

MODULE 4

NEWS WRITING

KEY OBJECTIVES

1. To understand what makes the news.
2. To recognise how we access news.
3. To identify the key elements of a news report.
4. To pitch and plan a news report for your publication.
5. To write a news report.

KEY FEATURES

1. To write in the third person.
2. To use language suited to your audience.
3. To use short paragraphs.
4. To present the facts rather than speculating or 'gossiping'.
5. To make your headline grab the attention of the reader.
6. To ensure you make the most of direct speech in the story.

Over the years we have delivered thousands of sessions to writers and we use the same foundations for this particular session every time, regardless of age and writing experience. Ensuring writers understand just what makes news and why we consider a story 'news' are the key elements. Once they grasp these areas, you are well on the way to creating engaging content for your publication.

WHERE DO WE GET OUR NEWS FROM?

This is a great place to start and identify the different platforms your writers may recognise for sourcing news stories. Some of these platforms will be more recognisable than others but the ones we focus on with our writers about are the following:

1. **Word of Mouth** – we often forget about this form of sharing news when asked how we find out news, but it is common for people to receive news initially through a friend or family member, saying 'they heard this' or 'they heard that'. We might, however, often go and validate these stories by checking another source to ensure that what we heard was correct as this form of sharing information can often be considered 'gossip.'

2. **Newspapers** – while the print industry has fallen prey to the internet newspapers are still considered a valuable form of receiving news, whether it be in the form of a broadsheet or tabloid or even a local newspaper.
3. **Television** – When you ask children what they understand about news, the news on TV will always be a popular response. Our young writers are in most cases more driven by the visual element and will frequently talk about the TV news shows being their main way of finding out what is going on in the world.
4. **Radio** – Not to be forgotten, with half hourly news updates on most stations, the radio is a popular choice of accessing news while driving especially.
5. **Online** – All print newspapers now have their online versions which are helpful when accessing news from around the world. Online news allows links and video footage to be included in stories which engages with the reader/viewer more while providing them with a multi-media experience.
6. **Social Media** – With Presidents being banned from certain social platforms we can't deny the importance of social media and its relevance in sourcing news instantaneously. With most politicians, sports stars, celebrities sharing their innermost thoughts and ideology on social media, Twitter and Instagram, for example, are fast ways of receiving news straight from the 'horse's mouth' so to speak.

RELIABILITY AND REPUTATION

It is worth touching on this with your writers to understand the importance of reporting the truth when you are writing a report or creating content for your publication. A lot of writers recognise how some media outlets are more reliable than others and this is a great talking point within the group setting when you are talking through this module.

We often create a make-believe scenario to highlight how *not* to believe all you hear and fact-check what you hear. For example, if you hear that someone of great notoriety has done something they shouldn't have, would you automatically believe that it is true or would you check for yourself,

TOP TIP

Invent a realistic scenario about someone famous and ask your writers if they think it is true or false and to back up their answer.

through media or even by asking another person? This sums up how gossip is

started and just how double-checking or fact-checking backs up the piece of information you are given.

Obviously, that is not to say all news channels, media outlets and websites get it right every time. Things can often be reported incorrectly and that is ok as long as the person or outlet who made the mistake owns up to it. A newspaper will point out if something has been misreported or is incorrect by making a note in a later edition or copy. It's when people don't own up to their mistakes or in some cases the lies they may have made up, that a reputation may suffer; the reputation could be that of the person who the report is about, the source of the news report, or even the writer.

THE FIVE W'S OF THE NEWS

WHAT IS THE NEWS?

It is factual reports that educate people on key events taking place around the world that are shared through a number of media outlets.

WHO READS THE NEWS?

People who have an interest in current affairs or want to learn more about specific topics such as politics, sport, music etc..

WHY DO WE READ THE NEWS?

To educate ourselves on events and happenings going on around the world and to be aware of things that may concern us personally or the population on a much wider scale.

WHERE DO WE READ THE NEWS?

We receive news from a number of platforms such as TV, newspapers, social media and radio.

WHEN DO WE RECEIVE NEWS?

The news is constantly being updated and is available 24/7 so we can get news whenever we want it.

We have provided a number of resources to help your writers identify the Five W's if they struggle with this aspect. Examples of actual news stories can really help improve their confidence with this key area of news reporting.

GEOGRAPHICAL REACH

Not all news is relevant to us as individuals and it is worth touching on geographical reach with your writers when you are setting up your publication.

Ensure they are clear on just who they will be reaching with their magazine, blog or podcast etc.

But it is worth doing an exercise around what media outlets serve what geographical reach if you have time in your session. This can be found on *Worksheet: How Well Do You Know the News*.

This also ties in with identifying the audience for your publication and what sort of reach you will have with that, which will have been covered in the module *Writing for an Audience*. It is always good to keep reiterating this with your writers so they keep on track as to who it is they are writing for. We have seen projects in the past verge on becoming fanzines or driven by individual writers' agendas.

Focusing on the following areas gives your group a greater understanding of what outlets suit what geographical reach. Using examples of newspapers, magazines, websites etc that they are familiar with will help identify who the audience might be.

1. Community News
2. Local News
3. National News
4. International News (for older writers)

WHO OR WHAT MAKES THE NEWS?

Asking your writers to talk about what content you find in a newspaper is a great way to uncover what things might feature in your publication. Some of the areas we have focussed on in past workshops have included the following topics:

- Events/ Life changing matters,
- Births and Deaths,
- Crime,
- New Products,
- Sporting Events,
- Music,
- Politics,
- Features. The basis upon what you feature in your publication is based upon what you feel is relevant to your audience.

There is so much going on within a school community or an organisation that often a great deal goes unknown by the audience you have identified. Creating content around the things that your writers experience and have knowledge of is key to the engagement and success of your publication.

Allowing them to discuss the key components of a newspaper and how their content can correlate, enables them to act as an editorial team and work together to create a body of work they are proud of.

CREATING A GREAT NEWS REPORT

A worksheet is included in the Resources section for your writers to support them in the planning their first news report. But first, asking your group to think of what should be in a news report is a great talking point to get them on the right track to planning their own.

Useful prompts for this discussion would be:

- Headline
- By-line
- 5 w's
- Quotes or witness statements
- Additional information to back up the report
- Word Count
- Image and caption

It is also worth mentioning the key features of writing news are:

- Writing in the third person
- Using language suited to your audience
- Using short paragraphs
- Presenting the facts rather than speculating or 'gossiping'
- Making your headline grab the attention of the reader
- Ensuring you make the most of direct speech in the story.

'HE SAID – SHE SAID'

Including a quote in a news story is a great way of encouraging your writers to identify someone who would be able to back up their report. For example, if you are writing about a school trip to Italy ask the writers to consider who would be suitable to provide a quote for the story? Why would this person be suitable? What would you ask them? The obvious choice would be a student or teacher who had been on the trip. They might also ask a parent or a Headteacher about the trip as well. People always like to share their opinions when they have been involved in the area of discussion. Therefore, you will find there are always plenty of volunteers when you need a quote about a specific topic.

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

The key focus when thinking about quotes is what you want the direct speech to relate to in your report. To get this you must ensure you ask the right questions of your witness or interviewee. So by asking 'Did you enjoy Italy?' you may only secure a 'Yes' or 'No' response, whereas, if you asked 'What

**TOP
TIP**

Use our 'Quotes' resources to inspire your writers when it comes to asking the right questions to validate their news stories.

were the highlights of the Italian trip?' you would expect a more in-depth response and you will be able to extend the further information paragraph considerably based upon that response. So open questions are what works best to get the detail for the news story.

REMAINING ANONYMOUS

Depending on the content of the story your writers are working on, there may be the need for sources to remain anonymous, which at this level you may not encounter. But it might be worth touching on this aspect of using anonymity with your group when the content of the report might be quite provocative. For example, a story based around the following headline 'SCHOOLS OVERCHARGE PARENTS FOR ITALIAN ESCAPE', might encourage people to come forward to respond to your questions but see them want to remain anonymous, which is totally acceptable.

These are all just areas you may want to touch on when introducing your writers to news reporting. Our workshops have included all of these areas at one time or another, depending on age, experience and engagement.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- Understand what news actually is
- Recognise multiple ways to source news
- Consider the topics that make news and those that will feature in your publication
- Differentiate between local, national and international news **
- Plan and write a news story suited to your publication
- Pitch an idea for a news story to other young writers **
- Provide positive feedback to other writers on their stories **

***advanced learning*