

# Story forms used at the Star Tribune

## updates

This is a great way to provide the latest news on a continuing story. For this form to really work, it means taking apart a story, rearranging and rewriting it to create quick hits for readers. It should explain what the latest news is, why it's important, what's at stake, the backstory and, if possible, what's next. It can be told in 5-6 inches as an individual story or packaged with other continuing stories. It is especially useful for packaging international election stories, since multiple countries will hold elections on the same day; political stories; severe weather stories and crime stories.

## deconstruction/reconstruction

This is probably one of the most labor-intensive forms. But it can be the most effective. They usually have an introduction area that will set up the story and then the rest of the information is broken apart by subject. It can be tailored for many topics but it really needs to have a vision or goal. Think about what information you're trying to convey? What topic breakdowns would be the easiest for readers to absorb and take away the message? What things do they want to know or should they know? Maybe it's the key points to the stimulus package or comparing where candidates stand on key issues. Once you've decided, it means mining the various stories that are moving on the topic, deconstructing the story down to its facts and rebuilding the facts as talking points. The most effective deconstruction/reconstruction forms are when they help readers examine a broad subject (the war, an election, the economy, Supreme Court decisions). Think about it like building a puzzle that piece by piece you reveal the image to readers.

## in their own words

Sometimes the most interesting stories are when someone interesting just talks. It can be a political figure, a historical figure, a newsmaker. These can be a series of quotes broken down by subject.

## q and a

What's more accessible than a question and answer session? It's a great way to give a lot of facts and usable information whether it stands as its own story or serves as a layering device with another story.

## talkers

Remember the tree growing in a man's lung or the shipwrecked dog that was reunited with its owners? You see these man-bites-dog stories all the time. There the odd, interesting, funny stories people are talking about. They often don't need a lot of space by themselves so why not put them all together for a really fun read? Sometimes there's a trend with the stories that come across, such as good news or bad news items or what's in and what's out that can be played up in the headlines.

## **exploded type forms**

It could be a feature, it could be a bright and it could be a way to focus more attention on an important subject. But the key thing is that they're pretty concise (usually less than 8 inches) or they need some air on the page for the telling. These forms say: I'm a special topic so you should pay attention to me. They usually need a photo to help with the telling.

## **above the flag form**

This is a variation of the exploded type form, but smaller. It's usually no more than 3 inches so that it fits above a subject flag on a page. It's a quick hit about an interesting topic that usually related to the other stories on the page, whether it's about Washington, science, the economy, etc. It usually needs a photo or some special typographical element to offset it.

## **by the numbers**

This form takes a page from magazines. It's an easily digestible way to tell readers key points or quick hits to a subject. Of course, you have to digest the information for readers, choosing the top key points to present.

## **roundups**

You have five different stories about the wars and a limited amount of space. So create a roundup. You can lead with the biggest story and then summarize the rest of the stories under different subheads. It's an organized way to give quick bits of information on a related subject. It works well for war stories, health stories, political stories and grouping all those tidbits of information that may pop up with a big story.

## **topic pages**

This is a way to give a subject identity. Great for health and science; science and technology, Washington pages. Each of the different stories on the subject should be presented differently, such as mixing an exploded type form with a Q and A and a roundup. But remember, one of those stories needs to anchor the page and have a bigger footprint or the page will end up looking chaotic.

# Designing alternative story forms

- Read the entire story. Understand the form. Visualize how it might appear on a page as you read. Think about possible photos/illustrations.
- If possible, wait until the copy is edited. This will save time in the end.
- Make sure the design will make sense to readers and be easy to follow. If it's pretty but unreadable, start over.
- Communicate clearly to originating editor and copy editor exactly what you are trying to do and what they need to do to make that happen. You might need to sell them on the idea.
- Be flexible. Don't force a story into a set form if it just doesn't work.
- Don't reinvent type styles each time you do a story form. Decide as a paper or design staff what headline fonts and text fonts will most often be used for story forms. Having the basic framework in place gives you a starting point and helps the task feel less overwhelming.
- Be careful not to eat up too much space with a form. Part of the idea is to communicate stories in easy-to-read chunks. After designing the piece, look at it again and see if you can make it tighter, more inviting.