

When it comes to deciding on the 'architecture' of your writing, it's nice to know

YOU HAVE A CHOICE!

The following four styles were tested by ASNE back in 1993 with groups of readers, all responding to the same basic story told in different ways. The sample text was written by Jack Kennedy, Rock Canyon HS, based on a actual performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," at City High School in Iowa City, Iowa. Often the problem with a story is that the writer is not quite sure what structure is best in getting and keeping reader interest.

TRADITIONAL

It was opening night for the spring play, but the most important worry for Director Luis Sierra and the cast of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was the weather.

"The entire show was built on doing it outside against a background of trees," Sierra said. "We had an alternative set on stage in the auditorium, but we really hoped we wouldn't have to use it."

The bad news was that it was too windy, and the temperature hovered in the 40s, so opening night was held indoors after all.

"What a letdown!" Mose Hayward '07, who played Demetrius, said. "The audience was still enthusiastic, but all of us in the cast were a little disappointed."

The weather finally relented for the final of the three nights, and a packed crowd of over 300 filled bleachers and lawn chairs...

Closely tied to inverted pyramid: a strong lead followed by several paragraphs backing up the lead. The tone stays neutral, with more telling than showing. Often uses a quote-transition pattern. It is built on clear writing and concrete details.

RADICAL CLARITY

Cold and windy weather forced the first two performances of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" to be held indoors on the auditorium stage. On Saturday, though, the winds calmed and the temperatures inched above 50 degrees. The first outdoor drama performance since 1979 was on!

Director Luis Sierra and a cast of 56 staged the famous Shakespeare comedy with a circus motif. The Athenian Circus included jugglers, dancers, wild animals (two large dogs owned by French teacher Ernest Kenerski), and clowns.

Sierra had seen the play done with a circus setting a number of years ago, and had always wanted to try the technique.

Actors and audience all seemed to enjoy the rather unusual approach.

"I wasn't sure what to expect," said audience member Elliot Gould. "But I knew it would be fun..."

Arranges material in an order that maximizes reader understanding and explains everything the reader might need explained. Defines terms and spells out motives. It "tells" readers things.

POINT OF VIEW

If you missed the Saturday night performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," you missed something truly unique. Not the play itself – a favorite of high school drama departments, staged at City High for the third time in two decades.

You missed an inspired troupe of actors and an inspired setting – outdoors behind the art room, in front of the small grove of trees – producing a night of theatrical magic.

"Magic was precisely what we were out to make," Director Luis Sierra said. "Just doing the play outside wasn't enough. The actors had to make the setting and the text come alive. I was thrilled with what they ended up with."

As were audience members.

"The fight scenes were hysterical," said...

Can be any shape except inverted pyramid, and tells a story with a viewpoint immediately clear to the reader. Might use second person, addressing readers directly. This structure occupies a space between news and opinion and is tricky to use very often.

NARRATIVE

As the wind swirled about the makeshift stage area, Mose Hayward '07, made a few tentative tosses of the juggling balls. After several misses, he turned to Director Luis Sierra and said, "It just isn't going to happen tonight."

Sierra, who had spent the last several hours helping technicians string the last of many hundred tiny Christmas lights in the bare branches of the overhanging trees, just grimaced, and turned away.

The show *would* go on tonight. It just would go on indoors.

Sierra and the cast had held the final dress rehearsal for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" the night before, and the weather had cooperated.

But the fickle Iowa April weather had turned cold and blustery. There would be no need to light up the trees tonight...

Tells a story, with actions by characters in time sequences. Story has beginning, middle and end. Quotes sound like real speech. Mostly reveals by showing, with a little telling for framing.

And the readers' choice over 15 years ago was... narrative. It seems readers liked to read a good story, though all four styles had fans. When choosing a structure, consider the space you have available for the coverage, along with whether you have the amount of concrete detail needed for a narrative approach. Have readers changed all that much since the mid-1990s?