

To the Point Storytelling Guide

A menu and guide to alt-format story forms for reporters. **Key point:** This is not exhaustive. Be creative. Be bold and imaginative.

TAGGING STORIES: This is extremely important. These are under “system tags.” Use the generic “To the Point” tag on ALL stories. Also use TTP-Listicle, TTP-What to know, TTP-Visual explainer, TTP-Explainer (not visual) if that applies.

Text-first alternatives

- What we know files – Let these be the centerpiece of a story. Not an afterthought or extra work.
- Live updates – Take beyond breaking news!
- Q&A / FAQs – Question and answer with a specific person. Or answer key questions about an ongoing issue and explain to readers why the issue matters.
- Lists – Lists of things to do, places to go, etc.
- The Players – A list and brief bio info on key players in an ongoing issue.
- Guides – Bullet-point heavy guides to local places, events, topics and activities.
- Timelines – Draw readers into a story by guiding them along a timeline
- Fact checks – Increase local use of the USA Today Fact Check format

Alternates to text

- Databases – Continue to seek and build files to house searchable databases
- Visual explainers/Infographics – Standalone infographics for social or use a series of them embedded into a Presto file to tell a story
- Video – Both traditional, text-over video and vertical video storytelling
- Social storytelling – Instagram slides, TikTok and more.

What to know

What to know: These concise packages help readers get to the heart of a story and why it matters to them. We often write these as follow ups, once reader interest takes off, but they can and should be a primary way for us to tell a story.

A strong SEO play for breaking news but also important for digital readers seeking talking points or to understand a story at a glance. Descriptive subheads are essential in this format.

Tips: These are most effective when each item / subhead is relatively concise (50 words or so). Make them conversational. Don't let these grow unwieldy. That doesn't serve readers. It also works to tell readers what you don't know yet. Tell them what you're working to find out.

Think who, what, when, where and why info.

Just because you put “What to know” in the headline and use subheads that are questions that doesn't necessarily make it TTP!

Examples:

[Is Wawa coming to Wilmington? Here's what we know](#)

[Election Day 2022: What to know about Wilmington-area races](#)

[Eight key Wilmington roads could lose project funding. Here's what to know](#)

[What we know so far about the disappearance of Wilmington teen Miyonna Jones](#)

[Celeb consumer advocate Erin Brockovich is coming to Wilmington. Here's what to know.](#)

Live updates

What to know: Live and updated blog-type story pages for breaking and developing stories encourage refreshes and return visits. But we can take these beyond those two categories.

Consider: Use the format for consequential action from a local government agency or on key days during state legislative coverage.

Tip: Use the “Live coverage” Presto system tag to boost your placement in Google.

Examples:

[Wilmington winter: Stay off icy roads and tips for safely heating your home during frigid temps](#)

[Hurricane Ian: Cleanup begins, residents urged to use caution if they travel](#)

[From vendors to die-hard fans, Donald Trump's visit to Wilmington draws large crowd](#)

Q&As / FAQs

What to know: These stories are an effective way to help readers understand a complex issue or give them information to the most-asked questions in an easy-to-follow format. They also can be more traditional, such as a Q&A with a specific person on a key topic.

Examples:

[From 'tiny homes' to planned developments, here's how Brunswick can manage massive growth](#)

[Meet the candidates: New Hanover Board of Commissioners](#)

[Cape Fear Festival of Trees: 6 things to know about a long-running favorite holiday event](#)

[A waterfront boardwalk? Southport's busiest tourist spot could get an upgrade.](#)

Lists

What to know: Lists are a great way to tell stories in short, concise blurbs, such as things to do, places to go, best restaurants, etc. More often than not, if you do a list, it should have the number in the headline.

Examples:

[38 can't-miss Christmas and holiday events in the Wilmington area for 2022](#)

[Businesses on the rise: These 11 Wilmington companies are among the nation's fastest growing](#)

[6 walking trails in the Wilmington area to try this fall](#)

[20 buzzworthy restaurants that opened in the Wilmington area in 2022](#)

[What's coming to Brunswick: 7 big projects to watch in 2023](#)

Guides

What to know: Guides are a way to explain key places, topics, events and activities to readers in a 101 format. It's best to use the "Your guide to ..." phrasing in the headline. And these should be heavy on bullet points and chunky bits of info. Including maps and other interactive graphics can be useful.

Examples:

[A guide to local seafood: Wilmington-area restaurants serve NC fish, shrimp and more](#)

[Your guide to 18 of the oldest restaurants in the Wilmington area](#)

[Your guide to N.C. oysters, from the salty sea to the half-shell](#)

The Players

What to know: For hot-button issues that we'll be following on a regular basis, it can be helpful to create a list of the key players / stakeholders. Include basic bio info as well as their connection to the ongoing issue.

Examples:

[Meet the people deciding the future of Wilmington's west bank](#)

Timelines

What to know: Timelines are a great way to provide readers with needed context and history, without weighing them down with a traditional narrative.

Tip: These can be both text-based or interactive. They can combine photo and video throughout, along with inline links to past coverage.

Examples:

[Carolina Beach missing boater: Timeline from last sighting to boat recovery near Portugal](#)

[Timeline: Notable moments in the history of Wilmington's Northside neighborhood](#)

[The David Bostian case: Timeline of events from accusations to most recent reactions](#)

[Timeline: A history of the StarNews](#)

Fact checks

What to know: The truth-telling found in fact-check stories are core to our watchdog mission and resonate well with scanning readers. Breaking up the stories with meaningful subheads, putting your “true/false” ruling high in the story and linking to other reporting are key to increasing visit depth.

Tip: Use the “Fact Check” template in Presto to boost your placement in Google.

Examples:

USA Today: [Fact check: Baseless NESARA conspiracy theory resurfaces online](#)

USA Today: [Fact check: False claim about Ukraine, child sex trafficking and money laundering](#)

Visual explainers

What to know: Numbers and data-heavy story are best told visually with key charts and graphics.

Consider: Use Flourish charts and infographics as the main way to tell a story.

Tip: Flourish graphics are easily embeddable in Presto and work across desktop and mobile.

Examples:

New York Times: [Visualizing the \\$13.6 Billion in U.S. Spending on Ukraine](#)

New York Times: [American Voters Now View Ukraine as Favorably as France, Germany and Japan](#)

USA Today: [Putin uses cherished WWII Victory Day to glorify Russia and himself. Now he may use it against Ukraine.](#)

USA Today: [By the numbers: Elon Musk’s multibillion-dollar bid for Twitter](#)