



Digital Media Virtual Learning

Grades 9-12/Writing a Good News Story

April 15, 2020



9-12/Digital and Advanced Digital Media
Lesson: April 15, 2020

Objective/Learning Target:

Students Will Be Able to Identify and Write Good News Story

Let's Get Started:

Think About the Last News Story You Have Read (You can find one online as well from a news site if you don't remember):

1. What was the story about?
2. What key facts did the story include?
3. Did you feel any facts or information was missing from the story?
4. What is your first impression of the way a news story is written?
5. How is this writing different from what you may turn in for an English or History report?

What is a News Story?

A **news story** is a written or recorded (or, occasionally, live) **article** or interview that informs the public about current events, concerns, or ideas. ... Hard - full of important facts and **news** items, or soft - focusing on the personal, more human side of a **news** event or situation.... or not?

We are going to focus on the written news story (for a newspaper or online) and will explore broadcast news in the future.

News Story Writing Process

1. Choose a recent, newsworthy event or topic - The first step is knowing when something is newsworthy and when something is not. A newsworthy story is anything happening in your community that might interest readers. It should be unique, active, and impactful. For example, covering a business (if it isn't new or offering any particular changes) isn't particularly newsworthy, especially if it's always been there. But covering a new business in the area is absolutely newsworthy, and will bring the company to the attention of your readers.

The story should be recent or current. It doesn't do a newspaper any good to cover an event that happened a week ago. The community has already moved on. They're talking about something else. You need to focus on the here and now, especially if you're writing a news story. What stories can you break to the public before anyone else has the chance? Remember, you aren't writing a feature story. You need to do something that's happening now.

Finally, we need to touch on the idea of "locality". If you're writing for a small, community newspaper, you need to focus your coverage on that community. Of course, you can touch on countrywide or worldwide events, but those stories need to take a backseat to what's going on in your area. If you cover statewide news, the same situation applies. You should only be covering worldwide events if they have an impact on your particular audience.

News Story Writing Process

2. Conduct timely, in-person interviews - The hardest part about writing a news story is getting interviews with the right people. If there was a robbery at a local grocery store, you'd need to talk to the store manager and, if possible, the cashier or employee involved. You should not ask a family that shops at the store frequently (unless they were witnesses) or a random community member. These interviews are cop-outs; gimmicks that keeps you from asking for hard answers from key witnesses. And, as always, these interviews need to happen as soon as possible (all the while giving the interviewees time to deal with the problem/event that faces them).

3. Establish the "Four Main Ws" - Within your first paragraph, you need to establish the "who", "what", "when", and "where" of your piece. The "why" and "how" can wait until the following paragraphs. Remember, a journalism piece should look like a pyramid. The most important information goes at the top. The rest is spread throughout the remaining column space.

4. Construct your piece - Now that you have the materials that you need to continue, start putting your piece together. Start with the necessary information, and let the rest trickle down. You'll start to get a feeling for this process as you continue to write journalistically.

News Story Writing Process

5. Insert quotations - Some writers choose to add quotations as they write. Others decide to add their quotations at specific points in the story, after it's already been developed. Either way, place your quotes and be sure to identify key people in the story by their full name, occupation, and age.

6. Research additional facts and figures - When your story is nearly done, utilize Google or other search site, and find additional interesting facts and figures that will make your piece stand out from the pack. Remember, you will nearly always be competing with another news source, and you'll both be trying to feed your information to the same audience. Add that extra touch. You're going to need it.

7. Read your article out loud before publication - Writers should read their articles out loud before submitting to their teacher or editor. It helps with sentence structure, phrasing, and the overall flow of your story.

A Few More Fundamentals For Writing a News Story

Reporting - One of the most fundamental differences between journalism and other forms of writing is the way journalists obtain the information they write about. Journalists obtain information through a variety of reporting techniques, which can include interviewing sources, looking through government documents, researching old articles, and observing events firsthand. Good news writing begins with good, accurate reporting. Journalists perform a public service for citizens by presenting truthful facts in honest, straight-forward articles.

News Values - Journalists commonly use six values to determine how newsworthy a story or elements of a story are. Knowing the news values can help a journalist make many decisions, including:

The six news values are:

- Timeliness- Recent events have a higher news value than less recent ones.
- Proximity- Stories taking place in one's hometown or community are more newsworthy than those taking place far away.
- Prominence- Famous people and those in the public eye have a higher news value than ordinary citizens.
- Uniqueness/oddity- A story with a bizarre twist or strange occurrences. "Man bites dog" instead of "dog bites man."
- Impact- Stories that impact a large number of people may be more newsworthy than those impacting a smaller number of people.
- Conflict- "If it bleeds, it leads." Stories with strife, whether it's actual violence or not, are more interesting.

The newsworthiness of a story is determined by a balance of these six values. There is no set formula to decide how newsworthy a story is, but in general, the more of these six values a story meets, the more newsworthy it is.

A Few More Fundamentals For Writing a News Story

Lede - The lede (or lead) of a news article is the first sentence, usually written as one paragraph, that tells the most important information of the story. When writing a lede, it is helpful to use the “tell a friend” strategy. Imagine you had to sum up to a friend, in one sentence, what your story is about. How would you sum up quickly what happened? A story’s lede answers some or all of the “Five W’s.”

For example: The Atlanta Police Department will hold a memorial service Wednesday at Holy Christ Church in Buckhead for fallen officer Lt. James Montgomery.

WHO: The Atlanta Police Department

WHAT: will hold a memorial service

WHEN: Wednesday

WHERE: Holy Christ Church in Buckhead

WHY: for fallen officer Lt. James Montgomery

Other Examples:

Gwinnett County Public Schools was awarded \$250,000 early Wednesday as a finalist for what’s considered the Nobel Prize of public education.

A man beat an Army reservist in front of a Morrow Cracker Barrel, yelling racial slurs at her as he kicked her in the head, Morrow police said.

A Few More Fundamentals For Writing a News Story

Inverted Pyramid - News articles are written in a structure known as the “inverted pyramid.” In the inverted pyramid format, the most newsworthy information goes at the beginning of the story and the least newsworthy information goes at the end. After you have written your story’s lede, order the information that follows in terms of most important to least important. There is NO formal conclusion in a journalism article the way there is in an essay or analysis paper.

Attributing information - ALL information in a news article MUST be attributed to the source where the reporter got his/her information. The reporter must indicate in his/her article where material was obtained from – from an interview, court documents, the Census, a Web site, etc. Direct quotes and paraphrasing can be used to attribute information obtained in an interview with a source.

For example:

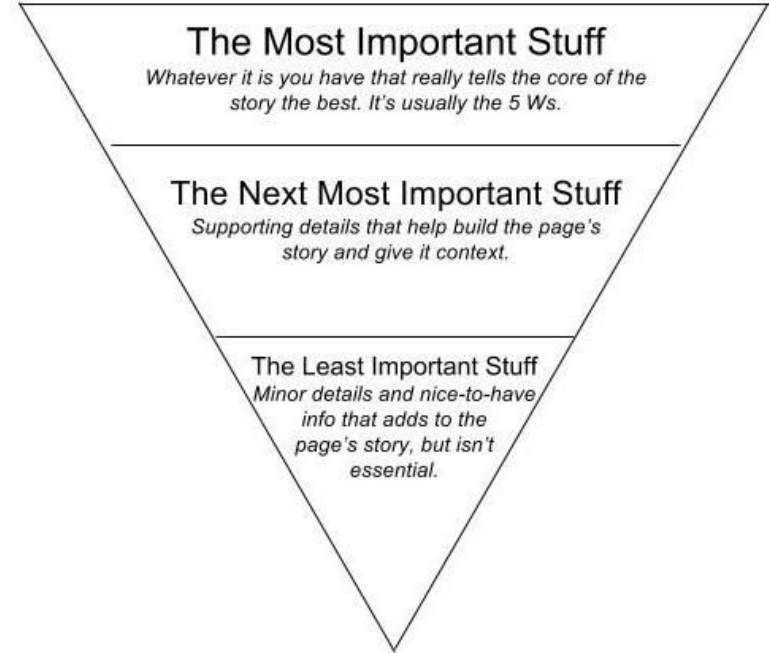
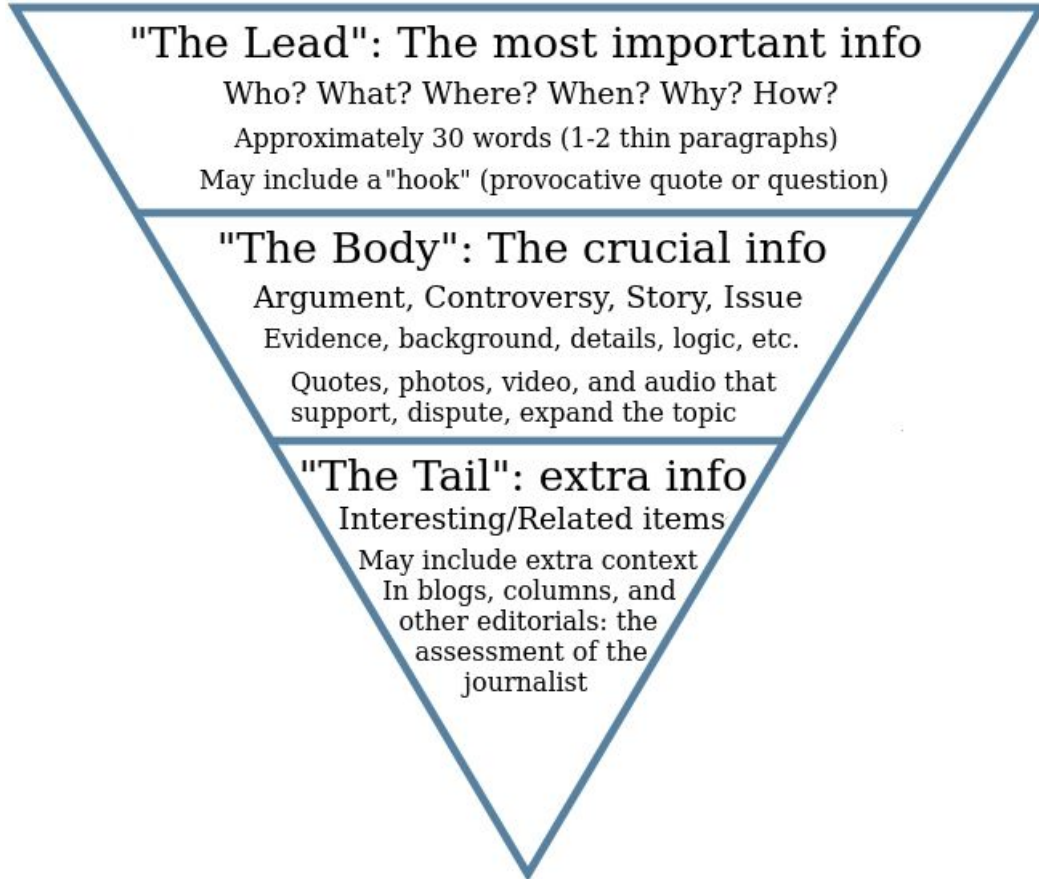
- According to a police report, the suspect threatened the cashier with a gun before running away with the money.
- In a 500-page government report, investigators reported evidence that the army had committed crimes against humanity.

Integrating quotes - The first time a source is introduced in an article, you should use that source’s full name and title. After this initial reference, use the last name only.

For example: “The swine flu vaccine is an incredible advance in modern medicine,” said Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

When attributing a direct quote, always use the verb “said” and never any other verbs such as “explained,” “whispered,” etc. It is also more common to use the format “XXX said” instead of “said XXX.” Even when information from a source is not used in a direct quote and is paraphrased instead, it still must be attributed to that source.

Inverted Pyramid Examples



News Story Example

Here is an example of a short news story in the inverted pyramid; structure:

A Palauli woman whose body was found in the sea is believed to have drowned.

Police say the 35-year-old woman, whose name has not been released, was an epileptic.

Her body was found floating in the sea near Palauli, Savai`i, on Monday.

A post mortem examination will be conducted today.

This is a shorter version but straight forward and simple news writing. Notice how the paragraphs are only a sentence or two.

Review/Practice News Story Examples

Take a look at the linked news stories below. These are full, professional news stories. Please pay attention to the format and structure of the writing.

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/02/us/holland-america-cruise-ships-florida/index.html>

<https://www.nbcnews.com/business/economy/record-6-6-million-americans-filed-unemployment-last-week-n1174776>

https://www.espn.com/nfl/story/_/id/28986862/titans-derrick-henry-signs-102m-franchise-tender

What is your first impression of these stories? How do these look different than the writing that you are used to? List the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of each story.

Resources/Other Important Articles on the Subject

[Importance of the Inverted Pyramid Style](#)

[More Lede and Story Writing Exercise](#)