

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.*