

221 Intelligencer

News that matters to you!

Who - What - When - Where - Why - How

Almost all newspaper stories start off by answering most of these questions. Try to answer these questions in your story. For example: "Sherry Smith won first place in the Cutest Pet contest yesterday at Columbia Mall."

Accuracy

Your writing might be outstanding, but if you don't get the facts right, people won't believe what you write the next time. Make sure everything you say is true. And spell people's names correctly — they get upset when you don't.

What makes a good story?

Anything that could interest or affect your classmates, teachers, school or family will make a good story. For example, science topics like the strange worlds of the planets and how the weather works ... school activities such as fund-raisers, what goes on in music classes, and the importance of safety patrols, after-school activities, a review of a book you enjoyed, or how middle school will be different from sixth grade. All could make good newspaper stories. Be curious. Ask yourself, "What would I like to know more about?" — then write a story about it.

Interviews

You may want to interview someone to get the facts. Here's what to do:

- **Make an appointment.** Call or meet with the person, tell them what kind of a story you want to write, then set a time and place for the interview.
- **Prepare questions.** Write down the questions you want to ask. For example, "How long have you been working here?" "What do you like most about your job?" and "Is there anything you would like to tell our readers?"
- **Take tools.** Take a small notebook and two pens or pencils to the interview.
- **Write it down.** Take notes as the person answers your questions — you want to be sure to quote the person accurately in your story. It's OK to ask the person to repeat what they said or ask them what they mean if you don't understand them the first time. The main thing is to get it right.

Research

Use encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs and other reference materials to get the facts you need. More and more reporters are doing their research on the Internet. Research includes interviewing people — such as a professor or doctor or coach — who know the facts. And your research may be just your own observation of an event: for example, reporting on the visit of a policeman and his dog to your class.

Writing the story

Start with a good lead — a sentence that grabs your reader and makes her want to read more — for example, "The sixth grade class painted one wall of their classroom with a picture so strange that their teacher immediately sent for the principal." Write your story plainly so that everyone can understand it. If possible, use quotes in your story to make it more interesting - for example, "The flames were so hot I thought my helmet would melt," the firefighter said. And remember to answer the questions Who - What - When - Where - Why - How.

Editing

You've written a GOOD story. But before you turn it in, edit it — go over the story again, fixing mistakes, maybe rewriting some things — and turn it into a GREAT story. Here's how:

1. Make sure you have included who - what - when - where - why - how.
2. Don't editorialize. That means, don't put in what you think or believe. For example, don't write: "Science is the most useful subject you can take in school." That's your opinion and other people might disagree with you. And, besides, how can you prove it?
3. Write clearly, using simple words. Imagine that you are telling the story to your friend.
4. Check the spelling of all words, especially people's names.
5. Make sure your quotes are accurate and in the proper form, like this:
"I enjoy being a safety patrol," Carol said. *Remember:* the comma goes inside the quote mark.

6. Numbers. Spell out numbers 1 to 9, and use figures for 10 and above.

For example, "We have two cars and 12 children."

-- Spell out a number at the beginning of a sentence.

Wrong: "120 children are in the fourth grade."

Right: "One hundred and twenty children
are in the fourth grade."

Or,

"There are 120 children in the fourth grade."

It is OK to start a sentence with the number of a year: "2001 has been an exciting year."