The Headline Checklist

Does your headline check off all of these?

☐ It’s specific-to-super specific.
What is your story about? Don’t be vague – that is the leading cause of headline fatalities. Avoid generic words and phrases. Show don’t tell. (Hundreds plan to march into D.C. July 4 with guns in hand)

☐ It’s localized.
Include something – a name, landmark, or reference – that signals to your audience this story is about the place they live. (San Francisco’s ‘cheap’ rentals are really not that cheap)

☐ It leads to a reaction and an action.
Imagine you’re seeing this for the first time. What’s your reaction? Would you click? Would you share? (Superheroes Wash Windows at Ann Arbor Children’s Hospital)

☐ It’s a clear promise of what’s inside.
The story should deliver on what you’ve promised in your headline. (Here’s a list of Oregon’s most ‘endangered places’)

☐ It can be understood in 2 seconds.
Keep the headline simple and straightforward. Avoid names or acronyms that aren’t universally known. (Delaware becomes 11th state to legalize same-sex marriage)

☐ It’s not clever.
Avoid puns, rhymes or cultural references. This approach is fun but distracts from the story and could put the audience on the outside of an inside joke. (Watch out for the billions of cicadas arriving in the D.C. region soon)