**The Art of Writing News**

by Sharon

News writing is a key skill for journalists, but it helps with other types of writing as well. That’s because news writing is about telling a story quickly and concisely. Anyone can learn to do this, with a bit of help. Here’s how you can write the news and get your story across. The technique also works well for writing press releases.

**News Writing Structure**

News writing has its own structure. It’s called the inverted pyramid. This upside down triangle serves as a guide for how you include information in the story. Using the inverted pyramid means starting with the most important information, then putting the next most important info and so on. It can also serve as a guide for writing each paragraph in the story. Start with the most important point, then the next most important and so on.

The inverted pyramid has an interesting history. Before digital printing and desktop publishing, news was laid out manually. If a late breaking story came in and the editor needed to make room, then the editor would order another story to be cut. Having the most important information at the top meant that readers always got the essential parts of the story.

**Writing the Facts**

Another way to think of the inverted pyramid is that you start with the facts and then add the background. So, how do you know what background to add? It’s easy. You can use the “6Ws.” Strictly speaking, there aren’t six Ws, there are actually 5Ws and 1H, but the formula seems to work. That mnemonic reminds us to include the who, where, what, why, when and how of a story.

Why is this? Think about how you tell a story to your friends. You might say: ‘You’ll never believe WHO I just saw!’ Then you might go on to tell the story of where the person was, what they were doing, and why it’s scandalous. We all want to hear about people – and that’s what news is about? Look at any news story and you will see that all of this information is in the first two paragraphs. Anything after that is background to the story.

Let me give another example. If I were writing about a car crash, I would say who was involved, when and where it happened, why it happened and how it happened. Those would be the main points and my story might look something like this:

Two people sustained serious injuries in a car crash at Hill Road at 6am today. The collision happened when Mr. Smith swerved into the opposite lane to avoid a dog in the road. Ms Jones, who was in that lane, was unable to stop in time. Both Mr. Smith and Ms Jones have been taken to the local hospital.

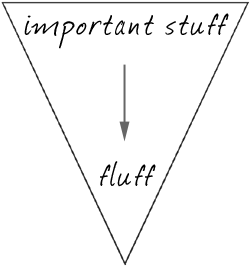
This is not a perfect example, but you get the idea – and now you can write the news too.

**The Inverted Pyramid**

by Michael

Here’s a tip from the newsroom: the inverted pyramid style of writing. It will help you to get your message across faster. It was developed by journalists for reasons that are completely irrelevant today… or are they?

The inverted pyramid principle says you should put your most important point at the top of the article, followed by your next most important point, and so on, in diminishing order of importance.



Newspapers still use this principle today, but where did it come from? Many historians say that the inverted pyramid was invented by 19th century wartime reporters, who sent their stories by telegraph. They wanted the most crucial information to get through first, just in case the transmission was interrupted.

But, you say, we don’t send many telegrams today. Ah, but more than ever, we do send messages that can easily be interrupted! Distraction, impatience, confusion, even boredom; all these can keep your reader from finishing those precious words that you’ve written. Busy people expect writers to get to the meat quickly, or they’ll find something else to read.

The next time you write something, decide what your most important point is. If they don’t hear anything else you say, what do you want them to hear? Then, say *that* first.

**Say What?**

by Sharon

If you’re telling a story, you can use two journalism training mnemonics to check that you have covered all the bases. These are the 6Ws and the WHAT formula.

Journalism tutors use the 6Ws to help students remember the main elements of writing a news story, but they work for any story. Here’s how to use them. Imagine you have seen a car crash on the way to work one morning. You want to tell your colleagues about it. The 6Ws are what you would relate:

**W**ho was involved?  
**W**hat happened?  
**W**here did it happen?  
**W**hy did it happen?  
**W**hen did it happen?  
**H**ow did it happen?

Giving these details gives you the bones of the story, and you can use them to write a lead which will hook the reader.

Once you have done that, use the **WHAT** formula to finish up your story.

**W**hat happened?  
**H**ow did it happen?  
**A**mplify the introduction – this means expand on the points you made at the start.  
**T**ie up any loose ends, so that your story answers readers’ questions.

These formulas are the basis for every good news story – and a lot of tall tales as well.

**Your Turn – Write a News Article**

***Directions: Choose an event that happened recently and identify the “6Ws” about the event. Use an event idea we generated in class or one that is approved by the teacher.***

Event\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Who:

What:

When:

Where:

Why:

How:

***After identifying the event and the basic facts, work on supplying the details. Quotes, statistics, and other references can strengthen a story. For this assignment it is ok to create a believable set of supporting details.***

Witness/Expert Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Quote:

Witness/Expert Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Quote:

Statistical Source/Other reference materials\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Data/Facts:

*Now you can begin your article. Remember the Headline and the Inverted Pyramid! One page minimum.*