

BBC. News Reports

The language of news reports

What is a report?

A news report gives you details of a news story. The reporter needs to choose the words he or she uses very carefully to make the story clear and unbiased.

1. The two news reports below come from BBC Radio News. Do they contain good news or bad news?

a) Five men **have been arrested** in connection with the theft last month of three masterpieces from the National Museum in Stockholm. The Swedish nationals **were detained** in the Stockholm area just days after police received several photos of the paintings, along with a demand for hundreds of thousands of pounds. The works of art, including one by the Dutch master, Rembrandt, **are estimated** to be worth up to \$30m in total.

b) The crew of the world's biggest ocean-racing yacht, the Team Philips catamaran, **have been rescued** after the boat was badly damaged in storms. They had been preparing for a race 800 miles off the west coast of Ireland.

2. Look at the verbs in **bold** print. Why are they similar?

3. In report **a)**, find two words or phrases with a similar meaning to 'paintings'.

4. In report **b)**, find two words with a similar meaning to 'boat'.

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The purpose of a news report is usually to give the listener information in an interesting but objective way. To do this, they often use the passive voice and words which are **near synonyms**, that is words which have nearly the same meaning.

Passive voice: Using the **passive voice** makes the report sound more formal. By putting the object of the verb at the beginning of the sentence, they take our attention away from the subject. So, although '**Five men were arrested**' and '**Police arrested five men**' have the same meaning, the reporter is focusing on the result of the action instead of the people doing the action. News reports often use the passive voice to avoid saying directly that someone has done something. In this way, they try to remain impartial.

Synonyms: Using words with similar meanings in a news report keeps it interesting. As there is a lot of information in a very short time, it is important that the listener pays attention. If we hear the same word being repeated more than once or twice we might get bored and stop listening. By using near-synonyms (e.g. yacht and boat), the reporter can keep us interested in the whole story.

Language task

1. Read the extract below about how police in the Thames Valley area are trying to reduce burglaries.

Find out what happens ...

a) if someone is burgled once

b) if someone is burgled twice

c) if someone is burgled three times.

For the past two years, the Thames Valley Police have been combating repeat burglaries with an increasing green, amber, or red police response. First-time victims of burglary are warned of the possibility of repeat attacks and are advised on security. A second break-in triggers an 'amber' response. This is when the property is code-marked and their neighbours are asked to keep watch. After a third robbery, alarms are fitted – free of charge in some cases. When the approach was reviewed last year, it was found to have dramatically reduced offences.

2. Find three words or phrases which the reporter uses to mean **burglary**.

3. Find six examples of verbs being used in the **passive voice**.