

Five Boxes to Build a Story Fast: A Suggestion from Rick Bragg

1. The first box, the lead, contains the image or detail that draws people in the story.
2. The second box is a "nut graph" that sums up the story.
3. The third box begins with a new image or detail that resembles a lead and precedes the bulk of the narrative.
4. The fourth box contains material that is less compelling but rounds out the story.
5. The fifth, and last, box is the "kicker," an ending featuring a strong quote or image that leaves the reader with a strong emotion.

Fill the boxes with bulleted lists of information, quotes, statistics and you have an instant outline.

The five boxes approach is the easiest method for quick organization of material. Using the boxes you can select and arrange information, settle on the beginning and ending of the story and decide what the story is about. Armed with this rudimentary outline, you can flesh out your story. It breaks the story into components that can be developed and refined.

Box 1—lead • Draw people in

Box 4 – Narrative • less compelling, additional information, rounds story

Box 2 – Nut graph • sums up the story

Box 5—Kicker • End with emotion, strong quote, image

Box 3 – New image/detail • resembles lead, precedes narrative

- Fill the boxes with bulleted lists of information, quotes, statistics and you have an instant outline
- Use strong Quotes: If anybody else could say it, it is not a strong or good quote.
- Include 5W's 1H: Who, what, when, where, why, how.
- Use the basics of story writing: Character, setting, plot, interesting twists
- Always 3rd person, No 1st person—except in a quote.
- First and last name, first time, then last name
- Take a neutral stance-“Prusak said”