Notes

Resources:

- Phone message on OHP/IWB
- IPW sentence sorting
- Phone message worksheet

Instructions:

1. Pairs organise sentences into newsworthiness.

2. Discuss their reasons for ordering – what ‘laws’ did they follow and what experiences were they drawing on to come to their conclusions?

3. Introduce the idea of inverted pyramid writing using the OHP/IWB ‘phone message’ and ask students what the biggest failing of this is.

4. In pairs, rewrite the phone message so that it is of use (use imagination!)

5. Tell students you’re going to explain the history and continuation of the inverted pyramid (particularly as the basis for all modern journalism) and that they should try to note down (on A4) points that they think are important. (Tell them they don’t need to note down every word, but get the general idea.)

6. Individually, using their notes they should write, in their own words, the history and use of IWP.

7. Plenary: share telephone instructions using IPW format.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>An accident occurred.</strong></th>
<th><strong>It happened yesterday.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Today is Tuesday.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The accident was a car accident.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>It happened in Corby where Main Street and Broad Street meet.</strong></td>
<td><strong>One person was killed.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The person was John Frazier.</strong></td>
<td><strong>He was 20 years old and lived in Corby at 212 Moore Court.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>He was driving a blue 1998 Ford Mustang.</strong></td>
<td><strong>He was driving northwest on Broad Street at about 5pm.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>He lost control of the car. It was raining, and the road was slick.</strong></td>
<td><strong>He was also driving about 20 mph over the speed limit.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>He was the only one in the car.</strong></td>
<td><strong>The car smashed into an electricity pole along Broad Street.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The impact crushed the whole front of the car. Frazier was thrown through the car’s windshield.</strong></td>
<td><strong>He landed on the pavement some 3 metres.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>He wasn’t wearing a seatbelt.</strong></td>
<td><strong>He was killed instantly.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why inverted pyramid writing works (OHT)

Imagine coming home and hearing this on your answer-phone...

‘I’m being followed, so I can only talk for a minute. In this telephone call, I will reveal the location of a suitcase full of money. I will then explain who gave it to you, and why. This telephone call will then go on to describe how to defuse the boobytrap without attracting unwanted attention from the dozens of armed mercenaries who are out to kill you at this very minute. After you have finished listening to this telephone call, you will be wealthy, healthy, and safe, thanks to the important information that this telephone call has communicated. Uh-oh... I gotta go. (Click!)’

Reproduction courtesy of Dennis Jerz. More can be found on his blog: http://jerz.setonhill.edu.
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With the help of a partner and a glorious imagination compose a more useful phone message. Points to consider:

- What is the most important information?
- Order your information sensibly
- Carefully select your words to convey as much information as possible in the fewest words.
Inverted pyramid writing

Essentially, inverted pyramid writing means putting the essential information first and then following it with the detail.

**A little history...**

Journalists in the American Civil War had to send information to their editors using military communication wires (veeeeeerrrry early versions of the telephone!). They often had very little time because not only did so many other correspondents want to use the wires, but communication wires were tempting targets for the ‘other’ side and a wire would often be ‘cut’ moments into sending the results of the day’s battle.

As editors really didn’t care whether Mary Jane had lost her teddy bear early in the morning, but wanted to know who had won, it became customary for journalists to shout (very quickly):

“The North won, 435 dead and 349 injured. Front line moved 2 metres.”

(... For example,) then add more detailed information ...

“John-boy Sulcombe was man-of-the-match, taking down 24 of the horrid Southerners”

More details would follow until finally (hours later!) they’d get to:

“Oh and tell Eloise that silly ol’ Mary Jane lost Teddy Blue this morning”, which many would consider to be fairly irrelevant information.

**Why do we still use it? It’s ancient!**

It is still in use because it gives the reader the opportunity to grab the headlines and a little detail if they have no time (Monday morning!) and to add to their knowledge of a story when they have time (Sunday morning!).

Newspapers now have so many adverts and ‘bits and pieces’ that much of the news is only allowed a certain amount of space – so again the journalists need to get the important information across and just hope that the editor will keep as much of their story as possible.