

You be the Editor Project

By Kristina Hoecker

This project is the culmination of an entire semester of journalistic writing. It combines most of what was learned in the class to show what the students have really learned in class. This project gives the student the opportunity to serve as the editor of his or her own publication.

Students will choose a topic, audience and format for his or her publication (newspaper or magazine). No student can have the same topic, audience, and format, but they can have two of the same variable. For example, a student can have a magazine on teen fashion and another student can have a magazine on teen lifestyles. The topic and audience must be evident in the final product.

On the “hiring” day students will choose the writers that they would like to have write for their paper and assign them stories. If at all possible, the story idea should first be the writer’s idea and then approved by the editor. Each student will receive an editor planning sheet and a story assignment sheet to help organize who they are writing for and who is writing for them.

This project gives the students a chance to work together as well as independently. They will find out what it might be like to work at an actual magazine or newspaper and meet deadlines and be counting on others to meet a deadline. During computer lab days and in-class work days (see teacher timeline), it is rarely specified what the students should be working on. The amount of out of class work they have to do depends on how they spend their class time. Each student will have to turn in a portfolio of their writing and the finished publication.

The final product of this unit will be a hardcopy publication. There will only be one copy of each publication due to the logistics of publishing multiple copies of everyone’s project. However, the students will have a day in class to present their project and a day in class to read the publications. This could serve as an end of the semester party with treats if the teacher desired.

Class: Journalism

Unit: News writing

Lesson: What is News?

Grade 11 & 12 (elective)

Objective: Students will know the five characteristics of news, and be able to differentiate between what is a print worthy story and what is not.

Content:

Prominence - Something that happens to a politician, public servant or a celebrity is more interesting than if it happens to someone not known by many. The marriage of the mayor, or the star player on the local university football team being arrested for fighting outside a local bar at midnight, is news.

Timeliness – If an event happened recently then it is timely. A story about the prevention of sunburn is more timely at the beginning of summer than in November. Most stories in a newspaper, especially on the news pages, have a sense of timeliness. The word "news" implies information that is new or timely.

Impact - Something that will effect a large number of readers. A bill passed in the state senate that requires all eighth graders to pass a test before they will be allowed to advance to the ninth grade has a great deal of impact on many readers. Likewise a new manufacturing plant coming to town that will employ 1,400 workers is also news.

Conflict - Events that denote a difference of opinion that puts parties in conflict are often newsworthy. Conflict usually involves surprise, tension and/or suspense. Some typical events in conflict are: sporting events, political campaigns, social issues and crime.

Novelty - Events that are unique, strange or odd. A unique event might be that a local person wins one million dollars in the lottery. A strange event could be a deer running through the downtown area of a large city or a fire station catching fire.

Procedures:

1. **Explain** to the students that what might be considered news for one paper is not always considered news for another paper. This is because each paper has different ideas as to which of the categories of news is important.
2. **Define** the different things that make a story printable (see content)
3. **Provide** examples for each of the categories
4. **Activity**—have students use the stories from their story files and choose which of the categories the stories fit into and explain why. The students should write the headline of the story, the category it fits into, and why it fits into that category.

Evaluation:

The written activity is due the next day. Students have time to work in class, and ask questions.

Materials:

Student's story files (compiled at the beginning of the semester)

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Class: Journalism

Unit: News story writing

Lesson: The inverted pyramid

Grade: 11 &12 (elective)

Objective: Students will be able to write a simple news story using the inverted pyramid method.

Standards: 3.C.5b—Write for real or potentially real situations in academic, professional and civic contexts

Materials: Newspaper photos

Content:

The Inverted Pyramid

- This is a method of organization where the most important information comes at the beginning of the story.
- Putting the most important facts at the beginning of the story was developed in the mid-1800s when reporters began to use the telegraph to transmit stories back to their newspapers. Because the telegraph lines were unreliable the reporters found that a dropped line would cut off their narrative style of journalism. They then began to push the important facts to the top of the story and provided detail as the story unfolded. If a line failed they would have given the paper the most important information first.
- Now it is used to make sure the editors can easily cut stories to fit them into the paper.

Procedures:

1. Students will **cut out** two pictures from newspapers (without the cut lines).
2. Students will **hand them in** and, then, pass them back out. This is to make it more likely that the students have not read the story that the picture ran with.

3. Have the students **develop** 10-15 “facts” about the story. They do not have to be the truth; in fact it is more fun if it is not the truth.
4. **Collect** the “facts” and redistribute them with the picture.
5. Students will **write** a story for the “facts” in inverted pyramid style with the remainder of the time.

Evaluation:

Inverted pyramid style story that will be handed in the next day

Additional Unit Activities

Feature Writing

Features are a form of soft news. Feature stories tell the story of a person or organization that is usually unusual or of particular interest to the newspaper or magazine readers.

The style of writing is usually less formal and more conversational.

Activity

- Have students research a famous person of their choice, looking for something that is interesting about the person that many people do not know about.
- Make sure students keep in mind the five categories of newsworthiness. For example, Tom Morello, from Rage Against the Machine, went to my high school (Libertyville); if I was writing a story for a local paper in Lake County, it would be appropriate to write about him from the LHS graduate standpoint. In Normal, IL, no one would care that he went to LHS.
- Have students concentrate on the interesting aspect that they found, and try to tell a story that hasn't been printed many times before.

Hard News? Soft News? Tabloid?

Hard news is news that is all facts. Stories like election news, foreign and domestic policy, and reports of violence are hard news.

Soft news is the personal aspect of hard news stories. Stories like the man behind the candidate, the local humane society, and a local dance recital are soft news. Soft news stories are often called “puff pieces,” but are much more popular with readers.

Tabloid stories are often sensational and not always the truth. Stories are often bought from informants.

Activity

- In groups, students look at various tabloid newspapers browsing over headlines and stories.

- Generate a discussion about the news value of the various stories and the qualities of hard news, soft news, and tabloid stories.
- Have students look through mainstream papers, and look for qualities of tabloid news in those papers.

Angling a story

Depending on what audience a publication is geared towards, a story may be angled in a different way. A publication that is traditionally feminist would most likely print a story differently than a publication that was traditionally republican, etc.

Activity

- In groups of 3-4 have students examine how different publications angle a story.
- Have each group write down the name of the publication and the way they have angled the story.
- In the group, have students decide why they think each publication angled the story, and if the way the story was angled was effective.
- Materials needed—many different publications that have printed the same story.

Editorial and Op-Ed Writing

Editorial: a story that discusses the views of the publication. This is not an objective piece.

Op-Ed: like an editorial, but discusses the opposite view of the publication.

Note: An editorial for one publication may be an op-ed for another publication and vice versa.

Activity

- In pairs distribute copies of a paper (local or national).
- Have the students examine the paper, and look for ideas that the editors have chosen to convey.
- Have the students write an editorial piece using the ideas they came up with from the paper about a current event (a controversial event works best).
- Then, have students write an op-ed piece that shows the opposite views of the editorial piece about the same event.

Journalistic Writing Final Project: You be the Editor

Who: You and your classmates

What: Create your own publication

Where: In class and at home

When: Over the next three weeks

Why: This will bring together everything that we have learned in class and allow you to use your skills to create an actual publication*

The Details

For the final project each member of the class will be using what they have learned to make their own magazine or newspaper.

- Each student will choose whether or not they would like to do a magazine or a newspaper and what the concentration and audience of that publication will be. No one in the class is allowed to do the same topic and audience.
- Each student will be responsible for “hiring” for their paper from the members of the class and being hired by the class to write stories. They will have to turn in a portfolio of their writing, as well as the final project, which includes other students writing.
- Each student is the editor of their publication and is responsible for critiquing their employees’ writing, and either assigning, or approving their writers’ story ideas.
- Each publication will have to include at least:
 - 3 news stories (2 hard news, 1 soft)
 - 1 feature
 - 1 review
 - 2 original advertisements
 - 1 editorial (written by you)
 - 1 op-ed

• Did you notice how I used the 5 W’s? Aren’t I clever? Just agree. I’m the teacher

- Creativity is key! Color is important, if not mandatory, but it is up to you (the student) as to how you would like to format your publication. You might also want to include ads from other publications as filler in yours. No writing from other magazines is allowed.
- To ensure that no two publications of the same genre have the same topic, there will be a name drawing in class tomorrow and topics will be chosen that way. Remember, it is possible to have a newspaper and a magazine with the same topic, or you could narrow your topic. For example, if you wanted sports, but did not get it, you could narrow your topic to a specific sport.
- Most of the work will be done in class. This project is due **December 18th**. Note other due dates on your story assignment sheet.

December 11—all final drafts due to editors

December 13—portfolios due

Editor Planning Sheet

Editor:

Topic:

Hard News Story 1:

Writer:

Expected Due Date:

Hard News Story 2:

Writer:

Expected Due Date:

Feature Story:

Writer:

Expected Due Date:

Review:

Writer:

Expected Due Date:

Original Advertisement 1:

Writer:

Due December 2

Original Advertisement 2:

Writer:

Due December 2

Op-Ed:

Writer:

Expected Due Date:

Remember: You still have to write your editorial, and be sure to let your op-ed writer know what you will be writing about shortly after you hire them

Story Assignment Sheet

Article 1: First Draft Due to Editor November 22

Editor:

Topic:

Story Assignment:

Article 2: First Draft Due to Editor November 25

Editor:

Topic:

Story Assignment:

Article 3: First Draft Due to Editor November 27

Editor:

Topic:

Story Assignment:

Two Original Advertisements Due December 2

Editor:

Topic:

Advertisement:

Editor:

Topic:

Advertisement:

Article 4: First Draft Due to Editor December 4

Editor:

Topic:

Story Assignment:

Article 5: First Draft Due to Editor December 6

Editor:

Topic:

Story Assignment:

Article 6: First Draft Due to Editor December 9

Editor:

Topic:

Story Assignment:

Article 7: First Draft Due to Editor December 11

Editor:

Topic:

Story Assignment:

Do not forget to write the editorial for yourself—it counts as part of your portfolio!

You be the Editor—Teacher Timeline

November 19-- assign and explain final project at the end of class

November 20—**students choose topics and hire writers**

November 21—computer lab writing day

November 22—1st article due to editors; in class day

November 25—2nd article due to editors; computer lab writing day

November 26—anyone who will not be in class tomorrow (because of Thanksgiving holiday) must have article three into the editor today

November 27—half day; 3rd article due to editors; editor organization day

No class November 28 & 29

December 2—original advertisements due to editors

December 3—computer lab day

December 4—4th article due to editors; computer lab day—recommend formatting

December 5—computer lab day

December 6—5th article due; in-class work day

December 9—6th article due; computer lab day

December 10—in-class work day

December 11—7th article due; all final drafts due to editors

December 12—copy editing day; all corrections to the writers by the end of class

December 13—portfolios due; in class work day

December 16 & 17—computer lab

December 18—final projects due!