

Writers' Workshop

Finding the Best Words for Descriptive Headlines

In this Writers' Workshop you will:

- Create and evaluate descriptive headlines.

Finding the Best Words for Descriptive Headlines

Mini-Lesson: Playing with the Key Words

Descriptive headlines can create emotions, employ symbolism, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia and puns, and tweak a common expression, even a cliché, into a fresh phrase. They are more likely to refer to the local face for a statewide story, such as Duane Goodall's predicament in the Writers' Workshop *Finding the Best Words for Summary and Narrative Headlines*.

Descriptive headline writers also ask several questions:

1. Do I understand the story and its impact completely? As with all headline writing, make sure you understand the story well. In addition, when you write descriptive headlines, you look for the emotional impact of the story so you can match your headline to the tone of the story.
2. What are the key terms, phrases or ideas? Descriptive headlines allow you to broaden your focus beyond the five W's you used in the summary or narrative headlines. Expand your search to include Duane Goodall's story, the assistant principal's comments and any infographics or photos and their cutlines.

In addition to the words you generated earlier (*January, new law, homeless, dozens of students, remain at Homestead High School, fear, out of district, dropout rate*), you may now have *long bus ride, two transfers, 20-minute walk, sleeping in cars, sneaking to remain at Homestead HS, PE showers, shelter, secret*.

3. How can I play with these words?

Look for *rhymes* such as:

Bus ride: hide, guide, lied, tide, side, bide, confide, vied

Fear: leer, steer, veer, deer, rear, career, cheer, gear, here, jeer, near, peer, sear, tear

Look for *antonyms or synonyms* such as:

Remaining at HHS: dropping out of HHS/staying in school

Secret: coming out, public, known, announced, into the light/anonymous, hidden, furtive

Sneaking in: cutting out, cutting classes, sneaking out/slipping in, blending in

Homeless: at home, safe home, home safe, housed, domestic/vagabond, transient, migrant

Look for *word associations*, not only for the key words but also for the rhymes, synonyms and antonyms. These may include common phrases, titles, puns, song lyrics and slogans.

Bus ride: forced busing, ride-and-go-see, ride and hide

Home: the long road home, sneaking home, stealing home, safe at home, staying home, home alone, homesick

Fear: nothing to fear but fear itself, face your fears, Fear Street, Fear Factor gone

Lied: lied and true, white lies

4. Work with others! Descriptive headlines usually require many brains working with each other, like a many-sided game of pingpong. Try out potential descriptive headlines out loud. No negative comments are needed. Good headlines will survive; weak ones will fall away.
5. Once you have several potential descriptive headlines, edit them for clarity, try them out on several people and choose the best. For instance, if you liked *Ride and Hide* and *The Long Road Home*, each followed by a clear narrative deck, type them out and read them to several people.

Ride and Hide May End

Law will allow dozens of homeless students to remain at Homestead

The Long Road Home

Law will allow dozens of homeless students to remain at Homestead

Apply It!

1. Working alone or in pairs, locate at least one feature story or news story from the professional press that gives a local angle or a human interest angle to a more distant news event. Look for stories that already have descriptive headlines. Carefully remove and preserve main and subsidiary headlines. Put your names on the headless story.
2. Switch stories with other individuals or pairs in your class or group.
3. Develop two strong descriptive headlines and a narrative deck by asking:
 - Do I understand the story and its impact completely?
 - What are the key terms, phrases or ideas?
4. Discuss the headlines you created with the students who provided the story. Evaluate them and suggest improvements. Compare them to the professional headline. Which is strongest and why?