

# You've got my attention. Please, don't repeat yourself!

**By Guillermo Franco**

The bad use of **print design resources** to present text on the Internet is negatively affecting usability of many homepages, particularly those of newspapers, thus making information delivery inefficient. Usability is a term that refers to easiness and efficiency of use.

When I say **print design resources** I refer, in the first place, to using the subhead, headline, summary and decks -as they were designed for print publications- along with texts that make use of the inverted pyramid structure.

In an article published in Poynteronline on January 17th, 2002, renowned newspaper designer Mario Garcia explains the logic and benefits of using some of these resources in printed products, assuring that "The single headline is becoming a thing of the past."

"For headlines to work more effectively – for the scanning process to be accelerated and the storytelling enhanced – it is best to add "decks" or "extra thoughts" to them... Historically, headlines rarely appeared as single units. The New York Times, and especially the Wall Street Journal, have always used multi-deck headlining. There is an art to doing this properly", says Garcia.

Later in the article it was explained how to use them:

"Multi-deck headlines must flesh out the story they accompany, while adding new information with each deck. The first line gets into the story; subsequent decks detail further aspects of the story."

But when it comes to content that uses the inverted pyramid style (start the article by telling the reader the conclusion, followed by the most important supporting information –which explains or amplifies the lead- and ending with context information), **the net effect of using these resources in web pages, as they were conceived for printed publications, leads into repetition of information** and the unnecessary increase, even if minimum, of vertical scroll. In other words, it's an inefficient way of presenting content. An unfortunate result if we take into consideration the difficulties of online reading.

"Reading on computer screens is 25 per cent slower than doing it on paper. Even users who are not aware of the research done on these human factors usually express feeling uncomfortable when reading online texts. As a result, people don't want to read a large amount of text on their computer screens", writes Jakob Nielsen, a guru on web usability (Alertbox, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1997).

Let's take a look at a series of examples to illustrate the initial statement and propose a journalistic debate on the subject. The value of the following examples (**elmundo.es**, **elpais.es**, **washingtonpost.com**, **lanacion.com.ar**, **eltiempo.com** and **nytimes.com**) lies in that they represent models and trends.

## **The inefficient Spanish model. Case 1: elmundo.es**

The most dramatic examples of the negative effect obtained from using printed media resources are presented by the homepages of two of the major Spanish newspapers: **elmundo.es** and **elpais.es**.

(Depending on the country or region, particularly those where Spanish is spoken. the subheads. headlines. decks.

summaries and leads receive different names. For that reason, we suggest the reader that he or she do the concerning adjustments and adapting. In this article, we'll show what name we give to each one of them.)

The image shows a screenshot of the El Mundo website homepage from July 30, 2003. The page is cluttered with various elements, including a top navigation bar with 'Euribor + 0,39 %' and 'EL TIEMPO Madrid'. The main headline is 'Los etarras detenidos en Francia tenían material para fabricar 20 coches bomba'. Other articles include 'Niño con kalashnikov' and 'DISCURSO DE LA FIESTA DEL TRONO Mohamed VI impulsará una ley para prohibir los partidos islamistas'. The page is cluttered with various ads, sidebars, and navigation elements. Red arrows point to the subhead, headline, and lead of the main article.

Elmundo.es homepage is also inefficient due to the length of its texts. When you access the page, the user is barely able to see more than one article. Additionally, why should the first headline be larger than the others? It's just another negative legacy of printed media design that makes no sense here. The location itself indicates it's the most important piece of news. The graphic elements, right above the first headline, are also typical printed media resources that take space away from important information, which could otherwise appear on the first screen.

This is a translation of the article shown in the image:

**Subhead:** THEY HAD TWO BOMB LETTERS READY TO BE SENT

**Headline:** ETA militants arrested in France kept material to assemble 20 bomb cars

**Lead:** Alleged ETA militants arrested this morning in French area of Cahors stored, in the facilities they had rented, 448 kilos of sodium chlorate to make chloratite plus different substances with which they could have prepared 20 bomb cars. They also had two bomb letters ready to make attempts with, according to sources of the antiterrorist forces.

In this case, the editors at **elmundo.es** repurpose the first paragraph of the full article, known as lead, which appears on an inside page. (since it's located in the homepage it might be referred to as "deck" or "summary").

Even though there are new elements, the repetition of others is obvious:

1. They had two car bombs ready to be sent.
2. The alleged terrorists had been arrested in France.
3. They could have prepared 20 car bombs.

The question is: Was it necessary to repeat information elements to deliver new ones? **The answer is no.**

Given the way information elements are distributed throughout the subhead, the headline and the lead within the homepage, it is clear the editors of **elmundo.es** presume users read word by word and, in that order, each one of those elements to eventually obtain an overall picture of what the information is about.

Nevertheless, this type of behavior, according to usability studies by Jakob Nielsen and his colleague John Morkes, is not the most common.

"...users tend not to read streams of text fully. Instead, users scan text and pick out keywords, sentences, and paragraphs of interest while skipping over those parts of the text they care less about. In a study by John Morkes and myself, we found that 79 percent of our test users always scanned any new page they came across; only very few users would read word-by-word -16 percent-." (Book: 'Designing Web Usability').

Whatever the user's behavior might be -scan or read word by word- **elmundo.es editors punish him by reiterating information.**

Notwithstanding, in the case of the user that scans the effect is more dramatic: once his attention is captured by the headline bearing a heavier typographic weight, he is "awarded with" the same information, should he choose to continue reading. Once again: this is not an efficient way of presenting web content, even less in the homepage.

## **The inefficient Spanish model, case 2: elpais.es**

Only occasionally does **elpais.es** use the subhead resource to present their articles in the homepage. Let's see an example of these: "El Pentágono concluye que sus soldados mataron a Couso en "defensa propia".

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GRÁFICO: Atentados en Israel  
TEMA: Oriente Próximo

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LA POSGUERRA DE IRAK

## El Pentágono concluye que sus soldados mataron a Couso en "defensa propia"

La investigación del Pentágono sobre la muerte en Bagdad del cámara español José Couso concluye que el tanque que disparó sobre el Hotel Palestina, donde se alojaba Couso, lo hizo en "defensa propia". Los soldados tenían razones para pensar que estaban siendo atacados desde el hotel por francotiradores.

Un tanque de EE UU mató a José Couso | 09-04-2003

CRISIS EN LA ASAMBLEA DE MADRID

## La empresa de fotocopias que contrató a Romero de Tejada trabaja para varios ministerios

El presidente de Aznar tacha de "falsa"



ESPECIAL  
Pretemporada  
Liga 2003-2004



TEMA  
El futuro incierto  
de la  
Comunidad de  
Madrid

Multimedia



FOTOGALERÍA  
El muro de  
división que  
construye Israel

Participación

ENCUESTA

¿Qué aspecto cree que  
habría que potenciar más  
para evitar los incendios  
forestales?

Partial view of elpais.es' homepage

Let me offer an English version of this news:

**Subhead:** POSTWAR IN IRAQ

**Headline:** The Pentagon claims their soldiers killed Couso in "self defense".

**Lead or deck:** The investigation carried out by the Pentagon regarding the decease in Bagdad of Spanish cameraman José Couso ended up in that the tank which opened fire against Hotel Palestina, where Couso was staying, did it in "self defense". The soldiers had reasons to believe they were being attacked by snipers from the hotel.

Even though they deliver new information elements, the editors of **elpais.es** repeat in the lead or deck information of the headline. The underlined sentences highlight the information that is partially o totally repeated.

Was it necessary to repeat this information to deliver new one? The answer is no.

In this case, they use the subhead as a reference to orient the reader: IRAQ'S POSTWAR.

While **elmundo.es** does it when presenting content in this fashion, **elpais.es** presumes the user will read the three elements of the news in order –sunhead, headline and lead, which sometimes becomes a deck in the home page- to inform himself. Once again, either the user reads word-by-word or scans the text, the same information is once more delivered to him: another inefficient model of presenting content in a homepage.

Additionally, the way the news about the Spanish cameraman is headlined reveals another concept error: they presume their readers are aware of who Couso is. That's why he's identified by his last name only. This mistake is magnified if we take into account that, most probably, **elpais.es** site has a large international audience, who presumably doesn't know who the dead character is. **In this case, the text following the headline solves the lack of context encountered in the headline.** It would have been possible to rewrite the headline to give it a minimum indispensable amount of context.

Paradoxically, the best model of what a good headline should be, one that bears information, is offered by the print version of El País. Its headlines are, indeed, leads with full sense. If they could just transfer this quality of writing to their homepage, the latter would be much more efficient.

Let's take a look at this news, which does not use subhead:

The screenshot shows a portion of the elpais.es website. On the left, there is a headline: "Trintignant tras cinco días en coma por la agresión de su novio" with a sub-headline "La actriz Marie Trintignant, en septiembre de 2000. (EFE)" and a "Ampliar" link. Below it is another headline: "El juez encargado del 'caso Kelly' llamará a declarar a Tony Blair". In the center, there is a main headline: "Al menos 35 muertos en un atentado en un hospital militar cercano a Chechenia" with a sub-headline "Al menos 35 personas han muerto y decenas más han resultado heridas en un atentado perpetrado con un camión-bomba contra el Hospital Militar de la ciudad de Mozdok, en la república caucásica de Osetia del Norte, fronteriza con la de Chechenia." and a "TEMA: Rusia, contra la guerrilla chechena" tag. To the right, there are partial headlines: "Marbella, el lado oscuro del paraíso" and "A f...".

Screenshot of elpais.es's home page

If you read the headline “Al menos 35 muertos en un atentado en un hospital militar cercano a Chechenia”, the following paragraph says the same, save a few additional facts.

Let me offer an English versión:

**Headline:** At least 35 dead in an attack on a military hospital near Chechenia

**Lead or deck:** At least 35 people have died and tens more were injured in an attack carried out by means of a bomb truck against the military hospital in the city of Mozdok, in the Caucasian republic of North Ossetya, which shares its borders with Chechenia.

The same information:

1. There were 35 dead.
2. The attempt happened near Chechenia.

Was it necessary to repeat this information to deliver new one? The answer is no.

You may do this exercise yourself at **elpais.es** and **elmundo.es** on a daily basis to detect repetition.



The right question is, are there other more efficient ways to present content in homepages?

Yes, there are. Websites such as **washingtonpost.com**, **lanacion.com.ar** and **eltiempo.com** have different models.

## More efficient home pages, case 3: washingtonpost.com

The screenshot shows the Washington Post homepage in a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window. The address bar displays "http://www.washingtonpost.com". The page features a navigation menu with categories like News, On Politics, Entertainment, Live Online, Camera Works, Marketplace, and Jobs. A weather widget shows "72°F / 22°C Cloudy". The main headline is "Bush Takes 'Personal' Responsibility on Iraq Info" by Mike Allen, accompanied by a photo of a football player. Other news items include "Redskins React to Wilkinson Release" and "Prosecuting Terror A 'Legal Black Hole'". A search bar and a "Maryland" advertisement are also visible.

Homepage of washingtonpost.com

**washingtonpost.com** manages the concept of headline and deck in their homepage better than anyone else. It almost never repeats information, which makes it very efficient.

Let's see the first news:

**Headline:** Bush Takes 'Personal' Responsibility on Iraq Info

**Deck:** In first news conference since the war, president says he still believes Hussein had weapons program.

There is no reiteration. However, when the user reaches the inside page he finds the text as if were going to appear in its printed form, bearing a different headline and summary. Likewise, one finds streams of text written with the inverted pyramid structure (Also, linear blocks-of-text layouts, no hyperlinks, no scannability –that may use techniques breaking the text uniformity: subtitles, lists, and so on). Obviously, in the inside page there is also reiteration due to the utilization of these print structures. But that problem is of minimum importance if compared to the benefit of having such an efficient homepage at presenting information. Additionally, we presume that when a user gets to this level, he or she is ready to put up with such reiteration.

The screenshot shows a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window. The address bar contains the URL: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A2184-2003Jul30.html>. The page title is "Bush Takes Responsibility for Iraq Claims (washingtonpost.com) - Microsoft Internet Explorer". The browser's menu bar includes File, Edit, View, Favorites, Tools, and Help. The toolbar contains buttons for Back, Forward, Stop, Refresh, Home, Search, Favorites, History, Mail, Print, Edit, and Discuss. The page content includes a navigation menu on the left with categories like Front, Elections, The Issues, Federal Page, and The Administration. The main article is titled "Bush Takes Responsibility for Iraq Claims" and is by Mike Allen, a Washington Post Staff Writer, dated Wednesday, July 30, 2003, at 3:20 PM. The article text discusses President Bush's State of the Union address and his taking responsibility for flawed intelligence about Saddam Hussein. A photo of President Bush speaking at a podium is included. To the right of the article is an advertisement for the HP Compaq d530 desktop series, featuring the HP logo, the text "The HP Compaq d530 desktop series", and a "Buy now" button. Below the advertisement is a small image of the HP Compaq d530 desktop computer.

The inside page of [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) has a writing structure typical of that in printed press: linear text block, non-scannable designs.

Let's see the second headline in their homepage:

**Headline:** Search for Hussein Intensifies

**Deck:** U.S. general downplays predictions leader's capture or death is imminent

Information here is not repeated, either.

Very occasionally does [washingtonpost.com](http://washingtonpost.com) lose efficacy at presenting content in its homepage due to information reiteration. It is obvious that when this happens the reasons have more to do with an error made by an editor than due to doubts about homepage conception.

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### **Former Dictator Amin Dies**

Idi Amin, who ruled Uganda for much of the 1970s, died Saturday.

- Richard Pearson

▪ [Photo Gallery](#)

**Headline:** Former Dictator Amin Dies

**Deck:** Idi Amin, who ruled Uganda for much of the 1970s, died Saturday.

Was it necessary to iterate the fact that he had died to add information about when he ruled Uganda and his complete name? The answer is no.

One version without repetition could be:

**Headline:** Former Dictator Idi Amin Dies

**Deck:** Ruled Uganda for much of the 1970s.

The following is another, less obvious, example. Essentially, it says the same in different words (August 18):

g. 18, 2003 | Updated 10:34 a.m. ET



## Wireless Growth Impedes Emergency Radio Signals

The nation's airwaves are so crowded that wireless signals clog frequencies used by police and firefighters.

- Christian Davenport

**Headline:** Wireless Growth Impedes Emergency Radio Signals

**Deck:** The nation's airwaves are so crowded that wireless signals clog frequencies used by police and firefighters

## More efficient home pages, case 4: lanacion.com.ar

**Lanacion.com.ar** is the website of La Nación, one of the major newspapers in Argentina, South America. By the amount of news it exhibits in the first screen and for not repeating the information in both headlines and decks, **lanacion.com.ar** could be categorized as very effective. However, it has elements that still tie them to the print way of presenting text, which somewhat limits such lofty effectiveness. The inside pages, which are also linked to the print model, deserve their own analyses.

In the first place, **lanacion.com.ar** intensively uses subheads in its homepage. It is probably the most remarkable legacy of the print design and allows us to deduct that the editors of **lanacion.com.ar** take for granted their users read each news unit in their homepage word-by-word. This is, and in that order, the subhead, the headline and the deck. As mentioned

above, this behavior is not typical of web users. To make things clear, readers are used to scanning and most surely, due to their heavier typographic weight, they might read headlines first.

Another fact that reinforces this conclusion is the sole referential or expository nature of many of the subheads, which identify the topics that will be dealt with.

I picked out a few examples of subheads from the August 23, 2003 issue:

El conflicto en el Gobierno: el PJ bonaerense estrechó filas con el Presidente

## Apoyo de Duhalde a Kirchner tras su disputa con Scioli



Los dos líderes justicialistas mostraron unidad en un acto lleno de gestos políticos

Kirchner compartió ayer un almuerzo improvisado con Duhalde y con su esposa, Hilda González, en la quinta 17 de Octubre, de San Vicente  
Foto: Willy Gómez

10:29 | Hilda Duhalde, preocupada por el enfrentamiento entre el presidente y el vice

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El ritmo del mercado cambiario: sigue siendo abundante la demanda de divisas

## La incertidumbre política llevó el dólar hasta 3 pesos

Al llegar a ese precio, hubo mayores ventas que llevaron la cotización al cierre a 2,98 pesos

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Los intelectuales y el país de hoy

### “Sólo el peronismo puede gobernar”

Beatriz Sarlo analiza la era Kirchner

A 24 horas de las elecciones porteñas

### Varias fuerzas denunciaron la violación de la veda electoral

Macri e Ibarra intercambiaron acusaciones

Homepage of lanacion.com.ar

“The intellectuals and today’s country”.

“24 hours to elections in Buenos Aires”.

“In a world ranking”.

“The pre-olympics”.

To offer clarity, the opposite of a subhead that acts as a simple reference is one that works as a full unit of information or, in other words, a sentence with full sense.

To notice this difference, I mention other subheads in the same issue that are indeed full-sense sentences. Oddly enough, they also include a referential or expository ingredient:

“Conflict in the government”: Buenos Aires PJ tied bonds with the President.

Here’s another example from the same issue:

“The stock market pace: demand for currencies continues to be abundant.”

The underlined sentences highlight the part in the subhead that acts as a referent. Following the colon are full-sense sentences.

In terms of effectiveness, what’s the difference between using one or another type of subhead?

Expository or referential subheads are tied to the headline that follows. Again, this treatment presumes the reader will read word-by-word and, in this same order, the subhead, the headline and the deck in order to fully know what the content being offered to him is about.

If we concentrate in the headlines and paragraphs that follow (decks), **lanacion.com.ar** is perfectly comparable with **washingtonpost.com** for not repeating information. A wise move, indeed.

Let's take a look at an example of their home page from a different date, one in which the subhead resource has not been used:



Screenshot of lanacion.com.ar's homepage

Let me offer an English version:

**Headline:** "Fernandez stated that Congress may "revise" amnesties"

**Deck:** The Minister of the Interior said this option will be discussed by legislators while amnesty laws are analyzed.

It is obvious there is no reiteration of the information, since the reader is given new elements.

But the efficiency accomplished by not repeating content in the home page of **lanacion.com.ar** comes at a high cost: in the same way of **elpais.es**, **lanacion.com.ar** sometimes errs when eliminating the minimum indispensable context in their headlines, or by presuming their readers already know certain aspects of the news. For instance, in the headline "Fernandez stated Congress may "revise" amnesties" it is -wrongly- taken for granted that the reader is aware of who Fernandez is (and knows his complete name). This mistake becomes more evident for those who are part of an international audience.



In this case, **lanacion.com.ar** has already repurposed, from their inside page, both headline and summary, which constitutes a double error. **In this manner, the lines that follow the headline end up filling the information gaps the headline has.**

The screenshot shows the website 'LA NACION LINE política' with a navigation bar containing 'noticias', 'deportiva', 'suplementos', 'especiales', 'clasificados', and 'archivo'. The main content area features a headline: 'Fernández expresó que el Congreso podrá "revisar" los indultos' with a sub-headline: 'El ministro del Interior dijo que esa alternativa será discutida por los legisladores mientras analizan las leyes de perdón'. Below the headline is a paragraph: 'El ministro del Interior, Anibal Fernández, ratificó hoy que la alternativa que discute el Congreso a las leyes de Punto Final y Obediencia Debida podría abarcar a los indultos presidenciales, incluso, el otorgado por el ex mandatario Eduardo Duhalde a Mohamed Alín Seineldín y Enrique Gorriarán Merlo, entre otros.' The right sidebar includes a search bar, 'ENVIAR POR E-MAIL', 'IMPRIMIR', and 'Audios' section with reports on Senator Eduardo Menem and Congressman Juan Manuel Urtubey.

Inside page screenshot presenting the news

This way of presenting information in an inside page is also typical of printed publications: the user is forced to reading elements of the information over again. To prove this, read the lead -the paragraph after the deck that follows the headline.

Let me offer an English versión:

**Headline:** Fernandez stated Congress may "revise" amnesties

**Deck:** The Minister of the Interior said this option will be discussed by legislators while amnesty laws are analyzed.

**The lead says:** The Minister of the Interior Anibal Fernandez ratified today that the alternative to the laws of 'Punto Final' and 'Obediencia Debida' (two amnesty laws ) being discussed by the Congress might comprise presidential amnesties: even

those granted by ex-mandataro Eduardo Duhalde to Mohamed Alin Seineldin and Enrique Gorriarán Merlo, among others.

Some other times, **lanacion.com.ar** repurposes the subhead and the headline, subtly modified, and creates a different deck for the home page but systematically avoids repeating information elements (another great move).

Let's take a look at one of these examples:



In this case, lanacion.com.ar reproduces in its homepage the headline in the inside page but it creates a different deck that doesn't reiterate information ("aged between 15 and 24 and none of them is searching for employment; the worst scenario is in the capital city").

**Subhead:** Labor crisis: a private study on official data

**Headline:** There are 1.272.000 youngsters that neither work nor study

**Deck:** They're aged between 15 and 24 and none of them is searching for employment; the worst situation is in the capital city.

If you read the following inside article, you can notice how both subhead and headline are repurposed, in a very subtle form.

**MARTES** : 19 de agosto de 2003  
Noticias | Economía | Nota

La crisis laboral: estudio privado sobre datos oficiales

## Hay casi 1,3 millón de jóvenes que no estudian ni trabajan

En el último año se sumaron a esta situación 127.000; es un 38,4% más que hace cuatro años

- En la Capital y el conurbano, casi un 60% de los que tienen entre 20 y 24 años no terminó la secundaria
- Especialistas coinciden en que peligra el modelo de ascenso social

La falta de oportunidades laborales, el desaliento y un entorno de pobreza capaz de entorpecer cualquier pretensión escolar o académica se han convertido en los principales problemas de los jóvenes argentinos. Hay en el país, según los resultados de la última encuesta de hogares del Indec, 1.272.000 jóvenes de entre 15 y 24 años que están en la inactividad absoluta: no trabajan ni estudian ni buscan empleo.

Screenshot of an inside page of lanacion.com.ar, with a text presentation structure typical of that in print press. Here, they work with resources taken from the subhead, the headline, and a text that, judging for its location, might be acting as a summary and that, after two more decks, starts with the black bullets and contributes with new information. The fundamental piece of information -the number of unemployed youngsters- is given to the user again less than 10 lines later: almost 1.3 million or 1,272,000.

**Subhead:** Labor crisis: a private study on official data

**Headline:** There are almost 1.3 million youngsters that neither work nor study

**Summary:** Last year, 127.000 individuals added to this situation, a 38.4 percent more than four years ago

**Deck 1:** In the capital city and its surroundings, almost 60 per cent of the inhabitants aged between 20 and 24 didn't finish high school

**Deck 2:** Specialists agree that the social ascent model is endangered

**Lead:** Lack of labor opportunities, discourage and a poverty environment, capable of hampering whatever school or academic effort, have turned into the main problems Argentine youth face. Today in the country, according to the latest poll carried out at Indec homes, 1.272.000 young people aged between 15 and 24 in total inactivity, do not work, study or search for employment.

### **More efficient home pages, case 5: eltiempo.com**

A different approach is offered by **eltiempo.com**, the site of El Tiempo, the leading newspaper in Colombia, South America.

**Eltiempo.com** creates one sole version of each news, written according to the principle of the inverted pyramid and typographically differentiates the first sentence of the first paragraph, thus turning it into the headline. If the news is properly written, according to the inverted pyramid principle, the second sentence will never reiterate information of the first one; it will only be a complement of it. In the home page, this second sentence acts as a deck.

In reality, this means eliminating the headline and the deck or summary, as they are conceived in printed media. Likewise, it means that it repurposes the first and second sentences in the first paragraph of the whole article.

When it comes to feature stories that utilize summaries or delayed leads, if it is not possible to rewrite them, **eltiempo.com** creates a headline and a deck that provides the user with the essence of the information in the homepage, in the same way as the **washingtonpost.com** does.

When we say **eltiempo.com** has only one version of each story, it means that users find the same content when accessing an inside page. It is an efficient way of presenting online content.



Eltiempo.com's home page

Let's take a look at the first news:

**Agresivo paquete de solicitudes de Colombia a secretario de Defensa de E.U., Donald Rumsfeld**

Este incluye información de inteligencia satelital inmediata sobre posiciones de grupos armados y entrenamiento de batallones especializados de selva. [más>>](#)



Agosto 16 de 2003  
ELTIEMPO.COM

## Agresivo paquete de solicitudes de Colombia a secretario de Defensa de E.U., Donald Rumsfeld

Este incluye información de inteligencia satelital inmediata sobre posiciones de grupos armados y entrenamiento de batallones especializados de selva.

Además, dentro de las prioridades de la ministra de Defensa de Colombia, Martha Lucía Ramírez, está pedir asistencia

Screenshot of an inside page at [eltiempo.com](http://eltiempo.com)



**La Ministra de Defensa**, Marta Lucía Ramírez, visitó a Donald Rumsfeld en Washington en febrero pasado. El m...

Let me offer an English version:

### **The first sentence of the lead works as a headline:**

Colombia's aggressive request package to U.S. Minister of Defense Ronald Rumsfeld

### **Second sentence of the lead works in the home page as deck:**

It consist of immediate satellite intelligence-related data on the location of armed groups as well as training for the soldiers in the jungle.

Notice there is no reiteration of the information.

At present, **eltiempo.com** rewrites most of the texts it gets from the printed version. Although very frequently our editors

don't get it right, they are instructed to structure text in this manner (we're in the learning process).

This is the first version of a piece of news (August 26) that repeats information:

ELTIEMPO.COM 11:21 a.m.  
**Tribunal de Miami confirma  
sentencia de 30 años de cárcel  
para Fabio Ochoa**  
Una corte de Miami ratificó el fallo del  
pasado mes de mayo en el que lo  
halló culpable de traficar con cocaína  
hacia Estados Unidos. [más>>](#)

In this case, the writer changed the subject (the High Court for Court) and the verb (confirms for ratifies) to introduce the fact that Fabio Ochoa had been found guilty of cocaine trafficking.

Let me offer an English version:

**Headline:** Miami's Hight Court Confirms a 30 Years Sentence for Drug Traffiker Fabio Ochoa

**Deck:** Miami's Court ratifies the sentence given last May in which he was found guilty of cocaine trafficking to the United States

In the second version, the editor eliminated the repetition:

26 de agosto de 2003 [Actualizado: 12:30 p.m.]

ELTIEMPO.COM 11:21 a.m.  
**Tribunal de Miami confirma  
sentencia de 30 años de cárcel para  
narcotraficante Fabio Ochoa**  
El pasado mes de mayo el colombiano  
fue hallado culpable de ingresar  
cocaína hacia Estados Unidos entre  
1997 y 1999. [más>>](#)

**Headline:** Miami's High Court Confirms a 30-Year sentence for drug trafficker Fabio Ochoa

**Deck:** Last May, the Colombian was found guilty of cocaine trafficking to the United States.

This 'refining' work between versions is carried out throughout the day.

Now, editors try to be more strict when reducing length and they also break the uniformity of text to make it more scan "friendly" (usage of secondary headlines, lists, etc.).

An additional benefit of texts written in this manner is that they may be easily repurposed to be sent to mobile devices such as PDA and WAP telephones. We simply define the number of paragraphs for each one of them.

## **A hybrid or transition model, case 6: nytimes.com**

The homepage of The New York Times (**nytimes.com**) offers what could be called a hybrid or a transition model. Some months ago, its homepage systematically repeated the information contained in the headline and in the first paragraph or deck. Now, there are coexisting articles that repeat information, along with others that don't.

If you see the article that says "U.S. Soldier and Iraqi Interpreter killed in Baghdad Attack" and carry on reading, the next paragraph offers the same information in a somewhat different fashion, plus some additional fact.



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FEATURES

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## [U.S. Soldier and Iraqi Interpreter Killed in Baghdad Attack](#)

By KIRK SEMPLE 10:17 AM ET

An American soldier and an Iraqi interpreter were killed today when their vehicle hit an explosive and then came under fire.

- [Debate on Whether to Seek a Bigger Military](#)
- [U.S. Is Creating an Iraqi Militia](#)
- [Complete Coverage: After the War](#)



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the American embass  
[Article](#)

**NATIONAL**

**Headline:** U.S. Soldier and Iraqi Interpreter Killed in Baghdad Attack.

**Deck:** An American soldier and an Iraqi interpreter were killed today, when vehicle hit an explosive and came under fire.

U.S. Soldier and Iraqi Interpreter Killed... = An American soldier and Iraqi interpreter were killed

The new information:

“Today” and “when vehicle hit an explosive and they came under fire”.

The right question is: Was it necessary to repeat the information?

The answer is no.

Here's another example:

OPINION

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FEATURES

Arts

[Delay to Carry Publishing Message to Congress](#)  
• [Live Video: Bush and Abbas at 11:50 AM](#)

## [House Approves Bill Easing Imports of Less Expensive Drugs](#)

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG

The House voted early Friday morning to approve a measure that would make it easier for Americans to import inexpensive prescription medicines from Canada and Europe.

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The headline and the following paragraph essentially offer the same information in a different way, with some additional elements:

**Headline:** House approves Bill Easing Imports of Less Expensive Drugs=

**Deck:** The House voted early Friday morning to approve a measure that would make easier for Americans to import inexpensive prescription medicines from Canada and Europe.

It is obvious that the headline and the next paragraph essentially offer the same information in a subtly different manner, with a few new additional elements:

- early Friday morning
- for Americans
- prescription
- from Canada and Europe

To deliver the new underlined information, was it necessary to iterate the fundamental fact?

Again, the answer is no.

Here's another example:

September 17:

---

## Head of New York Stock Exchange Resigns

### Grasso Leaves After Furor Over Pay

By JACK LYNCH 7:43 PM ET

Richard A. Grasso resigned this evening after three weeks of mounting criticism of his \$140 million compensation package.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



**Headline 1:** Head of New York Stock Exchange Resigns

**Headline 2:** Grasso Leaves After Furor Over Pay

**Deck:** Richard A. Grasso resigned this evening after three weeks of mounting criticism of his \$140 million compensation package.

Even though there are new elements, the repetition of other ones are obvious. You can read twice that he (Richard Grasso: Head of the New York Stock Exchange) resigned. Also, you can read twice the reaction that there was "mounting criticism of his \$140 million compensation package" or "furor over pay".

Was it necessary to repeat information to deliver new one? The answer is no.

Here's another example:

September 18:

<p><b><u><a href="#">U.S. Is Speeding Up Plan for Creating a New Iraqi Army</a></u></b> By THOM SHANKER A senior official said the U.S. had shortened the timetable for setting up a new Iraqi army, with plans for 40,000 troops in the field by next year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">U.S. Troops Ambushed in Central Iraq</a></li><li>• <a href="#">News Analysis: Rocky Path for Bush</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Coverage: The Struggle for Iraq</a></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">M</a></li><li><a href="#">INT</a></li><li><a href="#">Mi</a></li><li><a href="#">for</a></li><li><a href="#">BU:</a></li><li><a href="#">Me</a></li><li><a href="#">U.S</a></li><li><a href="#">NE</a></li><li><a href="#">Wc</a></li><li><a href="#">En</a></li></ul>
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**Headline:** [U.S. Is Speeding Up Plan For Creating a New Iraqi Army](#)

**Deck:** A senior official said the U.S. had shortened the timetable for setting up a new Iraqi army, with plans for 40,000 troops in field by next year.

It is obvious that the headline and the next paragraph offer the same information in a slightly different manner.

The new additional elements: the source (A senior official) and the number of troops (40,000).

To deliver that information, was it necessary to iterate the fundamental fact (the underlined sentences)? The answer is no.

### **Three U.S. Soldiers Killed in Iraq Ambush**

By REUTERS 6:31 PM ET

Iraqi guerrillas killed three U.S. soldiers and wounded two others in an ambush near Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit late Thursday.

- [U.S. Speeding Up Plan for New Iraqi Army](#)
- [Complete Coverage: The Struggle for Iraq](#)



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**Headline:** Three U.S. Soldiers Killed in Iraq Ambush

**Deck:** Iraqi guerrillas killed three U.S. soldiers and wounded two others in an ambush near Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit late Thursday

The fundamental fact is repeated (the underlined sentences).

The new information:

- wounded two others
- near Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit late Thursday

Let's see the same information in the **washingtonpost.com's** homepage

### **3 Soldiers Die in Ambush**

Iraqi guerrillas engaged U.S. troops near Hussein's hometown of Tikrit.

- Wire reports

**Headline:** 3 Soldiers Die in Ambush

**Deck:** Iraqi guerrillas engaged U.S. troops near Hussein's hometown of Tikrit

There was no repetition of information.

Another example (September 19)

### **Iraq's Ex-Defense Minister Turns Himself In to U.S. Forces**

By TERENCE NEILAN 10:02 AM ET

Gen. Sultan Hashem Ahmed, No. 27 on the list of most wanted government officials, turned himself in to U.S. forces today.

- [Video: Iraqis Held After U.S. Troops Killed](#)
- [2 U.S. Fronts: Quick Wars, but Bloody Peace](#)
- [Complete Coverage: The Struggle for Iraq](#)

**Headline:** Iraq's Ex-Defense Minister Turns Himself in to U.S. Forces

**Deck:** Gen. Sultan Hashem Ahmed, No. 27 on the list of most wanted government officials, turned himself in to U.S. forces today.

The fundamental fact is repeated (the underlined sentences).

The new information: the name of the Iraq's Ex-Defense Minister and the fact he was No.27 on the list of most wanted government officials

Was it necessary to repeat information to deliver new one?  
The answer is no.

But some other times The New York Times offers, in the paragraph following the headline, additional information without repetition.

Let's see this example (September 19)

UPDATED FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 19, 2003 10:47 AM ET |

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Past 30 Days ▾

**Millions Without Power as Flagging Storm Heads Northward**  
By DAVID M. HALBFINGER and JAMES  
DAO 9:42 AM ET

The storm was responsible for at least 14 deaths, according to reports.

- [The Scene](#) | [The Capital](#) | [New York Region](#)
- [Map: Isabel's Track](#) | [Video: Hurricane Landfall](#)
- [Slide Show: Hurricane Isabel](#)

**THE SCENE**

**Headline:** Millions Without Power as Flagging Storm Heads Northward

**Deck:** The storm was responsible for at least 14 deaths, according to reports.

There was no repetition.

Let's see another examples:

If you see the first news (Car bomb in Indonesia's Capital kills 13 and injures over 100), there's no information repeated.

To Save up to  
Here **65%**  
Click Here

# The New York Times

ON THE WEB

UPDATED TUESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2003 3:17 PM ET

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<a href="#">JOB MARKET</a>	SEARCH <a href="#">Go to Advanced Search/Archive</a>	<input type="text"/>	Past 30 Days <input type="button" value="↕"/>	SEARCH SPONSORED BY <a href="#">FREE CREDIT REPORT</a> Consumer
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<b>NEWS</b>	<a href="#">Car Bomb in Indonesia's Capital Kills 13 and Injures Over 100</a>			
<a href="#">International</a>	By KEITH BRADSHER 2:37 PM ET	Natalie Behring-Chisholm for The New York Times		
<a href="#">National</a>	The explosion came in the final days of the trials of the men accused of carrying out the bombing attacks on the island of Bali.			
<a href="#">Washington</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Scene in Jakarta: <a href="#">Slide Show</a>   <a href="#">Video</a></li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Coverage: Targeting Terror</a></li></ul>			
<a href="#">Business</a>	<a href="#">Vote on Gay Bishop, Delayed by Sex Accusations, to Go Forward</a>			
<a href="#">Technology</a>	By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS 2:30 PM ET			
<a href="#">Science</a>	The rescheduling of the vote was said to indicate that Reverend Gene Robinson had been cleared of the			
<a href="#">Health</a>				
<a href="#">Sports</a>				
<a href="#">New York Region</a>				
<a href="#">Education</a>				
<a href="#">Weather</a>				
<a href="#">Obituaries</a>				
<a href="#">NYT Front Page</a>				
<a href="#">Corrections</a>				
<b>OPINION</b>				

**Headline:** Car bomb in Indonesia's capital kills 13 and injures over 100.

**Deck:** The explosion took place in final days of trial against the man accused of carrying out bomb attacks in the island of Bali.

Later that day, The New York Times updated their version of the attempt and, once again, didn't repeat information.



# The New York Times

ON THE WEB

UPDATED TUESDAY, AUGUST 5, 2003 5:32 PM ET

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**OPINION**  
[Editorials/Op-Ed](#)  
[Readers' Opinions](#)

**Deadly Car Bombing Shakes Marriott Hotel in Jakarta**  
By KEITH BRADSHER 5:07 PM ET  
The explosion seriously damaged the lower floors of the 33-floor hotel, killed at least 10 people and injured nearly 150.

- The Scene in Jakarta: [Slide Show](#) | [Video](#)
- [Experts Warn More Attacks May Be Coming](#)
- [Complete Coverage: Targeting Terror](#)

**Vote on Gay Bishop Expected as Investigation Quickly Ends**  
By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS 5:20 PM ET  
A clergyman seeking to become the first openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church was apparently cleared today of allegations of misconduct.

[Enlarge This Image](#)



**Headline:** Deadly Car Bombing Shakes Marriott Hotel in Jakarta

**Deck:** The explosion seriously damaged the lower floors of the 33-floor hotel, killed at least 10 people and injured nearly 150.

Here's another example:

if you take a look at the news that says "Episcopal Leaders Delay Vote on Gay Bishop" as well as the subsequent paragraph, you'll find no iteration of the facts, either.



MARKET SEARCH [Go to Advanced Search/Archive](#)

ESTATE  **Past 30 Days**

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## [Episcopal Leaders Delay Vote on Gay Bishop](#)

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS 6:00 PM ET

A church spokesman said the move was made after allegations of misconduct emerged against the clergyman.


- [Episcopalians Give First Nod for Gay Bishop](#)

## [First Contingent of African Peacekeepers Arrives in Liberia](#)

By SOMINI SENGUPTA

Nigerian soldiers were at the vanguard of an international mission to end years of carnage in the war-torn nation.

- [Food and Peace Just a Memory in Monrovia](#)
- [Video: Nigerian Soldiers in Liberia](#)



Associated Press

### Prisoner Protests

Israel today published a list of

**Headline:** Episcopal Leaders Delay Vote on Gay Bishop

**Deck:** A church spokesman said the move was made after allegations of misconduct emerged against the clergyman.

## Conclusion

If you want to come up with a conclusion, I'd be pleased to show you a two-paragraph, modified version of a recent feature by Dan Willis, published in the American Press Institute (API) website, headlined 'Tradition Kills Usability'.

"As the newspaper industry redirects its content to the Web, the print resources to present content that made the paper model effective are killing the usability of the Web model and limiting the potential of online journalism".

"Tied too tightly to the conventions of print, most World online newspaper operations are stranded between the past

and the future. These organizations put a great deal of energy and creativity into developing wonderful content that expands the boundaries of traditional journalism, then they trap that trailblazing content in conventions that were created to solve print newspaper challenges”.

That’s the reason why, if tradition kills usability, then let’s kill tradition. Sites such as **washingtonpost.com**, **lanacion.com.ar** and **eltiempo.com** try, each one in its own style, to do so by getting away from printed models.

Quoting Mario García, when referring to printed media and transferring it onto the online world: “In a (almost, should I say) perfect world (**washingtonpost.com**’s homepage, **lanacion.com.ar**’s homepage or **eltiempo.com**’s homepage, I say), multi-deck headlines are written in such a way that the scanner, who does not wish to read the text of the story, still can feel like he knows the "essence" of its content (when presented in the homepage).”

Finally, I would like to quote the following paragraph by Jakob Nielsen and Marie Tahir in their book ‘Homepage Usability, 50 Websites Deconstructed’, which makes recommendations to improve homepages in any site and that can also be applied to news ones.

“In order for news stories and press releases to be effective on your homepage, you need to craft effective headlines and decks (the summary of the story below the headline). This applies to either the company news that you show on your homepage, or any news that your site delivers as content. Headlines and decks should actually give users information, rather than merely trying to tantalize them into clicking through to the real information. It’s just as important to help users know when not to click something, if they’re truly not interested. You can only get so many wasted clicks from users before they give up.”

**How can homepage effectiveness be improved? Avoid repeating information along the headline and the subsequent paragraphs (decks, leads or summaries). That would be a great start.**

Since journalistic know-how is being used to present content in any type of site, the recommendation would also go on to them.

And remember: The first thing most users see when they access a site is the text, as stated by Nielsen and an eyetrack study by Poynter Institute: don't punish them with repetition... don't punish them with repetition... don't punish them with repetition...: don't puni...

(Translation support: Mauricio Romero).

\* Guillermo Franco Morales is a Content Manager of New Media of Casa Editorial El Tiempo (CEET), in Colombia, South America and the Editor of eltiempo.com.

Franco is a teacher for postgraduate programs in Colombia regarding online journalism.