

A COMPARISON BETWEEN INVERTED PYRAMID AND CHRONOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Little has changed in how written news is structured, even as the newspaper industry changes dramatically. One of the most entrenched news routines, the inverted pyramid, continues to persist in both print and online news. This dissertation explored the cognitive processing and subjective evaluation of written news when structured either as an inverted pyramid or a chronological presentation. It also explored how the structure of written news affects men and women differently in terms of cognition and evaluation. Four different news stories were manipulated so that there was an inverted pyramid and chronological version of each. In a 2 (Structure) x 2 (Story) x 2 (Sex) mixed design, participants read two inverted pyramid and two chronological news stories, each on a different topic. Dependent measures included availability of cognitive resources while reading, cued recall, recognition accuracy, text comprehension, and reading enjoyment. Secondary task reaction times (STRTs), which measure attention and use of cognitive resources, were slower for chronological stories, possibly because they require more construction of meaning than inverted pyramid stories. No differences emerged for the memory and enjoyment measures, and a marginally significant difference favoring the inverted pyramid structure was observed on the text comprehension measure. Women had slower reaction times than men across stories, but a significant interaction showed their use of cognitive resources was less affected by variations in story structure.