Her method: short sentences, few adjectives, few quotes, many details.

She began writing at a weekly newspaper in Alaska after she graduated from the University of Montana in 1985. "I started out leaning toward brevity," she said. "My first editor in Alaska would always tell me, every time you finish a story, go back over it. Figure out what words are extraneous. What can you leave out?"

She takes voluminous notes but discards about half of them. "I write everything down. I don't trust my memory," she says. That includes her observations. A cracked cement step. An automobile battery under the sink. Cockroaches scurrying across the kitchen table. A toothless smile.

How does she know which details to include in her stories? "I write what I remember without looking at my notes. What details stand out. Like Joe Peak's teeth were so significant and personal. The contrast struck me. His place was so neat that I couldn't figure out how somebody who paid so much attention to his surroundings wouldn't take the same care personally. Then I found out how he lost his teeth."

She is equally selective about the limited quotes she includes. "I really think readers glance over quotes," she says. "I do few quotes because I think most people are pretty plain-spoken and simple. You don't need to use it just because it's in quotes."

Her tips for writing briefly: "Trust your instincts about what is important, what struck you during the interview. The rest is chaff. I generally bounce my lead and the most important details off my co-workers, and I can gauge from their reactions if I'm on the right track. That's the basic tell-it-to-a-friend technique.

She also stresses observation. "Pay attention to details, from the right spelling of names to finding out the date of people's birthdays."

On leads and kickers: "I tend to think readers read the beginning and the end. Never discount the lead you were throwing out. It could be a great kicker."

On structure: "You try to make a point with every paragraph."

On brevity: "Short has its place, but it won't replace more in-depth pieces; that's what a newspaper does best. I hope to continue to do both."

The two profiles that follow were part of a series about the problems of low-income residents in a deteriorating Spokane apartment building, the Merlin.

The second example, about Orval Aldrich, contains a racist term. "I thought about it and then realized it was too rich a detail to delete," Sullivan said. "The racism made me uncomfortable. How sad for someone to carry that around, especially since the only person who cared about him was a black woman. But in profiles, it's real easy to make people two-dimensional—the good guys and the bad guys. I tried not to
Donald ‘Joe’ Peak

Joe Peak’s smile has no teeth.

His dentures were stolen at the Norman Hotel, the last place he lived in downtown Spokane before moving to the Merlin two years ago.

Gumming food and fighting diabetes have shrunken the 54-year-old man’s frame by 80 pounds. He is thin and weak and his mouth is sore.

But that doesn’t stop him from frying hamburgers and onions for a friend at midnight or keeping an extra bed made up permanently in his two-room place.

“I try to make a little nest here for myself,” he says.

Chock-full of furniture and cups from the 32-ounce Cokes he relishes for 53 cents apiece, Peaks’ second floor apartment is almost cozy.

A good rug covers holes in the kitchen floor, clean-looking blankets cover a clean-looking bed. Dishes are stacked neatly in the kitchen sink.

But cockroaches still scurry across his kitchen table.

“I live with them,” he says with a shrug. “I can’t afford the insecticides, pesticides, germicides. I don’t have the money.”

With a $500 per month welfare check and a $175 rent payment, Peak follows a proper diet when he can afford it. He shops at nearby convenience stores where he knows prices are higher but the distance is right. He has adapted to the noisy nightlife in the hallways and sleeps when he is too exhausted to hear it.

Part Seminole Indian, Chinese and black, the Florida native moved to Spokane 20 years ago to be near relatives in Olympia. He quit school at 13 to help earn the family income and worked a string of blue-collar jobs. Along the way, someone started calling him Joe.

His voice is lyrical, his vocabulary huge, but Peak’s experience with whites is long and bitter.

When conditions at the Merlin began worsening three months ago, junkies and gray mice the size of baby rats moved in next door. He hated to see it, but he isn’t worried about being homeless.

He’s worried about his diabetes. He’s frightened by blood in his stool and sores on his gums. He wonders whether the white-staffed hospitals on the hill above him will treat a poor black man with no teeth.

Orval Aldrich

They call him the Jockey.

At 82, he is bent from too many spills from a saddle and too many ex-wives to name. But it’s the stress of his home that is breaking Orval Aldrich.

He moved into the Merlin 12 years ago to be close to his friends, who shared a passion for horse racing, cards and “chewing the bull.”

There was ample parking for his 1977 Ford. A dozen residents shared meals and long summer evenings together in the place they knew was rundown, but still livable.

“We had a pretty good bunch in here,” he says.

Now Aldrich’s friends have moved to quieter, safer apartment buildings. The friendly faces have been replaced by ones he doesn’t recognize or trust.

And the Ford’s battery is under the sink in his room so thieves won’t steal it.

Born in Liverpool, England, Aldrich worked as a jockey and construction boilermaker in jobs that took him from the Space
Needle in Seattle to refineries in eastern Montana.

He’ll tell you he had six wives and show you pictures of two children, six grandkids and one great-grandchild, a pale blond beauty whose photo hangs in Room 8.

His gray room also has a stained sink on one wall and a gas stove on another surrounded by wisps of ash. Roach bombs must be set off every week.

The electricity is sometimes shut off for hours, and there are interruptions in water service. Rent has risen from $50 to $100 since 1985.

The black residents bother him. He is afraid of them and calls them “niggers,” though the woman who reminds him to take his medicine calms him is black.

Lately, Aldrich’s eyesight has begun failing. It takes two trembling hands to bring a small glass of beer to his lips. His family in Montana would like him to move, but he makes his own decisions, thank you.

The day the drug addict stole his watch and stuck a needle in her arm at his kitchen table, Aldrich sat stiffly on the crusty blankets of his bed.

“I’ll get it back, you watch and see,” he fumed later.

He did. The $50 Seiko was returned without explanation Thursday morning.

That night, they stole his food stamps.

Here are some examples of vignettes written by journalism students who were following Julie Sullivan’s style. The assignment was to find people behind the scenes on the campus of the University of Kansas. Students were instructed to write profiles filled with revealing details in fewer than 500 words—about one to one and a half double-spaced typewritten pages. They were also told to stress show-in-action techniques. The frame was the university at work.

**Journalism school librarian**

Yvonne Martinez has carefully picked out her wardrobe.

Dressed in a navy blue skirt patterned with white boxes and a white blouse with the same pattern in blue, she had come prepared for another day of work at the School of Journalism library.

However, her outfit would not be complete without her size 6 1/2 sneakers.

The 4-foot-11 librarian does not wear them simply because they help maintain a quiet atmosphere. That is just one of the added benefits.

She wears them because she is constantly on the move.

Whether it’s searching for a student’s request for the last two years’ worth of *Folio* magazine or sorting through the seemingly endless stack of newspapers the library receives daily, she rarely has time to sit down.

Recent cuts in the library’s budget and staff have increased Martinez’s work load. The sneakers are crucial.

“I’d rather be comfortable than in pain,” she said.

Her duties have grown during the two years she has been working behind the counter. But now her duties include repairing the copy machine.

It is the only copy machine the library can afford on its budget, Martinez said. Overuse causes it to break down at least once a day.

As she returns to the counter, she immediately is greeted by a professor who says the machine is out of ink. She reaches under the counter and pulls out a bottle of black ink.

As she pours, the bottle slips and ink covers her hands. More students who need to be helped arrive at the counter.

Martinez stands by the machine staring at her hands as if she were auditioning for the part of Lady Macbeth. She sighs and runs off to the restroom. She quickly returns to the counter and apologizes to the students.

After all, she is the only librarian on duty.
Bus driver

The sounds of a screaming Mick Jagger shake the windows of the bus.

A basket of Jolly Rancher’s candies sits on the dashboard. And the driver in the blue and white Rolling Stones baseball cap is smiling.

This is Hank’s bus—slap him a high five on the way off, please.

Hank Jones, who is in the middle of his fifth year as a (University of Kansas) bus driver, likes doing something extra for his passengers.

“Why shouldn’t I,” he says.

“A little extra effort can go a long way.”

One passenger remembers Hank stopping his bus on Jayhawk Boulevard last Valentine’s Day just to give her a candy heart. She’s been a regular ever since.

Hank began driving those green and white buses when he needed some extra money and he enjoyed it so much, he stayed with it.

The students are the best part of the job, but Hank is not without his complaints.

“They’re not too quick sometimes,” he says. “But they’re good kids, most of them.”

He tries to keep it interesting—he never plays the same tape twice in one day on his portable Sony stereo.

“I’m always partial to the Stones,” he says, cranking open his pack of Marlboro cigarettes. “But I’ll play requests, too.”

Hank plans to keep driving for KU as long as he still enjoys it—or until he finds a wife. At 34, he hasn’t found the right woman yet. But he’s in no hurry.

“Who knows?” he says.

“Maybe someone will get on my bus.”

Flag raiser

Virginia Boyd is afraid of heights.

However, she does part of her job on top of Fraser Hall, one of the highest points on campus at the University of Kansas.

Boyd, an employee of the University’s housekeeping staff, raises the flags on Fraser Hall each morning at 7 o’clock, where they fly nine stories above the ground.

After taking the elevator to the seventh floor, she climbs two flights of stairs before ascending two more 16-stair spiral staircases where the flag turrets are located. Climbing to the roof of the building is no easy task for her 51-year-old legs, she says.

“Kinda spooky, isn’t it?” she says, wrinkling her freckled nose and gripping rickety wooden stair-case railings covered with bird droppings.

She peers through the gratings over the vents in Fraser’s turret and points to a trap door in the roof of the building.

“I used to peek out of there, just to see what it was like,” she says.

Wind swirls around the tiny turret and Boyd looks up at the flagpole that sticks through the opening at the top.

“If the cord is whipping against that pole, it’s too windy to put the flags up,” she says.

She gently fingers the limp American flag attached to the cord at the bottom of the pole.

“As soon as it goes through that hole, it just gets sucked up,” she says.

Boyd has only been on flag duty in Fraser Hall for about three weeks; she previously worked in the Art and Design building for two years.

She’s thankful that she’s only had to put the flags up three or four times since she has been working in Fraser.

“My knees just can’t take this,” she says, “so one of those young guys is going to take over.”