRESS?
- DO YOU NEED TO DO MORE REPORTING? OR DO YOU NEED TO REPHRASE HOW THE INFORMATION IS PRESENTED?