Text Type: News Report

Functions: One means of mass media for public communication – communicating current and up-to-date information and ideas.

Context of use: The nation, the society and the public in general.

Linguistic characteristics:
It can be written (press releases, newspaper articles) or spoken (news broadcast on the radio or TV).
It should be simple, concise, clear, consistent, objective, easily digestible, impersonal, precise, up-to-date and with the sense of immediacy and to the point.

Word choices:
Common, everyday words are generally the most effective ones for telling a news story. Concrete words are used instead of abstract words. When the writer uses a word or a term that is abstruse or obviously unfamiliar to most readers, he should either define the expression or put it in a context that defines it. Offensive words, jargons slang and vernaculars are quoted with care.

Sentence structures:
Sentences should be straight-forward and generally short. The simple, declarative sentences are mainly the dependable vehicle to convey an idea. Sentence order normally used is (1) the subject, (2) the finite verb, and (3 or 4) indirect object and direct object. However, when the writer wants to emphasize a sentence element, he may like to deviate the sentence order (passive voice, movement of adverbial.)
An average sentence length is about twenty words. The average lead sentence, however, is necessarily longer; a desirable length is no more than twenty-five words.

Paragraphs:
Paragraphs tend to be brief too, often consisting of a few sentences or a single sentence. (It is believed that readers have increased attention span if ideas are broken up into short, tight segments.)

Tense and person:
Most news stories are written in the past tense while headlines use the present tense (Present perfect tense). Since consistency is a hallmark of journalism, the past tense must be preserved throughout the story unless there is a reference to future plans.
or a past event. (M. L. Stein, 1985)

Another characteristic of journalistic style is the third person. The news writer’s stance should always be that of a reporter of information, not an analyst or evaluator. Judgmental and suggestive language should be avoided. The first person “I” or second person “you” can be used in some feature stories, but not in straight news stories. The idea of the third person is that the writer is the observer and chronicler, not a participant. As such, the reporter can fashion the story in an objective, fair and balanced manner, keeping herself out of the account. Readers should be able to form opinions or draw conclusions without the intrusion of the author’s viewpoint or bias.

Organization of ideas:
The conventional news report should consist of two parts: the lead and the body. Sometimes a news report also includes a conclusion.

The most important information is in the opening paragraph, which is supported by or documented by the following paragraphs. Information is presented in a descending order of importance so the least important part of the story is in the last paragraph. It is like the model of an inverted pyramid:

Main Ideas

The news stories can also be presented in a chronological order, but it is not very likely used in news reporting.

The beginning of the news story is called the lead or the introduction. In other words, the first paragraph of the story is called the lead. Mostly it only consists of one sentence of about 25 words. The lead includes a brief summary of the whole story and has three main objectives: (1) to tell the gist, or substance, of the event; (2) to draw the readers into the story; (3) to cause the readers to see the event. The lead should be specific rather than general and should include most of the news elements – the information about who, what, when, where, and why.

Some leads immediately identify specific names, dates, and locations. This approach works well when readers are likely to recognize or interested in the specifics
to following paragraphs.

However, in some types of news story which reports changes, innovations, and developments in society, industry, education, and other spheres of life, the best lead is often one of the concrete instances of examples of the matter being reported (Bush, 1965). Besides, in order to draw readers’ attention, the question lead or a lead which directly addresses the reader – a ‘you’ lead is used.

Main Body:

The body of a long story may be thought of as having the form of an inverted pyramid. This means that the writer presents the facts in a descending order of their importance or interests.

Conclusion:

Many news stories lack a conclusion, simply dwindling down to the less crucial or less interesting details. However, it is also common to round off the story in the final paragraph, perhaps with a quotation that sums up the points of the story or with a look ahead to the consequences or the next step.

Attribution and Quotation:

News sources are quoted or paraphrased to give the article strength and credibility. Direct quotes enliven a story as well as providing needed attribution. For indirect quoting, devices such as “according to…” or “Jones said…” are used. A well-balanced story about speech or a press conference should contain a mix of direct and indirect quotes.

Attributive verbs like ‘insisted’, ‘predicted’, complained’ and ‘declared’ etc. can be used for quotation.

Format and layout:

The source (e.g. Reuters, Associated Press in…), date, headline, subheadings, name(s) of the reporter(s), captions of pictures or graphics enclosed and any continuous pages/ articles (e.g. continued on page 2) to be followed should be stated clearly. Sometimes, the news reporter’s e-mail address is included when the news reporter directly works for the press company. The headlines are not always in complete sentences, but they are usually phrases or clauses of keywords.

The standard newspaper column is slightly less than two inches wide. This
means that the newspaper paragraph is not a unit of thought, as it usually is in books and magazines, but a unit of type. To facilitate comprehension, the newswriter indents – on the average – about every thirty-five words. (Bush, 1965)

References:
3. Hong Kong iMail.
6. South China Morning Post