

## ***The Beauties of the Bullet List & How to Build Lists Beautifully***

### **1. Among its virtues, the bullet list:**

- ✓ Makes info easy for audience to understand..
- ✓ Forces the reporter to simplify/clarify/summarize info.
- ✓ Cuts down words so story is shorter and/or has room for even more info.

### **2. The bullet list is wonderfully suited for:**

- ✓ Citing or explaining numbers and statistics.
- ✓ Organizing info by topic/theme/source (person).
- ✓ Presenting pros and cons.
- ✓ Serving as a graphic in BJ or an info box in print/online.

### **3. The bullet list has these requirements:**

- ✓ It is always preceded by a set-up sentence, such as all of these.
- ✓ The set-up sentence is punctuated with a colon:
- ✓ At least three items make up the list (if only two, then just do each in a graf).
- ✓ It must be crafted in parallel structure (all nouns or all verb-forms. The first two lists here are verb-forms. This one is nouns).

### **4. Yes, you can follow up a bullet item with explanatory info, including quotes.**

#### **For example:**

#### ✓ **Virtues**

The bullet list has many virtues. “See the list above,” said Professor Grimes.

#### ✓ **Requirements**

The bullet list has several requirements. The reporter/writer must think through the info to figure out the individual items to be bulleted.

If the bulleted item will be followed by explanatory info, it’s a good idea to boldface the item – as is done with this list of items. The reporter/writer must use a set-up sentence, with a colon.

“Bullet lists are wonderful,” said Professor Grimes. “They make the reporter do the hard work of thinking so that the audience doesn’t have to.”

#### ✓ **Weaknesses**

The bullet list has a few weaknesses. For example, too many bullet lists in one story become repetitive. Best is no more than two bullet lists in the same piece.

### **5. Here are some examples of bullet lists:**

#### ✓ EXAMPLE 1:

*Here are the choices city voters have among their candidates:*

- *In the Syracuse mayor’s race, (introduce the candidates. Use whatever background info you have on that race)*

- *In Common Council District 2, yada, yada (use the info about a plot twist, but first introduce the candidates in a straightforward way.*
- *In Common Council District xxx, yada, yada*

✓ EXAMPLE 2:

*Consider these statistics, from the Census Bureau:*

- *Nationally, one in six Americans – or 47 million – lack health insurance*
- *In Onondaga County, the gap is even greater, with one in four residents without health insurance.*
- *The majority of the uninsured are children.*
- *Nationally, that's 33 million children.*
- *In Onondaga County, that's 500,000 children.*

✓ EXAMPLE 3:

*Some key statistics:*

- *58 percent of Americans, says the Census Bureau, are fat.*
- *44 percent of overweight children are diabetics, calculates the American Diabetes Association.*
- *22 percent of overweight adults have had heart attacks, reports the American Heart Association.*