

# Writing a News Story

Here's something very few people realize: Writing news stories isn't particularly difficult. It does take practice and not everyone will be an expert but if you follow the guidelines below you should be able to create effective news items without too much stress.

## The Five "W's and the "H"

This is the crux of all news - you need to know five things:

1. Who?
2. What?
3. Where?
4. When?
5. Why?
6. How?

Any good news story provides answers to each of these questions. You must drill these into your brain and they must become second nature.

For example, if you wish to cover a story about a local sports team entering a competition you will need to answer these questions:

- Who is the team? Who is the coach? Who are the prominent players? Who are the supporters?
- What sport do they play? What is the competition?
- Where is the competition? Where is the team normally based?
- When is the competition?
- How long have they been preparing? Are there any other important time factors?
- Why are they entering this particular competition? If it's relevant, why does the team exist at all?
- How are they going to enter the competition? Do they need to fundraise? How much training and preparation is required? What will they need to do to win?

## The Inverted Pyramid

This refers to the style of journalism which places the most important facts at the beginning and works "down" from there. Ideally, the first paragraph should contain enough information to give the reader a good overview of the entire story. The rest of the article explains and expands on the beginning.

A good approach is to assume that the story might be cut off at any point due to time limitations. Does the story work if the editor only decides to include the first two paragraphs? If not, re-arrange it so that it does.

## More Tips

- It's About People!

News stories are all about how people are affected. In your sports story, you might spend some time focusing on one or more individuals, or on how the team morale is doing, or how the supporters are feeling.

- Have an Angle

Most stories can be presented using a particular angle or "slant". This is a standard technique and isn't necessarily bad - it can help make the purpose of the story clear and give it focus.

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## - Keep it Objective

You are completely impartial. If there is more than one side to the story, cover them all. Don't use "I" and "me" unless you are quoting someone. Speaking of quoting...

## - Quote People

For example: "We're really excited about this competition," says coach Bob Dobalina, "It's the highest target we've ever set ourselves".

## - Don't Get Flowery

Keep your sentences and paragraphs short. Don't use lots of heavily descriptive language. When you've finished, go through the entire story and try to remove any words which aren't completely necessary.

## 4 Main Types of News Stories:

All of this information can be written in four main television news formats. You should always try to have enough information to produce a PKG, but different things can affect the final product. For example, if you don't have video, you'll have to write a reader. If the show is going to be too long, you may have to cut your PKG down to a VO/SOT or a VO/SOT down to a VO.

- **Reader:** simple story read on camera by the anchor
- **VO:** (voice-over) news story read by the anchor, but shows video of the subject
- **VO/SOT:** (voice-over with sound-on-tape) news story read by the anchor; we see video, but we also have an inserted interview
- **PKG:** (package) a complex story that is introduced by the anchor, but is read by the reporter; a PKG should include several interviews