

1 Headlines

1.1 Words

Writing sentences using headline words

Level: Elementary–Intermediate

Preparation

Select a number of headlines from a broadsheet and/or a tabloid newspaper (see note below) and cut them into individual words. Use these to compile a sheet of headline words in a jumbled order, and make one copy of this sheet for each pair of students in the class.

In class

- 1 Pair students, give each pair a copy of the words sheet and tell your students that the words have all been taken from newspaper headlines. Deal with any problem vocabulary at this stage of the activity.
- 2 Tell your students that they should try to use as many of these words as they can to make up sentences, but make it absolutely clear that they do not need to use all the words on the sheet.
- 3 Explain that their sentences can be as long or as short as they wish, and tell them that they can add grammatical words (e.g. auxiliary verbs, linking words, pronouns and articles) which do not appear on the sheet to help them make their sentences grammatically correct. This is a good opportunity to point out to your students the elliptical nature of headlines by writing two or three headlines on the board and showing the kind of words that are commonly deleted (refer to Appendix 1).
- 4 Tell your students that as they use a word, they should tick it on the sheet and not use that word again. They should write out in a list all the sentences they make, adding the appropriate punctuation (e.g. full stops, commas, question marks).
- 5 As each pair finishes, ask them to exchange their list with another pair to check the sentences they have each produced.
- 6 Finally, ask pairs to read out their lists of sentences, and discuss their

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accuracy with the class. Deal with any language problems as they arise.

Extensions

You can use this same sheet in future lessons for a variety of tasks:

- 1 Look for examples of prefixes or suffixes.
- 2 Look for different types of collocation (e.g. noun + noun, as in *price rise*, or adjective + noun, as in *private word*).
- 3 Make a list of all the words that contain a particular sound (e.g. /æ/).
- 4 Classify the words into nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and so on.
- 5 Find words which can be a verb as well as a noun (e.g. *hand, page, stone*).
- 6 Find different pronunciations for a particular letter of the alphabet (e.g. Y – *try, system, country*), or for a combination of letters (e.g. OO – *good, flood, poor*).
- 7 Classify words according to the sense (i.e. smell, taste, touch, hearing, sight) with which students associate them.
- 8 Find words belonging to the same lexical group (e.g. words connected with *family*).

Variation

Instead of asking your students to make complete sentences, tell them to use the words to make newspaper headlines of any length, and allow these to have grammatical words omitted. The headlines can be discussed with the whole class, and students asked to make up stories which relate to the headlines.

Comment

An open-ended activity of this type is particularly well-suited to mixed-ability classes, in that it allows all the students in the class to produce language at their own level of proficiency. Higher-level students are challenged to produce more linguistically complex sentences, whilst even the students in the class with the least English will achieve a measure of success.

Note

Broadsheets (or broadsheet newspapers) are large-sized newspapers, and are printed on a size of paper known as broadsheet, hence this term. They are sometimes referred to as *the qualities*, or *the heavies*

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(referring to the weekend editions of certain broadsheets which contain so many pages that they are physically quite heavy to carry). Broad-sheets are considered to be informative and objective, keeping news and opinion or comment firmly apart. They present the reader with serious news, which is supported with detailed and informed analysis and comment on economic, political, social and world events. Such newspapers in Britain include *The Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Financial Times*, the *Independent* and the *Guardian*.

Tabloids (or tabloid newspapers) are newspapers whose pages are about half the size of broadsheet newspapers. All popular newspapers in Britain are tabloids, far exceeding the broadsheets in their sales. Typically, tabloids contain many photographs, attention-grabbing headlines and sensational stories, often concerning scandal involving prominent figures and personalities in the public eye. They are considered to be more entertaining than informative in terms of their news coverage, so much so that *tabloid* is frequently used in a pejorative sense when talking about the press collectively. Such newspapers in Britain include the *Sun*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Star* and the *Daily Express*.

Cross-references

A quick oral version of 10.4 can serve as a suitable lead-in activity. The headlines used in most of the other activities in this chapter can be recycled in this activity.

1.2 Headline halves

Matching halves of newspaper headlines

Level: Post-Elementary–Intermediate

Preparation

MAIN ACTIVITY

Compile a list of between eight and ten headlines, each of which should consist of six or more words. The meanings of the headlines should be transparent, i.e. there should be no word play or ambiguity.

EXTENSION

Paste the accompanying articles (without the headlines) onto a sheet of paper, numbering them for ease of reference. Deal with any vocabulary or language problems by adding a gloss (a translation or an explanation),

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and make one copy of this sheet for each student in the class. Keep the matching headlines for the final stage to check your students' answers.

In class

- 1 On the left-hand side of the board, write the beginnings of the headlines you have chosen. On the other side of the board, write the endings of these headlines, but in a jumbled order. Deal with any vocabulary or language problems at this stage of the activity.
- 2 Explain to your students that the headline endings on the right complete the beginnings on the left, but that they are in a jumbled order. Tell them that they should try to find as many possible matching endings for each headline beginning as they can. Their complete headlines should have meaning, and they should form grammatically possible combinations (allowing for the elliptical nature of many headlines).
- 3 Begin the activity. When your students are ready, ask them to compare and discuss their complete headlines with a partner.
- 4 To check your students' answers, ask them to call out their complete headlines, and discuss each one with the class in terms of its grammatical acceptability and whether it has meaning. To check this last point, ask your students to briefly tell the stories behind their headlines.
- 5 Finally, tell your students the original (complete) headlines.

Extension

After Stage 4 of the activity, give each student a copy of the articles sheet, and tell them that they should read the articles and try to re-create the original headlines from the headline beginnings and endings on the board.

When your students are ready, ask them to read aloud the headline(s) they wrote for each article. Finally, deal with any articles for which your students had problems finding a suitable headline.

Cross-references

The same headlines can later be used in 1.1, 1.10, and 1.16.

1.3 **Headline hangman**

Playing 'Hangman' to discover newspaper headlines

Level: Post-Elementary–Advanced

Preparation

Select three or four short articles with headlines containing two or more words. Remove the headlines and paste the articles onto a sheet of paper, numbering them for ease of reference. Make one copy of this sheet for each student in the class. Keep the headlines safe, as these will later serve as your answer key.

In class

- 1 Give each student in the class a copy of the articles sheet and tell them to read the first article. Deal with any language or vocabulary problems as they arise.
- 2 On the board, for each word in the headline of the first article, draw a short line, and explain to your students that each line represents one word.
- 3 Tell your students that to discover the original headline, they should call out individual words they think are in the headline. If a word is correct, you will write it in its correct position on the board. If a word is not correct, you will draw one part of the well-known hangman diagram.
- 4 Begin the activity, and continue play until your students have guessed the whole headline correctly, or have used up all their guesses and are 'hanged'.
- 5 Continue this procedure for each of the remaining articles.

Extension

In a future lesson, ask your students to find short newspaper articles and make up their own headline hangman game to play in class with a partner.

Comment

This activity is a fun way for your students to discover important structural and stylistic features of headlines, and you may even wish to select headlines which all focus on one particular feature (refer to Appendix 1).

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Cross-references

This can serve as a suitable lead-in to 2.6, 2.14, 2.15, 2.19, 2.22 and 2.24. The same headlines can be used in 1.1, 1.10, and 1.16.

1.4 Ask the right question

Writing and answering questions about newspaper headlines

Level: Pre-Intermediate–Post-Intermediate

Preparation

Select a number of newspaper articles covering a range of subject-matter, making sure that you choose articles with headlines that are easy to understand. You will need as many articles as you have students in the class, plus one other (with its corresponding headline) to demonstrate the activity. Remove the headlines, and paste (or copy) each one onto a separate sheet of paper, leaving plenty of space below for writing. Display these headline sheets around the classroom, on walls or desktops. Paste each article onto a separate sheet of paper and add a gloss (a translation or an explanation) where necessary to deal with key vocabulary. Keep the articles for the final stages of the activity.

In class

- 1 To demonstrate the activity, write your sample headline on the board and ask your students to imagine what information an article with this headline might contain. Tell them to put their ideas in the form of questions. Write their questions on the board (e.g. *What's the boy's name? How old is he? Where did it happen?*).
- 2 When they have exhausted their ideas, answer as many of their questions as you can by referring to the original article. Your students may be quite surprised to see how many of their questions the article answers.
- 3 Pre-teach any problem vocabulary in the headline sheets on display, then ask your students to read all the sheets, and each choose a different one.
- 4 Tell your students that they should now go from sheet to sheet and, on each one, write a question which they think an accompanying article would answer. They should write clearly, and leave room for an answer to be written.

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- 5 When there are several questions on each of the headline sheets, ask your students to claim the headline they first chose. Give each student their matching article and explain that everyone should now read their articles and try to answer any questions they can.
- 6 When all your students have done this, ask them to display their articles and headline sheets together on walls or desktops. Tell everyone to circulate and check to see if their questions have been answered.
- 7 Finally, explain to your students that it is often possible to predict or anticipate a certain amount of information to be found in an article if we understand the headline. This can help us in our reading of a text.

Cross-references

This can serve as a suitable lead-in to 2.5, 2.6, 2.9, 2.11, 2.14, 2.15, 2.18, 2.22 and 2.24. The same headlines can be used in 1.1, 1.10 and 1.16. The same materials can be used in 2.17.

1.5 Frames

Writing progressively longer headlines

Level: Intermediate–Advanced

Preparation

Choose three or four short articles which you feel would interest your students, cut off the headlines, and paste each article at the bottom of a sheet of paper. Add a gloss (a translation or an explanation) to deal with problem vocabulary or language where necessary. Make enough copies of each article for several pairs of students to have the same article. Keep the headlines for the final stage of the activity, and make a note of which articles they accompany.

In class

- 1 Pair students and give each pair one of the articles, making sure that several pairs have copies of the same article in order to cross-check their answers later.
- 2 Explain that each pair should read their article carefully, discuss its contents and then write one (or more) suitable one-word headline(s) at the top of the page. Below this, they should then write one (or

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more) suitable two-word headline(s), then headlines with three words, and then four words, and so on until they have written the longest possible headline they can to accompany their article.

- 3 When your students have written as many headlines as they can, put two pairs with the same article together, and ask them to compare their work. They should look for identical headlines they have written, and comment on the appropriacy of any different ones.
- 4 After this checking stage, work with the whole class and discuss any particularly interesting headlines your students wrote, focusing on any which seem inappropriate within the context of the article, and any which are grammatically unacceptable.
- 5 Finally, show your students the original headlines which accompanied their articles.

Comment

Before trying this activity, your students should already be familiar with different types of headline (refer to Appendix 1).

Cross-references

This can serve as a suitable follow-up to 1.8. The same headlines can be used in 1.1, 1.10 and 1.16.

1.6 One step at a time

Progressively changing one headline into another

Level: Post-Intermediate–Advanced

Preparation

MAIN ACTIVITY

Find two headlines where the only common feature is the number of words – between three and six words is the optimum number.

EXTENSION

Make copies of the two accompanying articles for your students to read at the end of the activity.

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In class

- 1 Write the two headlines on the board, pair students and ask each pair to copy them – the first at the top of a sheet of paper, the other at the bottom of the sheet.
- 2 Explain that by changing only one word at a time, they should progressively change the first headline into the second headline. Each time they do this, they should write the new headline below the previous one. Their aim is to reach the second headline with as few new headlines as possible.
- 3 Point out that each new headline they make will tell a different story, and that they should be able to make up suitable stories to match their new headlines.
- 4 Begin the activity. Circulate to help your students if they get stuck, and to give encouragement.
- 5 When your students are ready, put two pairs together and ask them to compare their work. Tell them that each pair should briefly tell the stories behind the new headlines they have made.
- 6 At the end of the activity, find out which pair(s) managed to change the first headline into the second in the minimum number of moves, and tell them to write their headlines on the board.
- 7 If you wish, you can allow the class to challenge any doubtful headline by asking to hear the story behind the headline.

Extension

Give your students a copy of the original articles for them to read.

Comment

This activity is based on a popular word game in newspapers where the player has to convert one word (e.g. *said*) into another word with the same number of letters (e.g. *tell*) in the minimum number of moves.

Cross-references

The same headlines can be used in 1.1, 1.10 and 1.16.

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1.7 Unlocking headlines

Understanding tabloid headline words through synonyms in the article

Level: Pre-Intermediate–Post-Intermediate

Preparation

Cut out several short articles from tabloid newspapers (see note in 1.1) with headlines containing examples of *tabloidese* (also called *journal-ese*) – short, sensational and often exaggerated words (see note below). You should make sure that each of the articles you choose contains a synonym (the more usual word) in the text which corresponds to the headline tabloidese word – this is invariably the case (see Box 1 for example headlines and texts). Paste each article onto a separate sheet of paper, underline the tabloidese word in each headline, and number each sheet for ease of reference.

In class

- 1 Write the list of tabloidese words on the board and ask your students to copy them. While they are doing this, display the article sheets around the classroom.
- 2 Explain to your students that all the words on the board have been taken from newspaper headlines and that such headlines can be difficult to understand. An important reason for this is that newspapers often try to sensationalise news, and powerful headline words have a greater impact on the reader. In addition, headline space is limited, and tabloidese words are usually shorter than their more everyday synonyms.
- 3 Explain to your students that they should look at each article, find the underlined tabloidese word there in the headline, and look for a synonym in the accompanying article. Because these tabloidese words are often difficult, you should allow your students to look them up in a dictionary. They should write the synonym next to the corresponding tabloidese word on their list. They should then read the headline again, replacing the tabloidese word with the synonym, to see if the headline now makes (more) sense and is easier to understand.
- 4 When your students have finished, ask them to compare their answers with a partner.
- 5 Check the answers with the whole class and ask if they found the headlines easier to understand with the help of the synonyms.