

1 — Face the press

As a responsible citizen, let alone a talented economist, you must keep yourself well-informed about what goes on in the world around you. The economic press will be an invaluable source of information and ... pleasure! It is therefore essential that you should read an economic publication in English **regularly**.

Regularity is indeed the key word here as only practice makes perfect. You will find that reading the economic press in English regularly will bring an accumulative advantage. By choosing your publication astutely, you will get a reliable and non-parochial view of international affairs while practising your English.

Those whom a quick browse over an economic article in English has already put off must be reassured. The English of the economic press is full of stock phrases and references that are fairly limited in number and which many people find definitely less taxing than the English of *belles-lettres*. In addition, because economic reports can sometimes make rather dry reading, deft journalists try their best to stimulate their readers' interest by enlivening their articles with all manner of witty comments and repartees. An article you may now judge ever so serious could very well tickle you a few months on when you are finally able to decipher the various puns, quips and quirks you had entirely missed at first. The faster you can master those skills, the better. It is an investment that will yield high interest and should therefore not be postponed because you will be reaping accrued benefits from the first day of study until, at least, the day of the final exam, if not for many years after that.

Because you will be making such wide use of the economic press, constantly referring to it, presumably also frequently quoting from it, there are some basic notions you must first become familiar with.

1 — TYPES OF PUBLICATIONS

You may choose to read:

newspapers
magazines
newsletters
bulletins
journals
reviews
periodicals etc.

They can appear:

daily
weekly
monthly
fortnightly
quarterly
yearly
etc.

They are written by:

reporters
journalists
correspondents
leader writers
chief editors etc.

1. Give a definition for the words listed in the three boxes above.
2. Complete the boxes with further examples.
3. Show how the various types of publications serve a different objective.
4. Say which of these categories is more informative, interesting or captivating. Why?

2 — TYPES OF ARTICLES

Translate the words in the box and find more examples.

a dispatch
a survey
a colour supplement
an editorial
a leader column
a column

3 — THE COMPONENTS OF A PRESS ARTICLE

Choose any economic press article and mark out its different parts using the words supplied in the box.

If — however hard you try — you cannot find as many parts, give the reasons why you think the article you have selected follows a different pattern. Maybe you should try another article and see if you come to the same conclusions.

A headline or head
A subheadline or
Subhead
A lead
A development or body
A conclusion

Note the transition between paragraphs as you go along, e.g., the use of link words or the absence of them.

Can you justify the author's choice?



You must remember that, technically speaking, only books have titles. A press article carries a headline.

4 — THE GRAMMAR OF HEADLINES

More often than not, an elliptic form of grammar is used in headlines.

Joe Bloggs offered post of Governor General

1. Write the headline again, using conventional English and translate the new sentence.
2. Compare the two versions. What changes did you have to make?

3. What is the basic rule of elliptic grammar applied in headlines?
4. Find your own examples.
5. Can you find exceptions?
6. Try to explain why the rule does not always strictly apply.
7. Compare with French (or other) headlines.

US President clears way for oil ban

Important European decision on defence

Investment bank charged in insider trading case

1. Same as before, rewrite the three headlines in conventional English. Then compare the different versions and say what changes had to be made.
2. Can you now fine-tune the rules of elliptic grammar applied to headlines?
3. Explain why the press has developed its own syntax.

5 — MULTIPLE HEADS

An article can have more than one headline. In that case, the first head usually introduces the subject in general terms while the second one gives a more precise idea of its contents.

STRIKES	→	HEAD 1
UNION RIGHTS	→	HEAD 2
<i>Labour backs up NUT</i>	→	SUBHEAD

1. Why may “NUT” pose an extra problem to the French reader here?
2. What are groups of letters like “UN”, “EU” called?
3. Say what purposes heads and subheads aim to fulfil.
4. Find your own multiple-head article and say what makes the different heads & subheads useful and interesting.
5. Suggest your own heads and subheads for your article.

6 — WHAT’S IN A HEAD?

I — Informative headlines

Purely informative headlines and subheadlines can make rather dull reading, yet they should always get all your attention as they convey important information on overall contents in a nutshell and can therefore help you with the general understanding of the piece you may have to summarise.

Before you start to organise your summary, you ought nonetheless always to begin by carefully reading the text in full. The economic press is full of surprises and there can very well be a twist somewhere within the body of the article.

Some essential developments will pass you by if you jump to foregone conclusions and content yourself with the general drift expressed in the heads & subheads.

You have been warned!

ECONOMIC TRENDS
BY U. KNOWALL

**WHY CAN CHEAPER OIL LEAD
TO A NEW WAVE OF
IMPORTS?**

1. Spot the only slight piece of information that goes beyond pure fact in the head & subhead above from a satirical newspaper.
2. Rewrite the headline to give it a crisper look.

II — Cryptic heads

There are various reasons why it is more in the nature of good headlines to be expressed in a somewhat cryptic form.

The most obvious cause is that journalists are always pushed for time and space and so, they tend to use condensed information. Because of this, unless the reader already has some background information, many headlines may not be entirely understood until the article has been read in full, especially by readers that are insufficiently *au fait* of current affairs and economic news.

Fish fight

London and Reykjavik duel over cod

The head above should pose no real problem to the average European reader. It is obviously about a conflict between the UK and Icelandic governments over fishing rights. Yet, what would the average Texan reader think of it? A certain amount of general knowledge is often required regardless of geographic propinquity. You would probably have no real trouble grasping the meaning of a headline like “The Elysée takes on Matignon”, although it demands some familiarity with French politics. Still, you may have more difficulty with “La Muette passes strong judgment on EU growth”? In that case, what could you make of the following head:

Berkeley Square takes on Madison Avenue

National niceties may compound the problem even further:

Loaded ball game lands Lambeth Palace in Westminster court.

1. Imagine the general contents of the article introduced by the headline above.
2. Assess the good & bad points of this headline.
3. Find your own cryptic heads.
4. Work in pairs. Submit to your partner the general contents of an article for which he / she will have to think of a cryptic headline. Your partner will then do the same for you.
5. Can you think of a convincing method that could help you with cryptic heads?

III — Witty and more ... intellectual heads

The other reason why heads play an essential part is that the press is above all, a commercial business and if articles do not sell, reporters put their jobs at risk. This factor becomes even more crucial with the economic press because it is not only sloppy students who sometimes fail to get a kick out of reading economic articles.

Business people *are* busy and sometimes quite demanding. Journalists only have the fraction of a second to trap their prospective readers into buying their prose and a mind-challenging headline is often the best means to that end.

Although this feature is not entirely unknown in continental Europe, it is much more common in the Anglo-US press and probably even more so in Britain. It can certainly be argued that *The Economist* has developed the genre into an art form.

The field of reference extends to whatever can grab the imagination. Often it can be general knowledge or more simply basic clichés everybody learnt at school. The problem is that what is taught in British schools is not necessarily the same as what is being taught in schools elsewhere. What remains true is that the reference usually rings a bell to every anglophone ear, even though the average English-speaking reader might be hard put to tell how and where he picked it up.

Do not panic! *The Economist* employs a pool of professionals to write its headlines. So, what has been said before can only be repeated once again. In actual fact, the dedicated reader will find that the same tricks are used again and again, and may even feel tempted at times to write to the editor to complain about some complacency.

In sum, there is nothing you will be unable to master through regular effort, as an ounce of practice is worth a pound of precept. If worse comes to worst, do not forget you can always use a dictionary of quotations.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

1. Take a note of any relevant terminology.
2. Sum up the main ideas.
3. Give a critical commentary on the passage.
4. Write a brief summary & prepare an oral presentation.

TAKING STOCK

Give a summary of what you have learned so far about headlines.

7 — THE TYPOLOGY OF HEADLINES

If an attempt at rationalisation is to be made, one can say that headlines fall into five major categories.

- A. Assonances & alliterations
- B. Straightforward puns & coinages
- C. General knowledge (esp. history) & everyday life
- D. Literature — in which Shakespeare remains a favourite — & the arts
- E. The world of politics & political catchphrases.

“TALKING HEADS...”

A. ASSONANCES & ALLITERATIONS

Farewell, welfare states?

What welfare without the state?

B. STRAIGHTFORWARD PUNS & COINAGES

On debt row

Cash for cows

C. GENERAL KNOWLEDGE & EVERYDAY LIFE

**Workers of the world, compete
Georgia on his mind**

**Workers of the world, unite
Mission impossible**

D. LITERATURE & THE ARTS

**Is this a dagger?
Measure for measure**

**Et tu, Fabius
What's in a deal?**

**The importance of being
honest**

**The importance of being
Turkey**

Of mice and men

Death of a statesman

Cause without a rebel

“Mirror, mirror on the wall...”

E. THE WORLD OF POLITICS & POLITICAL CATCHPHRASES

Lafontaine's foibles

Cresson in the soup

IDENTIFY

1. Identify the references used in all the heads quoted above.
2. Find your own examples of headlines that would correspond to the suggested typology.
3. Which category do you find the easiest to decipher. Why?

MATCH HEADS AND ARTICLES

A. The European Commission has just devised a proposal to pay grain farmers for taking land out of production. The idea was to coax the Germans into accepting the package of farm and budget reforms that had been blocked at the last EU summit...

B. What better holiday reading for a Chancellor of the Exchequer than the latest report on the British economy from the OECD...

C. More marketing of brands across Europe will require developing pan-European advertising. The large advertising agencies are beginning to jostle for this new business...

D. On the rolling, windswept hills east of San Francisco cattle graze among enormous windmills. The mills are the children of the nearly forgotten energy crisis, born of the impetus to use the wind, the sun and other renewable power sources to replace natural gas and oil...

1. Praise from Paris

2. Gone with the wind

3. Avenue Madison

4. Not in clover yet

IDENTIFY THE FOLLOWING PLACES

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| a) N°10 | g) The Hill |
| b) N°11 | h) Lombard Street |
| c) Chequers | i) Wall St. |
| d) Westminster | j) The Old Lady
(of Threadneedle St.) |
| e) Whitehall | k) The Mother of All Parliaments |
| f) The White House | |

IDENTIFY THE FOLLOWING ABBREVIATIONS

- | | | |
|----------|-------------------|----------------|
| a) e.g. | e) MBA | i) VAT |
| b) i.e. | f) MIT | j) BSc (Econ.) |
| c) misc. | g) PM | k) n / a |
| d) QED | h) MP / MEP / MSP | l) a.k.a |

SUMMARY & PRESENTATION

1. Write a summary of the instructions given to you so that you can face the economic press
2. Prepare a brief survey of the economic press in English.
3. Conduct a comparative study of French and Anglo-American economic publications (or any other country you may happen to be familiar enough with).
Can you observe any major differences?