

How to find key words for a headline | By Frederick Vultee |
University of Missouri | vultee@missouri.edu

Find the first **independent clause** in the story and list the **simple subject**, **simple predicate** and **direct object**. In other words:

WHO _____
did WHAT _____
to WHOM _____ ?

WHERE was it done? _____ ?

Now look for **dependent clauses** and **participial phrases**.

A participial phrase might tell you **WHY**
you care about the **verb**: _____

*(A car bomb exploded in Beirut today, **killing a former prime minister.**)*

A **relative clause** often tells **WHY**
you care about the **subject** or **object**: _____

*(The man **who performed the world's first heart transplant** died today.)*

REMEMBER: If your headline's verb comes from a relative clause, **you have the wrong headline:**

Man performs heart transplant

– vs. –

Heart transplant pioneer dies

Which noun is more important to your story:

SUBJECT (think **active voice**)
or **OBJECT** (think **passive voice**) ?

Can you omit any **grammatical steps**?

<i>Smith</i>	<i>files</i>	<i>a lawsuit</i>	<i>against Jones</i>
subj	verb	direct object	indirect object

<i>Smith</i>	<i>sues</i>	<i>Jones</i>
subj	verb	direct object

<i>A man</i>	<i>who was charged</i>	<i>in last week's robbery</i>
subj	relative clause	prepositional phrase

<i>A suspect</i>	<i>in last week's robbery</i>
subj	prepositional phrase