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*24 Ways to Write  
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*Lesson 10*

**INVERTED PYRAMID  
REPEATED PYRAMID**

By Professor Dick Bohrer, M.Sc., M.A.

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# INVERTED PYRAMID

**Back in English class, your teacher told you to tell everything you were going to write about in one sentence.**

**That would be your first sentence.** Since it presented the topic you were going to write about, it was called the “topic sentence.”

All the rest of the article was to fall within the limits of that sentence. You were not to bring in anything not related. Everything had to conform to the limits of that initial sentence.

Many writers use this same method. Oscar Schisgall wrote an article for “National Wildlife” magazine about the snail.

**He said:** “In many ways, the everyday snail—or *l’escargot*, as the French call him—is a phenomenal creature.” From there he could go off in any direction. Everything he wrote after that conformed to the limits of that sentence.

In newswriting, commonly, writers employ the five w’s—who, what, when, where, why. They will not use the “who” if no who is involved.

This method lets them give the news at once and then present the accompanying facts. See it here as a reporter covers this tragedy. He tells what happened (helicopter began picking up survivors), when (Friday), where (Labrador coast), why (a ferry hit an iceberg):

## Survivors cling to ice

**HALIFAX, Canada (AP) -- A rescue helicopter began picking up survivors early Friday from ice floes and lifeboats after the Canadian National coastal ferry “William Carson” hit an iceberg off the Labrador coast of Northeast Canada.**

**A Canadian National spokesman said there were 88 crew members and 22 passengers aboard the ship. An earlier report said there were 125 persons aboard.**

**The spokesman in Moncton, New Brunswick, said the collision occurred near Square Islands, about 18 miles off the Labrador coast.**

**The spokesman said 19 persons were in the first helicopter load. They were flown to a nursing station at Mary’s Harbor, on the Labrador coast.**

**The first sentence** tells us everything. The next five sentences tell how many were involved, where the collision occurred, how many came out in the first flight and how they were treated.

We have the whole story in a nutshell. But the writer crystallized his essential news ingredient in 32 words in his first sentence.

This is a discipline that every feature writer should master.

Economy!

Economy!

Economy!

**Say it in as few words** as you can.

Let the drama of the incident or the natural curiosity of the topic carry the reader along. Don't you try to paint a picture with beautiful words. We don't have time.

Other writers begin each paragraph with a topic sentence.

This is the method common to textbooks where an author presents his point at the beginning of each section and then proceeds to expand and explain what he means through several paragraphs or half-chapters more. And you'll find that many feature writers do the same thing in their articles.

**Look at this one** by Bob Hope, the world-famous comedian who goes back to the early days in his friendship with Bing Crosby and details the memories that he'll never forget.

His article is called:

## UNFORGETTABLE BING CROSBY

*It's funny how many times the most lasting friendships of our lives begin in a moment so incidental we scarcely recall it.* Bing and I shook hands outside the Friar's Club on 48th Street in New York one autumn day back in 1932. He was already a recording star and had one of the most popular radio shows in the country. I was a comedian fresh out of vaudeville and

nibbling at a Broadway career.

Two months later I was emceeing a variety show at New York's Capitol Theater, and Crosby was the lead singer. It was the first time our names appeared together on a marquee. Across from the theater there happened to be a watering hole to which Bing and I repaired each evening between shows. We started kidding one another, then developing little bits to work into the show. The crowd in the bar loved it. Who can define what the chemistry was between the easygoing crooner from Tacoma via Spokane and the erstwhile boxer and vaudeville hooper from England via Cleveland? It was just there.

*On our respective radio shows during the 1930s, we both fostered the "Hope-Crosby Feud."* He took potshots at my nose ("like a bicycle seat"), my golf and even my jokes. I fired back at "Ol' Dad," the aging star, ribbing him about everything from his "groaning" to his rapidly thinning hair and jug ears.

One night he walked on, unexpected, during my radio show. "Tell me, Bing," I said, "with so much hot air and those ears, why don't you take off?" He replied, chuckling, "The downdraft from your nose prevents it."

*Bing could kid around about those very things that made other stars flounder in a morass of vanity.* He once wrote regarding my incessant razzing over the hairpiece Para-

mount made him wear in his films: “Robert Hope, of the non-classic profile and the unmissable midsection, is sometimes goaded by a knowledge of his own lack of physical charms into referring to me as skin head. I don’t have to specify what it means. It’s generally known that for screen purposes I wear a device the trade calls a scalp doily.”

By the time I got to Hollywood and signed with Paramount, Crosby had already made his mark in movies.

*By then, too, ol’ Cros was also a little mad about horses, though the ones he bought weren’t necessarily mad about winning races.* The first horse he owned was named *Zombie*, and it ran true to its name. Bing often averred that his losing stable was purely an altruistic gesture for my benefit, a charitable source of jokes. “Hope is always short of good material,” he said.

*Bing’s penchant for horses eventually got us together in the movies.* Wanting to be sure he had good seats at the finish line, Crosby had in his grandly casual way purchased a big interest in the Del Mar racetrack near San Diego. To boost attendance, he helped stage lavish parties at the track’s Turf Club and invited film and radio personalities to entertain. I was included in one of these Saturday-night forays, and Crosby and I did a little reprise of our clowning from the Capitol Theater days. The old chemistry was still there. Only this time a Paramount

producer was in the audience, and he said, “We’ve got to get these two boys together in a picture.”

The result was a zany film called “The Road to Singapore”—the first of seven “roads” we traveled on film, usually in pursuit of the lovely Dorothy Lamour. It was Bing who saw the possibilities for ad libbing in the script. I can still see Cros drawing thoughtfully on his pipe between takes as he studied new ways to butcher the script. Sometimes we’d shout back and forth between our dressing rooms, trying out new bits. Poor Dottie Lamour, who had studied her lines like the pro she was, couldn’t recognize a single phrase to cue on.

*Crosby always loved words, liked to trip them mellifluously over his tongue.* He had a soft-spoken way of circumlocution larded with erudite words and foreign phrases that was part of his trademark. (Crosby would have loved those last two sentences.) I remember a scene in “The Road to Morocco” in which we were having trouble with a French policeman. I began ad libbing and asked Cros, “Can you talk French?” “Certainly I can,” he replied and directed an effortless stream of Gallic at the policeman. Later I discovered he had recited a short French fable about a crow and a piece of cheese—a classic piece of high-school French that was indelibly imprinted in Bing’s brain.

*It’s no big secret how long I panted*

*after that Barbie-doll-sized gold statue they call Oscar.* In fact, it was a running gag between Bing and me, especially after he won one as best actor for his portrayal of Father O'Malley in "Going My Way." Once, during the filming of "The Road to Rio," the script had me down on my knees, clutching at Crosby's coattails, crying, "Don't leave me! Don't leave me!" As the take drew to a close, Crosby solemnly pulled his Oscar from beneath his coat and handed it to me. The sound stage broke up.

*If you want biographical detail on Harry Lillis Crosby, there are several books around (including Bing's own, Call Me Lucky) that trace his career from the early days in Spokane to his place in the pantheon of popular entertainers.* You can read all about Crosby playing drums with an outfit called the "Musicaladers," about his big break with the Paul Whiteman band and the forming of a trio called the "Rhythm Boys." Then, at the fabled Coconut Grove in Los Angeles, Bing began singing solo, and the music business was never quite the same.

The mischievous kid from the big Irish family who had wanted to be a professional baseball player became a recording star before there were recording stars. It's estimated that he sold more than 400 million records and recorded more than 4000 songs. Then there were the movies and the radio and television and concert appearances.

For all his celluloid escapades, for all his celebrity, Bing was a private man and he let it be known quite firmly that he intended to live "outside the fan magazines." He had the magnificent opportunity to love and be loved by two extraordinary women: his first wife and mother of his four eldest sons, Dixie Lee, who died of cancer in 1952; and Kathryn, the beautiful and vivacious lady who was his wife the last 20 years of his life, bearing him two sons and a daughter.

*The public loved him because they saw in him an absolutely ordinary guy who had become very rich and famous yet never left his real self behind.* Who but Bing could be refused a room at a posh hotel when he came in from a hunting trip all bearded and bedraggled? And it was just like him, too, to be arrested by the Paris police who found him dozing next to a "Keep Off the Grass" sign, a newspaper tented over his face to shut out the sun. He loved singing and show business, but he always let it be known that he might just rather be playing golf, fishing a good trout stream or hunting pheasant with a Labrador at his side.

*Make no mistake, though, Bing was serious about those things he believed important in his life—family, church and giving his time, talent and money to a world he felt had been pretty good to him.* He was a devout Catholic, but he didn't wear his religion on his sleeve. When director Leo McCarey



approached him about playing the part of the young priest in “Going My Way,” Bing was concerned that the Church might find the idea of a “crooner” in the role offensive. Only after McCarey assured him that a number of priests had reacted favorably did Bing agree. The result was the portrayal of Father O’Malley that further endeared him to millions.

*Bing also had to be practically coerced into recording “Silent Night” and “White Christmas.”* When Decca asked him to do “Silent Night,” he refused, saying it would be like “cashing in” on religion. He relented when it was arranged that the proceeds would go to orphans being taken care of by American missions in China. Later, during the Second World War, Bing and his troupe toured military camps on funds from “Silent Night.” It was his next-biggest-selling record to “White Christmas.”

“White Christmas,” sung by Bing. What more can you really say? Who isn’t touched with a wave of nostalgia when he hears it? But again, everyone had to twist Bing’s arm to get him to sing it in the film “Holiday Inn.” He said it might be interpreted as commercializing Christmas. He was finally persuaded, and he sang it like nobody ever will again. It became one of the biggest hits of all time, a special tribute to the man who loved to take his kids caroling in the neighborhood every Christmas.

*I don’t suppose anyone will ever be able to calculate the total amount of money Crosby gave or raised for charitable causes.* He loved golf, particularly when he was playing to raise money for a hospital, school or some other worthy cause. And he sacrificed time, money and even physical stamina to do charity benefits—so much that someone called him a one-man “itinerant foundation.”

Once we played a charity match together in Indianapolis during World War II. I was scheduled to go from there to South Bend for a War Bond rally at Notre Dame. I asked Bing to come along, and he did. The crowd roared with delight at his unexpected entrance. Then he flew on to Chicago, while I stayed in South Bend to do a show at a Navy installation the next day. It was my birthday, and darned if Cros didn’t fly back to surprise me onstage with a cake.

*He liked those casual surprises.* I was in London once doing a benefit for a boys’ club, and asked Bing, who was also in town, to appear. It was unlikely he could make it, and I didn’t really promise that he’d show, but the word got around. That night the audience called to me, “Where’s Bing?” I joked with them, saying it was late for such an old man to be out. Suddenly there he was, leaning against the proscenium, grinning at me between puffs on his pipe. The crowd went nuts. It was the first time Bing had ever been on the stage

in England. He sang for 40 minutes as the audience shouted out their favorites.

*In December 1976, Bing and his family began a charity concert tour that showed the world he could still sing like nobody else. Clive Barnes wrote in the New York Times, "He lives his songs. He never plays any role other than himself. This is what is so touching."*

**That was Bing all the way. A natural. One of his old buddies from Spokane said that when Bing was a boy, you could always tell he was coming because you'd hear him singing or whistling. Well, thanks to records and films, he'll never leave us. That's a reassuring and pleasant thought.**

*Bing loved his dad, and said of him, "He was a cheery man. He liked everybody and I think everybody liked him, which is a better epitaph than most men have."*

**It's Bing's epitaph, too. If friends could be made to order, I would have asked for one like him.**

**Now, you've read that once to get the message. Go back and read it again. Test out the pattern. We have inverted pyramid all the way through. And try to figure out what touched your heart (unless you're a matter-of-fact toughie that thinks this is only a textbook). How does the author get to your emotions?**

I know.

He lets his own emotions show. You are touched because he is touched.

He's had a wonderful friend and he's shared him with us.

**I hope you'll be that kind of writer.**

**Share yourself**—your own loves and hopes and dreams. Share the days of your years. Reach us with your own heart.

Bob Hope used 15 topic sentences. He used these subjects:

1. First meeting—where and when
2. Early friendship—fun and games
3. Character—he could take a ribbing
4. A hobby—horses
5. A partner—in movies together
6. A special love—the sound of words
7. A joker—and a joke he played on the author
8. A biographical sketch—childhood through marriage
9. An ordinary guy—with ordinary loves
10. Essential matters—faith and family
11. Achievements—a master of his field
12. Philanthropy—the giving of more than money
13. His charm—he loved surprises
14. A giver
15. A friend

**Don't try to take up** those identical subjects in that identical order. But do write an article about a special friend you've had. Make him/her so appealing to your reader he will wish that friend had been his friend, too. (Aside: Do You know when to put a

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: INVERTED PYRAMID

comma before “too?” When it means “also.”)

Remember to put your key thought for each section first. You’d be wise to write out all your topic sentences before you begin so that you can march from one to another and sustain your tone.

We want to feel that you wrote it all at one time.

We want to read it without thinking of you at all. Be deliberate about the

points you choose and let them cover the whole spectrum of your friendship. That way we’ll enjoy the wide sweep of all the ways that friend was special to you.

Don’t think you have to spend much space on a physical description. Do that little bit we might need, then go for action.

What a person is comes out in what he does.

**Item:** Writing the article is like assembling a pie full of blackbirds. Getting them all to stay in the pie takes a master craftsman. Completing your research, forming your article structure, assembling all the parts, writing a compelling title and lead sentence and then proofreading it to weed out all the typographical errors your spell-check let go by—these skills make demands on all feature writers.

You would think editors would welcome your package with open arms.

They don't.

It's like trying to sell a used car to a new car salesman. He knows what he wants and he knows that he can get it from someone he knows, not from an unknown he's never heard of.

Your initial **query** gets your car rolling. I suggest a three-part query containing no linking verbs. In paragraph one, tell what you are offering with a good lead. In paragraph two, tell how you would like to write it or how you have written it. You speak of content, not structure here. In paragraph three, tell why you are qualified to do it. It boils down to what? how? why me?

Even in your query, ferret out misspelled words. Editors figure if you can't proof your own work you are not reliable enough to trust to write a good article. So, your letter should be neat, compact, grammatically correct, simple, modest and formal. That it shows you are knowledgeable about the subject goes without saying.

Remember, you are competing with professionals who have a track record. Why should an editor go with you when he has experts ready, willing and able to write. You not only need a good angle, but you need to be excited about your work. Show him you know already what his magazine prints. The query goes to him first. If he wants the article, he'll let you know.

# REPEATED PYRAMID

Now there's another side to that pyramid coin.

Instead of putting your topic sentence first, you put it last.

This is the style of the fable, the joke, the children's story, the sermon, the tale, the narrative poem. You present your material and build to a climax. That climax will be a declarative sentence that sums up what led up to it.

That summing up may be a quote, a statement of fact, an exclamation, a sweeping conclusion, a historical record, a summarizing question, a resolve—and more.

Your task as the writer is to divide your subject into some kind of anecdotal string. Tell a series of stories about your person and end each one with a punch line.

**It's art, I tell ya!**

Look at this one, condensed by Reader's Digest from "The Kiwanis Magazine" and written in the long paragraphs "Reader's Digest" editors commonly use. It was written by James Stewart-Gordon.

## JACK NICKLAUS: GREATEST GOLFER EVER

**On a blustery day in January, 30-m.p.h. winds sent waves dashing against the cliffs surrounding the Pebble Beach golf course south of**

**Monterey, Calif. Against this dramatic backdrop, two golfers were approaching the climactic moment to determine the winner of the 1973 Bing Crosby Tournament. Hands in his pockets, Jack Nicklaus stood watching while his opponent, Orville Moody, struggling against the elements and a difficult green, missed a two-foot putt on the final scheduled hole. On the first sudden-death hole, Nicklaus apparently—but maybe controlledly?—oblivious of the weather, the thousands of spectators and several million television viewers, hunched his muscular body, pulled back his putter and tapped his ball 12 feet uphill and into the cup for a tournament-winning birdie. In the gallery, a young pro on his first tour shook his head. "Jack Nicklaus isn't great," he muttered. "He's awesome."**

**Dominating golf as no man has for 40 years, Jack Nicklaus has compiled a record which reads like a golf duffer's most outrageous daydream. To date he has won 14 major championships, surpassing the total of the legendary Bobby Jones. In 1959, as a chubby, crew-cut 19-year-old, he won the U.S. Amateur title, then repeated in 1961. Turning pro in 1962, he immediately won the U.S. Open, besting golf's reigning idol, Arnold Palmer, and then repeated twice more in 1967 and 1972. He has won**

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the Masters, golf's most prized jewel, four times: in 1963, 1965, 1966 and 1972. Three times, in 1963, 1971 and 1973, he has trounced the field in the annual Professional Golfers Association (PGA) tournament. And he has also twice won the prestigious British open—in 1966 and 1970. *No other golfer playing today comes close to matching this record.*

In putting together this marvelous chain of achievement, the Golden Bear (a name given him by an Australian reporter in recognition of his blond hair and burly frame) has earned more money than any golf pro in history—almost \$2 million. *Last year alone, playing in 19 tournaments, he won \$320,542, shattering all fiscal standards for the sport.*

“Golf,” the late golfer's golfer Tommy Armour once said, “is an awkward set of bodily contortions designed to produce a graceful result.” The dynamics of the Golden Bear's contortions have been analyzed in a half-dozen books, hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles, and in tens of thousands of 19th-hole discussions. *Unquestionably, he is the longest, most controlled hitter of his time, with the ability to drive up to 350 yards and stay fair all the way.*

But raw is not his secret weapon. On the fairway, or in the rough, his touch is so sure, and his self-confidence so unshakable, that he can loft the ball and drop it as lightly as thistledown almost precisely where he

wants it. And on the green, crouching over the ball, *he can stand motionless for 30 seconds, in absolute concentration, before he moves his putter and clicks the ball toward the cup.*

Indeed, Nicklaus' determination to get things right on a golf course has won him the reputation of being an over-deliberate player who takes far longer to play a round than hit-and-run whizzers like Billy Casper or Lee Trevino. As one pro observed after Jack had won his fourth Masters, “*He may play slowly—but I notice that he doesn't seem to have to hit the ball as often as those other fellows.*”

Off the course or on it, Jack is quick in one area: his readiness to share his golfing knowledge. Several years ago, when Lee Trevino was having troubles with his putting, Jack voluntarily gave him a lesson in technique that Trevino credits with putting him back on the winning path. Asked why he had taken the trouble to help a rival who was battling him for his bread and cheese, Jack looked surprised. “I just thought I could help him, I guess,” he replied. “*After all, we all want to play better golf, don't we?*”

Jack's largess with his golfing knowledge does not stop with helping the other pros. Before playing the \$250,000 Westchester Open in 1964, he noticed a middle-aged woman having some trouble with her swing and politely made a suggestion about her grip. The woman tried his advice and whistled one

down the fairway.

“Thank you, young man,” she said. “I’ll bet you’re a pretty good golfer yourself.”

“Well, I like the game,” Jack conceded.

Jack William Nicklaus was born in Columbus, Ohio, on January 21, 1940. His father, Charles Nicklaus, a pharmacist who by hard work had built up a chain of four drugstores, was a lively extrovert who had had a remarkable career as an amateur athlete. When Jack was ten, his father injured an ankle and was told by his physician to walk for at least two hours a day to strengthen the muscles in his leg. No man for idle strolling, Charlie Nicklaus took up golf. Jack, who idolized his father, went along to keep him company. Soon, however, he decided to try the game himself. *The first time out, the boy shot a 51 for nine holes.*

One afternoon when Jack was 12, Charlie drove a ball 260 yards, turned to his son and jokingly said, “If you can beat that, I’ll buy you a Cadillac convertible.” Moon-faced and solemn, young Jackie stepped up to the tee and drove one 290 yards. While Jack did not get the Cadillac (when he graduated from high school, his father gave him a somewhat smaller car), *his destiny clearly involved a different sort of driving.*

At 13, Nicklaus was playing Columbus’ long, 7095-yard Scioto golf course in 69—and his name was being linked with that of Bobby Jones

by local sportswriters. At 15, he played in his first big national tournament, the U.S. Amateur, and Jones, who had heard of the prodigy, was on hand to look him over. Leading in his first match by the tenth hole, Nicklaus grew rattled when he realized that The Legend was watching him from his golf cart. He flubbed the next three holes and blew the match. *Jones comforted him by saying, “You’ll do better another time.”*

At 16, facing tough professional competition, Nicklaus won the Ohio Open. By the time he had graduated from high school, golf-minded colleges were pouring in scholarship offers. While he considered which one he might take, his father advised him to go to Ohio State, his own alma mater, and forget about the fun and money. *“Get yourself an education,” his father told him. “You can play golf anywhere.”*

Jack registered for a pre-pharmacy course, got a junior pharmacist’s license and helped at one of his father’s drugstores after school. His second day at Ohio State he was sand-trapped by romance, in the fetching form of Barbara Bash, daughter of a mathematics teacher. *In July 1960, before their senior year, they were married.*

In 1961, after winning the U.S. Amateur for the second time, Nicklaus was urged to give up his job in an insurance office and turn professional. He was initially unreceptive

to the idea, mainly because his idol, Bobby Jones, had never given up his amateur standing. Finally, Jack realized that golfing had changed. What had once been a weekend pastime had become a big-time sport. *Unless he was able to devote his full time to playing golf against the best professionals, he might never realize his dream of being the top golfer of his time.*

In January 1962, Jack kissed his wife and his young son, Jackie (aged three months), good-bye and set off to the golfing wars. Before leaving, he said, “Barbara, no matter what happens, I am never going to be away from home for more than two weeks. You and my family will always come first. Golf has got to be second.” *It is a promise he has always kept.*

In his first tournament, Jack failed to kill any giants, and his total purse was \$33.33. But by June he was in full stride—facing Arnold Palmer in a playoff for the U.S. Open title. He had tied the Pennsylvania Flyer in four rounds of tremendous golf. Then, in the playoff, he beat the incomparable Arnie to become the youngest Open champion since Bobby Jones turned the trick in 1923 at the age of 21. This time the message from Jones was different from the one Jack had received after playing so nervously in his first U.S. Amateur tournament. *“Congratulations!” it read. “I knew you could do better.”*

During the next four years, Jack gained championship after championship and seemed destined to become the winningest golfer in history. Then trouble—in the form of some unfortunate business ventures—struck. Because of Jack’s worries over his fiscal future, his golf game—the foundation on which he had built his life—began to slip. *For two years he won no major championship.*

And he had another problem. Overweight since boyhood, Jack’s unhappy experiences on the course and in business had made him eat more heavily than ever. His weight ballooned, and on the circuit he became known as Blob-O, Moby Dick and Barrel Bottom. While Jack affected not to hear the comments, they hurt. In 1969, literally fed up, he told his wife, “I’m going to lose 20 pounds.” He went on a diet, and in three weeks shed 15 pounds, seven inches from his hips, and two inches from his beltline. With the loss of weight, *a new Jack emerged. Gone was the Moby Dick outline, replaced by the figure of an athlete who now weighs a trim 185.*

He trimmed his business life, too. After terminating all outside management contracts, he set up a new organization to handle his affairs—with Put Pierman, a fellow Ohio State alumnus and fraternity brother, as a partner—and promptly resumed his winning ways on the links. Today Jack is the head of a



company called Golden Bear, Inc. *The company handles Jack's commercial work, his auto agency in Delray, Fla., and does land and golf course development on an international scale.*

In the relentless pressure-cooker world of professional golf, Big Jack's career has involved more than just winning tournaments and becoming a millionaire. For in the process he has transformed his public image from that of a sullen slob of the fairways, who had the blackhearted temerity to surpass the phenomenally popular Arnie Palmer, into that of a personable, international sports hero *who, according to some, is among the world's 20 best-known men.*

This newfound sense of public acceptance became real to Nicklaus during the 1972 British open in Muirfield, Scotland. He had already won both the 1972 Masters and the U.S. Open, and was setting his sights on the third leg of the never-before-achieved Professional Grand Slam (the PGA tournament is the fourth leg).

Battling Lee Trevino on the last round, Jack saw his early lead melt. Suddenly, however, he regained his touch and pulled level with a cluster of shots that had the gallery gasping. As he walked toward the 11th tee, it happened—a prolonged surge of spontaneous cheers from the crowd.

Deeply moved, Jack stopped on the fairway to regain his composure. Small matter that Trevino went on

to victory by one stroke.

*"I didn't care," Jack said later. "That was my greatest moment in golf. Whatever I have given the game, it gave me back then--and more."*

Now, let's look back and analyze what we've got here. The writer wants to prove that our golfer may be the greatest one to come along.

He doesn't trace the history of golfing or give us much about the achievements of anyone other than Nicklaus. But he doesn't have to. He's proving his point that in Nicklaus we have a great golfer, and he leaves it to the reader to find an answer to his title question: "Greatest Golfer Ever?"

He opens with a scene he sets. We're told when, where and how. Our hero emerges on top, and we quote a young professional who sums up the entire article in six words: "Jack Nicklaus isn't great. He's awesome."

But look at the paragraphs ("Reader's Digest," from which this was taken with permission, doesn't paragraph much because, I imagine, it saves a great deal of space). The first sentence isn't a topic sentence. The article is not about the waves dashing on a California cliff. It is about an awesome golfer.

So we have a pyramid structure here that puts the most important part of the paragraph at the end. We could draw a pyramid right on top of each paragraph. Its base would sit right across our last sentence.

In paragraph two we are given Jack's record. It builds to a sweeping

declaration: **No other golfer playing today comes close to matching this record.** (Realize, this article first appeared in September, 1973. But it's been so memorable, I've never forgotten it.)

In paragraph three we speak of money and that section ends with a strong declaration of Jack's total earnings for one year.

In paragraph three, we talk of Jack's style and strength.

In paragraph four we talk of his technique.

**Paragraph five** gives an observation by another professional that Jack's snail-pace play is to his advantage. Even though this is a major section of the article, showing how he plays his game, each part ends with its own grand slam.

Then we go off the course and see what kind of a man he is—as a person. He helps rivals improve their game. He helps little old ladies with theirs. Yes, we agree. He's a pretty good golfer, lady; and he says, "Well, I like the game."

We've ended with a quote there, but it sums up his modesty as well as his heart.

We then go into a biographical sketch—a common device when you write biographical articles. We want to know the subject's origins. Where did he come from? What was he like as a kid? The strong statements at the ends of our paragraphs tell us this:

—**The first time out, the boy shot a 51 for nine holes.**

—**His destiny clearly involved a different sort of driving.**

—**"You'll do better next time."**

—**"Get yourself an education. You can play golf anywhere."**

—**They were married.**

We've taken him from 12 to 20. Now we look at his professional career and how it began. We will continue presenting stories of when he did this and how he did that. As with the Bing Crosby article, this one depends on anecdotes to carry it along.

**We're not interested** in his deep thoughts as he drives to the golf course and home each day (unless they tell us secrets of how he wins). We want action. We want what happened when . . .

As with all good drama, we hit a slump. Everything has been going great guns and we're winning everything in sight when—oops! The bottom falls out. His business interests go bananas. He gains weight. He's the roly-poly of the golf world. We have something to overcome.

Our last sentences tell us this, too:

--**A new Jack emerged.**

--**He's among the world's 20 best-known men.**

We sweep to the final anecdote and we're in a battle. And it's interesting—and better—that we don't win. It makes the article more believable. But we end on an emotional note. His fans give him an ovation that reaches his heart. He responds with Sidney Carton grandeur. He means these words. We respect him for them.

**"Whatever I have given the game,**

**it gave me back then—and more.”**

**Now, let’s plan** your strategy.

This requires more thought and deliberate plotting. As with inverted pyramid, you must pre-think and pre-plan your article. What stories do you have to tell? What quotes are available?

Have you done your homework? Have you read the other materials available about this person? You should be an expert on his life before you try to tell the world what you know.

**Have you interviewed** his family? friends? co-workers? enemies? It’s good to get some detractors—people who know other sides of his character or “aw shucks!” things that he’s done. That gives you color and class—not because we’re looking for dirt as much as that we want people to know our guy is not a patsy. It’s the flaws that make our hero human.

So what’s your assignment? Pick a person. Don’t use the Lord. Choose someone who would interest an editor. Do you know any celebrities? That’s not necessary. Remember, you don’t have to write for “Saturday Evening Post” or “Reader’s Digest.”

**Write** for an industrial magazine and write-up a tool-and-dye man. Write an architecture magazine and see if they’d like an article from the viewpoint of your son-in-law who’s at Oklahoma State teaching building construction while helping the Pawnee nation with its building projects. See if a vocational cooking magazine would like the story of a chef in the restaurant around

your block.

**Go to the library** to see all the different kinds of magazines that publish. Read an up-to-date “Writer’s Market” book to discover what magazines are looking for articles you know how to write.

Interview the person to see what’s unique about him.

Does he think deep thoughts?

Does he have suggestions about making something more efficient?

Would he do things another way if he had the money? the power? the authority? the clout?

What contribution is he making in his milieu (his personal or professional neighborhood)?

**As you interview**, become a friend. Find about his family and his roots. Invite him out. Perhaps he’ll invite you to his home in return. Earn his trust. Gather your data. Tell him what you’re doing and ask his permission to let you turn your pocket recorder to “on.” These are so good to have because you keep them in a pocket out of sight, and they give you proof that the interviewee actually did say the things he may later deny saying.

**Ask him for stories**—experiences on the job, built-in problems that go with the job, how he solved his problems, tips for other people who might have those same problems.

Get “one day when . . .” kinds of anecdotes. Keep a sharp ear open for punch lines. Listen for declarative statements that seem to sum up major points you’ve been working on.

It's work. If it comes easy, don't trust it. You've GOT to do your homework. Set your standards high and go to work!

**Item:** No writer ever needs to be a bore. A Bohrer, yes. A bore, no. You have five questions, yea, six including "how" to turn any long trip on a bus or plane into a fascinating interview that might sell to *True* or *Reader's Digest* or *Forbes*. Strangers will often tell a seat-mate they'll never see again secrets they would never breathe at home. An interested YOU, asking questions, pumping with "why" questions—Why did you do this? Why did you let them do that to you? Why do you think you can get away with this? You will certainly have an interesting trip if nothing else.

**Item:** Ask the impossible. So there's a guard around the Russian ship. Ask for a tour. Sure, if they let you on you'll get soaked with propaganda. Ask for an appointment with the queen or the president. Make sure you have matters of interest and significance to bring up. Remember, writers walk with kings. Be good enough and a president might ask you to join his speech writing crew.

**Item:** Check your equipment before you go in for an interview. You're going to use a tape recorder? Make sure it's not on pause. I have sad stories to tell about that. Make sure your pen has enough ink or that you have more pens in your pocket.

**Item:** Never pass a restroom by. Among other things, you should look in the mirror. You may have food in your teeth or other appendages about

your face you are not aware of but which will distract the person you are trying to interview.

**Item:** Most editors work months ahead. They look for Christmas articles in May and June. Be aware of this.

**Item:** Use radio ham operators to get interviews with people far away.

**Item:** Ask your congressman to put you on the mailing list to receive the Congressional Record. Many items of significance in Congress are reported there where many newsmen rarely go. Senator Long of Louisiana, head of the penitentiaries committee, once gave the truth about the "Birdman of Alcatraz" in a speech the newspapers missed. A researcher found the item and sold his feature to a national magazine.

**Item:** Government agencies report out their doings and findings each January. Write the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20025 to get on the mailing list.

Here, again, you have had four new structures to add to your file of ways to write articles. It's important to keep a list of these near your computer so that, as you sit down to write the current article, you can glance through the kinds of structures available for your use. This will save you tons of time and enable you to turn out a professional looking article the first time around.

I know from personal experience that this works.

Trust me.

Professor Dick