

# *Asia Pacific Media Educator*

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*Issue 18*

2007

*Article 2*

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## Turning the inverted pyramid upside down: how Australian print media is learning to love the narrative

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## Abstract

Print journalism has long embraced the inverted pyramid, that writing style which emerged in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. While still a popular option, other styles are moving in to share the space at the front of the daily newspaper. This paper will present the findings of a pilot study of narrative writing in two Australian daily papers. Over a period of one month during April-May 2007, the style of news in the front pages of *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* was analysed to determine how much were written in the inverted pyramid and how much were in narrative format or a mix of styles. The research also examines *The Australian's* 'Inside Story' a regular feature which includes elements of literary journalism, bringing together a strong narrative style with a serious investigation in the news pages of the weekend, and occasionally weekday, paper. This analysis features insights from the writers, editors and creators of 'Inside Story', which has been running for almost a decade. Finally, the paper provides a brief overview of some undergraduate journalism and media text books in Australia to determine the dominant paradigms in university journalism curriculum and how these might have changed in recent years. It suggests why narrative news might be a popular option for the future as newspapers are repositioned within the expanding sea of media options.

## Introduction

Let's begin at the end: Associated Press features editor Bruce DeSilva does. In his article in defence of strong endings in news writing DeSilva notes that the need to cut from the bottom of a news story – inherently important in the days of stories sent by telegraph – is gone. “But most newspaper stories dribble pitifully to an end. This is the enduring legacy of the inverted pyramid – a form that makes good endings impossible” (2007: 116). He argues that the inverted pyramid never had anything to do with writing or readers of news, but about speedy transmission over the telegraph and easy editing by typographers who had to set the stories in lead type. Both reasons are now many years behind us (2007).

So, is the inverted pyramid an outdated paradigm? And what is the current best practice in the Australian media environment? This paper seeks to provide some answers through a short literature review and a one-month study of two Australian daily newspapers – *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* -- to determine the proportion of the inverted pyramid format in the news pages and the extent to which these papers have incorporated a more narrative style of news writing into their news pages. The study also briefly analyses *The Australian*'s ‘Inside Story’ series run usually, but not exclusively, on Saturdays. The series, on first observation, is written in a narrative style, more consistent with the feature section of a newspaper yet it appears in the news section of the paper. This study aims to provide a profile of Inside Story.

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## Literature Review

Ricketson notes that literary or narrative journalism is more common in magazines than newspapers; and in the United States and the United Kingdom than in Australia (2004). While this is not a comparative study, it does set out to investigate the observation that narrative journalism is not widespread in Australian newspapers. Though it is generally accepted that journalists are storytellers, there appears to be few, if any, empirical studies about what writing styles journalists currently employ in mainstream Australian newspapers.

In the Australian literature, the inverted pyramid has been one of the main paradigms for teaching and describing how to report and write news (Conley, 1997; White, 1996; Granato, 1991). While still very much presented as a primary option for news writing, there has been a move in recent text editions to suggest a choice between this style and a more narrative approach. Take for example, Bruce Grundy's *So you want to be a journalist?* published in 2007. He suggests an “out-of-the-pyramid” style of writing in which the would-be journalist can “escape the inverted pyramid” for news as well as features. Indeed, he challenges the writer to get out of their comfort zone without the recipe or formula of the inverted pyramid (2007: 75).

We can follow the changing environment from Conley's 1997 version of the news writing text *The Daily Miracle* to Conley and Lamble's 2006 version of the same title, with the addition of the following point in the chapter on “upside-down pyramids”:

The structural strategy is not as predominant as it once was. With the broadcast media having captured much of the day's breaking news, newspapers are more likely to encourage reporters to write in narrative, story-telling formats than once was the case. (Conley and Lamble, 2006: 125)

Nevertheless, they argue that the standard news form still presents news in a logical sequence and they cite several texts from the 1990's to support the inverted pyramid's dominance. Conley and Lamble also choose to deal with the inverted pyramid in a separate chapter to feature writing, suggesting inherent differences. In contrast, Grundy deals with narrative writing as a whole, rather than separating news and features (2007: 79).

In her public relations text *Media Relations: Issues and Strategies*, Johnston identifies a trend: "while the inverted pyramid remains the most popular style of [news] writing, it is clear that other styles have moved in to share the space" (2007: 73). She cites a growing tendency to incorporate a more conversational and narrative approach to news and attributes this to a merging of news and features and the role of the column in bridging the two types.

Other reasons to move away from the inverted pyramid in newspapers include changes to the consumption habits of media users: that is, newspapers are losing audience to other media such as magazines, TV and the internet. Thus there is a need to engage more with the reader. While not touted as a panacea for regaining readership, it has been argued that narrative journalism or longer form journalism might assist with the task of regaining the reader from other media which "notoriously pilfer audiences from the pleasures of print" (Weisstuch, 2001). On this point, Director of the Nieman Program on Narrative Journalism Lisa Birks asked the following:

What are newspapers going to do to get their readers back? ... Everybody loves a story. Newspapers are the ones to revive narrative and draw people with it. You don't just get the facts shoved down your throat with the spoonful of narrative as a hook at the beginning. Anecdotally, we're finding that excellence in narrative not only brings people back to newspapers, but makes them loyal readers and encourages them to trust the writer. (in Weisstuch, 2001)

Other literature tends to draw a clear distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' news, suggesting that soft news can, and does, incorporate a more narrative style, while hard news is locked into the more traditional inverted pyramid style. For example, Fulton argues (2005) that hard news is conventionally located in the first few pages of the newspaper and has the largest amount of column inches devoted to it, whereas soft news stories are not (necessarily) specific to a particular day, but provide background, human interest or light relief. "Soft news stories appear to be more obviously structured as narratives, with many of the features of fictional narratives" (2005: 226). She further argues that hard news is characterised by three things: third-person narrative, a high proportion of empirical information and definitive language, whereas soft news is marked by more engaged narration and personal experiences (2005: 233).

In addition, she argues that in conventional news the opening, or lead should include a point of closure, thus when the point of closure comes toward the end of the news story it should not be classed as a news story but rather an opinion piece, commentary or review (2005: 236). Ricketson, in his text *Writing Feature Stories* (2004) is quite specific in his approach. "Stories written to the inverted pyramid formula are known in the industry as hard news" (2004: 3). This study seeks to investigate this distinction and determine if hard news is, or can be, successfully reported in a more narrative style.

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## Narrative and news – is there a dissonance?

Wake (2006) argues the term 'narrative' is often closely identified with the writing of novels but he also notes that far from being confined to the novel and other forms of art – such as drama, poetry and film – the narrative can be found in how we construct history, politics, race, religion, identity and time. "All of these things, regardless of their respective claims to truth, might be understood as stories that both explain and construct the ways in which the world is understood" (2006: 14). Bell supports this, noting that "journalists do not write articles. They write stories. A story has structure, direction, point, viewpoint" (1991: 147). In its simplest analysis then, all news, including the inverted pyramid might be defined as 'narrative'. Indeed, a simple definition of a narrative is "a chain of events in cause-effect relationship occurring in time and space" (Bordwell and Thompson in Gillespie, 2006: 81). Of course, these elements are important in all news stories – something happened at this place at this time because of this event/conflict/occasion. However, we might expect a traditional narrative to have a beginning, middle and end (Gillespie, 2006). So, at this point we can see a deviation by the inverted pyramid because, as DeSilva notes above, in this structure the end just falls away and does not hold any resolution. Rather, it is expendable and can be cut for whatever reason.

All of the above elements are meant to create meaning in the story, which according to Franklin (2007), the inverted pyramid does not do. He argues that this style is devoid of meaning. He notes that journalists are trained *not* to insert meaning into news stories. "Journalism as we currently know it is relentlessly cognitive. We use facts; we prove things. Journalism has very little to do with meaning ... But we mistake meaning for opinion" (2007: 109). On a basic level though, we might reject Franklin's argument on the basis that the inverted pyramid's inherent simplicity gives it meaning. Its simple, clean writing is largely without ambiguity. Perhaps a stronger argument would be that inverted pyramid journalism suggests only **a single layer of meaning**. Other forms of writing may bring in subsequent layers of meaning. Franklin (2007) notes three layers in story telling: the top layer is what actually happens (factual, as in the inverted pyramid); the next layer brings together the story character's and the reader's feelings (emotional); the final layer provides a rhythm and a universal theme.

At the extreme end of the inverted pyramid scale is the simplest of stories; the brief. DeSilva, in his rejection of the inverted pyramid structure argues that "the only appropriate use for the inverted pyramid today is briefs, but old habits die hard" (2007: 117). Bell supports this by arguing that the minimal, well-formed news text is indeed a one-sentence story (1991:174) or indeed – a brief. He goes on to note that the lead is a story in microcosm. "The lead-as-complete-story consists minimally of

the actors, action and place which constitute a single text. Attribution, abstract, time and the supplementary categories of follow-up, commentary and background are unnecessary” (Bell, 1991: 174). To some extent we might argue that this applies in radio where news stories are less than one minute, or sometimes less than 30 seconds (Dunn, 2005). The lack of context or background in radio news keeps it short but as Dunn argues there is still a narrative structure at work because in radio it is usually in the second sentence that the story begins to unfold (2005: 206).

The simplicity of news briefs, or indeed the inverted pyramid in its longer format is highlighted by Clark (2006) in translating the simple 5Ws and H into a narrative formula. In his analysis:

Who becomes character;

What becomes action;

Where becomes setting;

When becomes chronology;

Why becomes motive;

How becomes narrative.

Where ‘what’ might be the more likely lead start in an inverted pyramid news story, using less words and punctuation and getting to the point more quickly, the ‘who’, ‘where’ or ‘when’ might be a likely lead start in a narrative because it is not the purpose of the lead to ‘get to the point’ quickly. This issue is taken up below in the discussion on Inside Story.

Distinctions between ‘news as information’ and ‘news as narrative’, and ‘news affiliated with literary style’, are certainly not new in journalism discourse. Campbell talks of a notion of a “higher journalism” in England in the 1850s and the identification of “a new journalism” in the 1880s as invoking superior and more reflective journalism affiliated to literature (2000: 5) (Interestingly, this distinction uses the term ‘new journalism’ commonly associated with Tom Wolfe 100 years later). In the USA, Schudson notes that reporters told narrative stories in chronological order until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the summary lead became standard by 1910 (in Bell: 173). This is confirmed by Errico, whose study of American newspapers between 1860 and 1910 debunked the notion that the inverted pyramid emerged out of the American Civil War and an unreliable telegraph system, suggesting that it was due to “new social trends at the turn of the century” (Ericca, 1996: 6). The division between facts and story was made by Mead in 1926 in claiming professionalism of journalism (in Fulton, 2007) and by the 1970’s Tom Wolfe wrote the famous *New Journalism* as the precursor for moving out of the confines of the inverted pyramid style, spearheading a new style for the time by incorporating techniques of the novel into journalistic writing.

This study investigates these distinctions and differences in current writing styles in Australian newspapers. It provides illustrations and examples of contemporary practice in Australian newspapers by looking at the first section of two daily,

broadsheet newspapers over a one-month period and it aims to provide foundations for further quantitative and qualitative research into narrative journalism in Australia.

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## Methodology

The purpose of the study was to determine what structure was being used within the news sections of daily metropolitan news papers.

Research questions that drove the study were:

What percentage of news stories in the news pages employed an inverted pyramid style of writing and what percentage employed a narrative style?

Was there a clear distinction between these styles or are hybrid styles emerging in the news pages?

What stories would typically be written in a narrative style?

One part of the study was an analysis of *The Australian's* 'Inside Story'. Because this feature appears regularly in the news section of the paper, but breaks from the inverted pyramid approach, it was identified from the outset as being 'different' and hence requiring special treatment. To this end, it was treated as a case study and several additional research questions were formed:

What were the driving forces behind the development of Inside Story?

What structures were most commonly used?

What narrative tools were used?

The study looked at the writing styles in the news pages of *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* over a one month period. This period extended from Saturday 15 April 2007 to Friday 14 May 2007, inclusive of Monday – Saturday each week. Once the study was proposed, newspapers from this period were purchased and this locked in the time frame. The two papers were chosen because of the inclusion of Inside Story in *The Australian* and hence its centrality to that aspect of the study. *The Sydney Morning Herald* was chosen to provide possible contrast, both papers being broadsheet, but also to include representation by both of Australia's daily newspaper owners, News Ltd and Fairfax respectively.

Categories for the content analysis were kept simple. Stories were categorised as one of the following: Inverted pyramid, Colour/Feature, Comment/Column. The three categories were defined according to the following criteria:

**Inverted pyramid:** began with a summary lead, making the story content clear in the first few paragraphs, with attribution within the first three paragraphs and the story written in descending order of importance in a relatively formal but simple style.

**Colour/feature:** began with a non-summary or feature lead, did not get to the main point of the story for several paragraphs, employing either colloquial or informal word choices or a narrative/story-telling style.

**Column/comment:** indicated by head-shot or by-line of columnist or commentator, written in first-person or in obvious commentary style.

For the purposes of this study, the sample was restricted to the front section of the paper, traditionally the news section, because its purpose was to investigate what writing styles were employed in the news section of the paper only. This section is known to include the 'hard' and breaking news because of its proximity to the front of the paper and the choice of writing styles was of particular interest in the study.

Thus, the total number of news stories in the front section of the paper was counted, with the exception of pages which were clearly identified as feature pages, gossip, letters or opinion. Excluded sections in *The Australian* were: Arts, Letters and Opinion; in *The Sydney Morning Herald* were: Timelines (obituaries), Stay in Touch (gossip), Letters and Opinion, Arts & Entertainment, Insight, Eco, Film guide and Television. These omitted sections, while in the first part of the newspaper, were written in specific styles, feature, commentary or gossip style, and were clearly marked by page banners. As a result, the total pages analysed was made up of news and world news only. Sections were typically between 7-17 pages in *The Australian* and 9-24 pages in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, with *The Herald* including more excluded sections due to its compartmentalising of stories under named banners and also having many more pages of full advertising in the first part of the paper.

In addition, a case study analysis of 'Inside Story' was undertaken. This included a content analysis of Inside Stories which appeared in the sample period plus email interviews with editorial staff on *The Australian* (both current and former) to provide background to the series.

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## Findings

A total of 2435 stories were analysed over the month-long sample period. The findings show that the inverted pyramid is the most used style of news structure in the news section of both papers. While *The Australian* is the highest user of this style, with 84.5% of stories using it, *The Herald* is also a high user with 76% of stories written in this style. On average 81% of stories are written in this style, representing four in five stories using the inverted pyramid for both soft and hard news. The use of the inverted pyramid is consistently high: that is, on any given day at least 28 inverted pyramid stories in *The Australian* (representing 82%) and 27 inverted pyramid stories in *The Herald* (representing 76%) may be found.

Within the news section, *The Herald* incorporates a far greater number of colour/feature stories into its news pages. More than one in five stories use a colour or feature structure. *The Australian*, by contrast, uses this style for only one in 10 stories. Relative to the overall news story output, *The Herald* produces more than double the number of colour/feature stories than *The Australian*. The use of colour/feature structure is not consistent across all days, especially in *The Australian*: the lowest incidence of this style in *The Australian* is one story (or 3% of the total stories for the day) and the highest is 12 stories (or 20% of the total stories for the day). In *The Herald* the lowest is five (or 15% of the total stories for the day) and the highest is 21 (or 38% of the total stories for the day).

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While the number of comment/column pieces were incidental to the findings, they nevertheless warrant some analysis as part of the overall news content. They are more commonly used in *The Australian* news pages than *The Herald*, making up 5% of *The Australian* news pages, but only 2% of *The Herald*. When coupled with the colour/feature stories this means that 15.5% of *The Australian* and 24% of *The Herald* use a non inverted pyramid style in their news pages.

Table 1

Story Type	The Australian		Sydney Morning Herald		Total	
<b>Inverted pyramid</b>	<b>(1164)</b>	<b>84.5%</b>	<b>(808)</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>(1972)</b>	<b>81%</b>
Lowest daily incidence	(28)	82%	(27)	76%		
Highest daily incidence	(65)	88%	(41)	75%		
<b>Colour/Feature</b>	<b>(*146)</b>	<b>10.5%</b>	<b>(235)</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>(381)</b>	<b>16%</b>
Lowest daily incidence	(1)	3%	(5)	15%		
Highest daily incidence	(12)	20%	(21)	38%		
<b>Column/Comment</b>	<b>(66)</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>(16)</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>(72)</b>	<b>3%</b>
Lowest daily incidence	(0)	0%	(0)	0%		
Highest daily incidence	(19)	24%	(4)	7%		
<b>Total Stories</b>	<b>(1376)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(1059)</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(2435)</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table represents all news counted in *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* in the sample period. \*Includes three 'Inside Story' features within the one-month period. Bracketed number denotes number of stories counted.

## Analysis and trends of colour/feature stories

Of the 22% of stories in *The Herald* and 10.5% of stories in *The Australian* which represent the colour/feature story output certain trends were apparent, particularly relating to content. These trends are discussed below, with story date, publication, headline and lead cited as illustrations.

In both newspapers, world news included a relatively high instance of colour/feature stories. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the coverage of the Virginia Tech massacre and following the French election. The following examples illustrate this:

18 April, *The Australian*

'Normal Looking Kid' spreads death in class

It was just after 7.15am when gunshots broke through the crisp air at Virginia Tech's west Amber Johnston Dormitory.

19 April, *The Australian*

The lines loaded with evil and hate

To some it might have simply been creative expression, but the screenplays by 23 year old Cho Seung-Lui can now be seen as portals of evil intent. "I hate him. Must kill Dick. Must kill Dick. Dick must die".

8 May, *The Australian*

Femme's fatal gender vote plea

The 'Sakozyettes' assembled in the women's toilets at the concert hall where their hero Nicolas Sarkozy delivered his victory speech were ruthless in their post-electoral demolition of Segolene Royal. "Oh yes, she is quite pretty but she has no charm," croaked the Joan Collins botoxed-lookalike as she sucked on another cigarette.

23 April, *The Herald*

French fantasies turn to voter reality

The hooded youth on the Champs-Elysees launches a crumpled drink can towards a rubbish bin. Welcome to Paris under President Nicolas Sarkozy, a country that is clean, correct, crime-free and controlled.

Other stories from *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Washington Post* and *Associated Press* printed in the world news pages also used narrative structures on a broad range of topics. Further study of world news might indicate if this is consistent with a trend.

The literature had indicated that 'hard' news would be more likely to employ inverted pyramid and 'soft' news, a more narrative structure. While this was true of much of the news analysed, there were significant exceptions. Many court stories were written in longer formats using a narrative style. This might come as no surprise when we consider that major court stories begin with a summary opening and end with a summary closing, thus providing the full story for a journalist to reconstruct into a narrative structure. This type of story often employed the use of chronology to provide a time frame reference, often using several key time frames to ground the story and lead the reader through. Other stories simply described the courtroom. For example:

8 May, *The Australian*

Gangland killer jailed for 35 years

He greeted the courtroom with a goofy grin, as if he was proud of his own notoriety.

The use of time was a key element in the stories that were written in the narrative style in many stories, not just court stories. The following leads illustrate this:

19 April, *The Australian*

Kevin savours his Macarena moment

It was two minutes past nine o'clock, and Kevin Rudd wasn't where he was supposed to be, which was on the set of Mornings with Kerri-Ann at the Nine Network Studios in Sydney.

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7 May, *The Herald*

Town rises from its watery grave as lake dries up

In 1949 the people of Adaminaby gathered beside the Eucumbene River to watch an explosion officially launch the Snowy Mountains Scheme.

11 May, *The Herald*

Leader never lived up to rhetoric

It seems an age ago now -- certainly longer than 10 years -- that a youthful Tony Blair addressed his adoring Labor supporters at the Festival Hall in London on the morning of his election victory.

In *The Australian*, stories in the narrative style often concluded with a pointer to the Arts section later in the paper. In this way, a short news story would serve to highlight a longer, full feature in the Arts section, still employing a more narrative style. For example:

28 April, *The Australian*

New Chief censor had eyes wide shut

The new chief censor, Donald McDonald, once responded so dramatically to a film he had seen that he made a 'public embarrassment' of himself.

The writer goes on to explain that the film was *Bambi* and, in paragraph 4, she announces McDonald's new position in more detail. The story then provides a 'pointer' to the Arts section later in the paper.

This style is also consistent with an approach used by *The Herald*. Stories written in a narrative style in *The Herald* sometimes employed what might be classed as a 'drop' lead, where a personal story is written in narrative style in the first few paragraphs, leading to a summary paragraph later in the story, usually paragraph five or six, announcing the news point. For the purposes of this sample, these stories were categorised as colour/feature because they provided a strong narrative for at least the first part of the story. The following two examples illustrate this:

16 April, *The Herald*

City takes to polo: it's extreme, sport

Polo is a tough sport that has long been played by city clickers and rival folks.

The story continues to describe polo and then announces in the fourth paragraph: In a first yesterday, Australia took on Chile at the Windsor Polo Club.

16 April, *The Herald*

School to fight rule that short changes disabled pupils.

Bernadette Mullumbuk desperately wants to be like other 12 year -olds.

The story continues to describe this disabled student and then announces how the Catholic-run school is preparing a complaint for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission.

A more abridged version of this style, and one that was counted in the inverted pyramid tally, was what might be known as a hybrid version of the inverted pyramid or an ‘unconventional inverted pyramid’ (UIP) as represented in Table 2, below. This style incorporated a non-summary lead, in feature style, but reverted in the second or third paragraph to the inverted pyramid approach. This approach also often incorporated a more informal style of writing than strict inverted pyramid structure. This would seem to indicate either a merging of styles or a conscious attempt at freeing up the inverted pyramid to be more conversational and reader-friendly. For the purposes of this sample, these stories were categorised as inverted pyramid because there was limited deviation from the inverted pyramid. For example:

26 April, *The Australian*:

Brain is no ticket to bucks

A great mind does not always make for a great bank balance, according to research that suggests the richest people no cleverer than the rest of us.

This article continues in an inverted pyramid approach but uses “our” and “us” in first person references. It is also worth noting that it is from *The Times*, reinforcing the point made earlier that international news is sometimes more flexible in its structure.

**Table 2**

Story Type	The Australian		Sydney Morning Herald		Total	
<b>Traditional inverted pyramid</b>	<b>(1105)</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>(784)</b>	<b>97%</b>	<b>(1889)</b>	<b>95%</b>
Unconventional inverted pyramid	(59)	6%	(24)	3%	(83)	5%
Total inverted pyramid	(1164)	100%	(808)	100%	(1972)	100%

Shows the number of total number of inverted pyramid stories and the number of inverted pyramid stories with a more unconventional lead.

The UIP and ‘drop’ lead style are significant because of their hybrid nature. Most analysis of news structure categorises style as either inverted pyramid OR narrative; news OR feature. In fact, these categories indicate that there are hybrid styles emerging, with varied elements of style and structure. Further in-depth analysis of these styles might provide greater detail about their prevalence and make-up.

## ‘Inside Story’

One of the best examples of a narrative approach to news writing lies in *The Australian*’s ‘Inside Story’. This is a combination of a news investigation and a feature story usually begun on page 1 and spilling into the later pages of the paper. In the sample period there were three Inside Stories: in the weekend edition of 14-15 April, in Thursday 26 April and the weekend of 5-6 May. This analysis draws from

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these three stories plus interviews with various current and former staff who have been involved with 'Inside Story' in *The Australian*.

Former News Ltd editor in chief David Armstrong (now with the *Bangkok Post*) is credited with beginning the series 'Inside Story' in the 1990s, however Armstrong credits others with its inspiration and origins. He notes:

*The Australian* always used the more narrative, features style of reporting in its news pages, but only when that style suited the story. A reporter called Jane Perlez (now a senior writer on the *New York Times*) used it to great effect in the late 60s and early 70s. I used it myself, following Jane's example. (2007)

Armstrong points out the development of the series and the rationale behind the style of writing:

I decided a great word with which to begin such a narrative news story was "When". It was an immediate signal that you were telling a story about the news, not just doing a straight who-what-when-where-how report. Frank Devine, editor in the later 1980s, used it on the front page from time to time. Frank had a lot of American experience and liked to have a story which "spilled" or "jumped" (the American term) from the front page into the paper. (2007)

He further credits former editor Alan Farrelly with the development of the precursor to the series in the early to mid 1980s, referring to what he calls: 'Farrelly's Akubra yarns'. Armstrong notes: 'he made it a regular practice to publish picture stories about life in rural Australia on the front page of *The Weekend Australian*' (2007).

These remained a feature of the front-page of the paper until about 1990 when they were dropped in favour of the largely urban readership: 'Nevertheless, like "Inside Story", they were a feature of *The Weekend Australian* for many years' (Armstrong, 2007).

Armstrong notes that 'Inside Story' was developed as 'a regular home for this style of reporting in about 1999' and points out that he is not aware of a similar series anywhere else in the world.

*The Australian's* Queensland bureau chief Andrew Fraser, a regular contributor to 'Inside Story', explains that the series is not a specialist round. The 'recipe' for 'Inside Story' is not prescriptive, rather it develops from individual reporters' investigations. "Sometimes you get an absolutely fascinating story that doesn't quite cut it as news," explains Fraser (2007). In Fraser's case, stories are most likely to develop out of his two rounds: sport and finance. He notes that 'Inside Story' requires a specific emphasis on style and structure:

You set out to write it differently for an 'Inside Story'. In the first couple of paragraphs you set a strong picture, outline a specific incident at a specific time. Main thing you've got to do is set the scene ... (2007)

'Inside Story' usually begins on page 1 and, as Armstrong noted above, spills to an inside page. While there were three examples of 'Inside Story' in the sample period, two occurred in this way and one was run in its entirety on page 7. Interestingly, only

two of the three ran in *Weekend Australians*, with the third running on Thursday 26 May.

The story which ran on 5-6 May, on page 7, dealt with the culmination of an Australian Federal Police (AFP) investigation about donations to the 2004 Tsunami being used to fund Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka, with the following headline and lead:

How Tsunami cash bankrolled Tigers

As the Tamil faithful filed past the open coffin of their community leader Thillai Jeyakumar in Melbourne last month, Australian Federal Police could only look on and shake their heads in amazement.

The story, about a month-long investigation includes the 'new news' in paragraphs six and 13 with the announcement first of the month-long investigation (para 6) and the AFP charging two Melbourne men (para 13).

We can apply some of the key ideas from the earlier literature to analyse the story. First, Clark's list of character, action, setting, chronology, motive and narrative:

Who becomes character – these are members of the Tamil Tigers and the AFP. Secondary characters are the Australian public who donated to Tsunami relief;

What becomes action – the investigation into the channelling of funds includes suspense;

Where becomes setting – the funeral, complete with 'open coffin', provides a strong setting for the story;

When becomes chronology – the time begins a month ago (highly unusual for a news story) and progresses through the month-long investigation;

Why becomes motive – the AFP conducted the investigation to track the channelling of funds from Tsunami relief into the secessionist movement in Sri Lanka;

How becomes narrative – the investigation unfolds in the story as initially the AFP are powerless, developing into the investigation, culminating in the charges.

In addition, there are three levels to this story, consistent with those described by Franklin (2007) in his discussion of narrative style:

Factual -- the investigation and subsequent charging by the AFP;

Emotional -- the use of Tsunami funds for guerrilla warfare, and;

Universal -- justice prevails.

These frameworks allow us to understand the layers of this story and its relative complexity, when compared with a simpler inverted pyramid structure.

## Conclusions

This sample of news indicates that narrative news structures do have a significant place in these two broadsheet Australian daily newspapers. While the findings clearly showed that the inverted pyramid was the preferred style for the majority of stories in these papers, there was nevertheless a strong representation of alternate styles of writing. The *Sydney Morning Herald* had a higher percentage of stories using the narrative style than *The Australian*, but *The Australian* nevertheless used a narrative style of writing, particularly in world news and in arts stories that pointed to the later Arts section.

The 'Inside Story' series provided a strong example of narrative news. The sample of this series was very small however, with only three Inside Stories over the one-month period. Further investigation into this series over a longer period might provide more detail about its use of narrative devices. Nevertheless, the first-hand accounts indicate the importance of the series in *The Australian* and its commitment to this narrative approach to news that began in the 1960s. It also provides encouragement to investigative journalism in Australian newspapers.

The findings did not show an exclusive use of narrative writing for soft news or inverted pyramid for hard news. Coverage, particularly of courts in *The Herald*, was structured in a more narrative style. Similarly world news (French election) and breaking news (Virginia Tech massacre) were often written in a narrative style.

The use of a narrative style in world news appeared to be quite high and, while outside the scope of this study, might also warrant further investigation

The findings indicate that the categories of inverted pyramid and narrative are not mutually exclusive. Hybrid forms of style and structure are apparent in the 'drop' lead story, notably in *The Herald*, and the unconventional inverted pyramid (UIP) that varies from strict adherence to the inverted pyramid summary lead and formal language. This is consistent with the idea of the merging of news and features noted by Johnston above, both throughout the paper and within individual story structures.

Finally, the findings indicate that the move to present a range of writing styles in current journalism and communications text books is reflective of the range of writing styles in these two papers. The inverted pyramid, once the mainstay of the news section of newspapers and news writing courses, is now considered only one choice, alongside more creative, less structured narrative styles, informed by elements of fiction writing and more consistent with feature style. What might be identified as an increased readability of stories and engagement with the reader could well be a response to declining newspaper readerships which are demanding more entertainment and less straight information in their news diets, especially in the competitive and expanding media environment.

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