

## Writing effective forecast discussions

### Objective of the forecast discussion:

To paint a more detailed and interesting picture of the current weather and forecast by summarizing the main weather features, how these features evolve and interact, and what this all means for the public's weather.

### Tips for writing an effective discussion (also see following example discussions):

1. Write the discussion last or towards the end of the forecast process. This way you will have a better understanding of the story.
2. Always try to begin your discussion with a sentence that summarizes your main points in the forecast. This should smoothly introduce the reader to what you're going to discuss. A good introductory sentence might sound like, "Colder and drier conditions will dominate the next few days and then a major storm system may affect us." This sentence sets the stage for coming story.
3. Your discussion should then tell the story chronologically, starting with a brief description of the current weather, including the major weather features affecting the forecast area.
4. Keep it clear and concise. Avoid getting lost in the details of what's going on; keep the specific details to the forecast text. Try to make the text interesting and engaging.
5. Length...aim for at least three sentences, but try to keep it under seven.
6. Keep the voice fresh and active. Try to make the interactions of the weather features sound dynamic and active; avoid using a passive voice.
7. Remember that our audience is the general public...avoid technical jargon without brief explanations.
8. Proofread your forecasts! Please check your spelling and grammar before submitting.
9. Avoid using the first person (I); rather, write in the third person.
10. Try hard to express your confidence, or lack thereof, in the forecast, especially over the first two days. Avoid ambiguous, vague, and wishy-washy words/phrases that express uncertainty without understanding. Be frank (not DeWitt) and to the point with your forecast uncertainty.

## Example forecast discussions and their critiques

**A poor forecast discussion...this discussion is poor for a few reasons. It starts out with too much detail, trying hard, in a very confusing manner, to describe the stability and how it will affect the forecast. It's also poor because of the uncertainty and lack of confidence displayed in the "...chances of pop-up showers from time to time."**

"Atmospheric conditions are relatively stable with warmer temperatures aloft while cooler temperatures are present at the surface after this weekend's front passed through. This will keep our skies cloudy for most of the week with chances of pop-up showers from time to time."

**A fair forecast discussion... this discussion is skeletal; it lacks the meat to make it stand out. However, it's concise and relatively clear.**

"A cold front to our west will be moving across the region late tomorrow. This will bring some snow showers to the area. Later in the week we will see mostly sunny skies with seasonably warm temperatures."

**A very poor discussion...while I admire the author's attempt to pull together a number of details, it just doesn't do it. I'm not convinced the author really understands what's happening; at least they can't effectively convey this. There are way too many details included (who cares about where the low pressure center is coming from Saturday?). There is also little or no connection between the sentences.**

"The stationary front that is sitting off the southern coast of New England is supplying the Northeast with its fair share of rain. High pressure, centered over northeastern Maine, delivers a southerly flow and an increase in moisture in the mid-levels of the atmosphere. The rain in southern New England that spread northward, keeps us wet through tonight (Thursday) and all day Friday. Rain amounts will be about one inch. Saturday, a low pressure system moves southeast from central Canada, which increases the chances for rain once again, as well as the colder temperatures."

**A good forecast discussion...it is succinct and includes the main features in the forecast and the resulting weather. The flow or transitions between the sentences, however, could be improved.**

"An area of high pressure will dominate the area for the next few days. Expect sunny skies during the day and very cold temperatures overnight. Towards the end of the week another low pressure system will move into the area. Snow will persist through the day on Friday and will be heavy at times. Have a safe and happy holiday season."

**A good forecast discussion...there's a great introductory, catch sentence. The author then carefully describes what they think will happen and does a good job of laying out the salient details of the forecast. However, I thought there was a little too**

**much detail with the discussion of “...an upslope snow event on the west side...”; this sentence needs more translation for the general public.**

“A strong storm system heading into the Great Lakes region will make for a busy forecast Wednesday through Thursday. As the precipitation Wednesday moves into some colder air over the region, we could see several hours of sleet. The sleet should changeover to plain rain Wednesday evening. After a cold front sweeps through the areas late Wednesday night, we will see an upslope snow event on the west side of the hills and mountains. There could be some accumulations during the day Thursday into Thursday night for the higher terrain. Friday is looking cold, with a moderating trend for the weekend.”

**A fair forecast discussion...it’s a bit too complex (remember our audience is the general public), and too many details are strung together. The forecaster could probably cut half the length and have the same effectiveness. The forecast numbers should remain in the forecast itself, not in the discussion.**

The low pressure system that brought snow last night is rapidly moving eastward towards the Canadian Maritimes, but the moisture is still wrapping around the storm causing upslope against the mountains, which is why we saw very light, almost misty precipitation today. This will continue through Thursday, then another weak low pressure system moves southeast, developing into a closed low, keeping Friday very cloudy with the chance of showers or flurries. Saturday is when the slow moving high pressure ridge will dominate our weather, bring plenty of sunshine and temperatures in the 50’s. Halloween night looks like it will be mainly clear and not too cold.

**A forecast discussion that contains all the details but could use more flow and forcefulness; the voice is too passive. I think it does a decent job identifying the important forecast features, but a poor job in describing what those features mean for the reader’s weather.**

“A cold front moved across the region today bringing clouds and showers. High pressure will build in from the Great Lakes for Wednesday and Thursday. This will bring sunshine and rather mild temperatures. During Thursday night and early Friday a cold front will move through the region bring more clouds and showers. Behind this cold front much cooler and drier air will filter into the area for Friday afternoon through Saturday due to an area of high pressure moving in from Canada. As this high pressure moves off the east coast Sunday, another storm system will be moving in from the west. This could bring more showers for later on Sunday. “

**An example of discussion that leaves me scratching my head about what’s going to happen Friday. It’s good to mention forecast variability and to be honest about your uncertainty, but avoid words like “definitely” in these cases.**

“Tonight will be the coldest night we’ve experienced so far, with temperatures dropping into the single digits. High pressure will keep skies mostly sunny for Thursday. On

Friday, a coastal storm passes to our south. We will definitely get snow out this storm, up to 2 inches in total accumulation, unless the storm tracks further north. If the storm takes a more northerly track, total accumulations may rise to 4 inches. The weekend will be partly cloudy with occasional snow showers.”

**A very good forecast discussion...it flows well, includes the main features and how they evolve. This is one of the best forecast discussions of fall 2005.**

“A rather unsettled and mild weather pattern is in store for the forecast area over the next five days. A series of disturbances are expected to track just to our west, delivering showery and windy conditions on Sunday and Wednesday. With a strong ridge dominating over the western Atlantic, southerly flow will tend to keep temperatures much above average. It appears that Old Man Winter will not make a return visit to the North Country, for at least the next 5 days.”

**Here’s a discussion that’s overall quite poor...it’s too wordy (at least 18 excess words-see bolded words) and very difficult to follow...it’s like a 5 buckets of paint spilled onto a floor, oozing together into an indescribable color. I’d give it a D+.**

What a gloomy weekend it has turned out to be **as of this point**. Tropical Storm Ophelia is throwing back moisture from the Atlantic **seaboard** causing overcast skies and scattered showers across the area. These showers, short-lived, are creating slick roads, so please be careful when traveling. **Tropical Storm** Ophelia should be heading out **of the area** to the north and east **and a faster clip** come this afternoon and evening, therefore leaving the chance of a few showers for tomorrow, but not a washout. [*This last sentence is horrendous.*] The sun **looks to** return on Monday **for a time** before an area of low pressure moves in from the west, giving us a chance of showers Monday afternoon and leaving us with cloudy skies for Tuesday and Wednesday **of next week**. Have a great weekend!

**Here’s a much improved discussion from the same person as above; overall, it’s moderately good. However, I recommend we avoid adding too much of our own enthusiasm at the end of the discussion. I think keeping it at “enjoy the foliage” is adequate in this situation. You are hereby limited to using only one exclamation mark, if any, in your discussions.**

High pressure is the main weather feature in our area this weekend. Sunny skies and mild temperatures are seen nearly everywhere in the Northeast Kingdom. The next chance of precipitation will not arrive until at earliest Wednesday night this upcoming week. Get outside and enjoy the foliage, go for a walk, or even a hike! Enjoy!

**Here’s an example discussion that will earn you an “F”. It’s way too long, uses the first person, contains excess words and numerous spelling/grammar errors (see bolded words), violates the exclamation mark rule, and interjects way too much of**

**the forecaster's personal thoughts and rambling. I challenge you to read it entirely without screaming.**

It's been a delightful day **today** with temperatures in the lower 60's **under partly cloudy skies**. And while **I** hate to be the bringer of bad news, there's going to be more rain on the way for pretty much the entire weekend. A very late-season Nor'easter will make **it's** way up the **coastline, starting near the North Carolina/Virginia border today**. It will then track to the southeast of Cape Cod **for** Saturday and Sunday, where it will gradually dissipate and slowly make **it's** way far out into the Atlantic. *[Who cares, how is this relevant to northern VT?]* It **currently** looks like we can expect total rainfall amounts from the storm to be from a half-inch to an inch, **depending on how close the storm comes to us. Also, if it comes closer, we can expect some breezy conditions to develop Saturday and Sunday**. All these clouds will result in cool temperatures, but once the storm pushes off the coast temperatures will rebound nicely. Next week is looking to be quite seasonable with temperatures in the sixties. We may even hit 70 degrees Tuesday as high pressure briefly moves in! Our next chance of rain comes from a disturbance that will form to our west on Wednesday, **which will bring us scattered showers and thunderstorms**. It's not looking like a total washout, though. **For all the students traveling through Wednesday to head home, it's looking pretty decent!**