

COPY EDITOR'S 1-2-3 CHECKLIST

© 2006 By Josh Gaby, Sports copy editor/designer, Chicago Sun-Times

1. Does the story make sense? Do you understand what's going on?

YES - Good. *It probably will make sense to the reader.*

NO - Bad. *Readers won't understand it, either.*

Options

- ◆ Try to adjust wording or news order so it does make sense.
 - ❖ Get main idea up high (lead and first few paragraphs)
 - ❖ The "telling a friend" approach
 - ❖ Worry about big stuff first, then specifics
 - ❖ Work in a little explanation, background or context.
 - ❖ Kill zzzzzzzz words
 - ❖ Trim the fat
 - * Passive voice
 - * Unnecessary repeats
 - * The setup/ quote "stutter"
 - * "It was a dark and stormy night" writing

- ◆ Call the reporter
 - ❖ Does the story make sense to the reporter?
 - ❖ Have the reporter explain it to you

- ◆ Send the story back to section editor

2. Are there any unanswered questions here? Missing Pieces?

No - good.

Yes - Options

- ◆ Fill in the blanks yourself
(Internet, archives, common knowledge)
- ◆ Ask other copy editors
- ◆ Ask a section editor
- ◆ Get reporter to tie up loose ends

3. Assuming the story checks out, would the reader care?

Yes - Good.

No - Options

- ◆ Draw out the news peg as clearly as you can
- ◆ Emphasize the "How does it affect me?" part
- ◆ Snappy headlines
- ◆ Visual help: Breakout boxes, charts, photos
- ◆ Discuss news value with editors - is this worth running?