
STUDENT JOURNALISM & NEWS WRITING

A Complete 4-Week Unit for Grades 6–10

- 20 Detailed Lesson Plans
- News Writing Anchor Chart
- 5 Story Type Writing Guides
- Interview Question Planning Sheet
 - Peer Editing Checklist
- Publication Layout Template
- Journalism Ethics Code Poster
 - Final Publication Rubric

UM Printables

Premium Teaching Resources

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WEEK 1: FOUNDATIONS OF JOURNALISM

- Lesson 1: What Is Journalism? The Role of the Press
- Lesson 2: Journalism Ethics & the Code of Conduct
- Lesson 3: The 5Ws & 1H — Building Blocks of News
- Lesson 4: The Inverted Pyramid Structure
- Lesson 5: News Values & Lead Writing

WEEK 2: GATHERING THE STORY

- Lesson 6: Interviewing Skills — Preparation & Question Design
- Lesson 7: Interviewing Skills — Conducting & Recording
- Lesson 8: Research, Sources & Fact-Checking
- Lesson 9: Note-Taking & Organizing Information
- Lesson 10: Writing Workshop — Drafting from Sources

WEEK 3: WRITING & REFINING

- Lesson 11: Writing a Hard News Story
- Lesson 12: Writing a Feature Story
- Lesson 13: Writing an Opinion / Editorial Piece
- Lesson 14: Headlines, Bylines & Photo Captions
- Lesson 15: Peer Editing & Revision Workshop

WEEK 4: PUBLICATION

- Lesson 16: Publication Planning & Role Assignment
- Lesson 17: Layout & Design Principles
- Lesson 18: Final Editing & Proofreading
- Lesson 19: Production & Assembly
- Lesson 20: Publication Day & Reflection

SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

- News Writing Anchor Chart
- 5 Story Type Writing Guides
- Interview Question Planning Sheet
- Peer Editing Checklist
- Publication Layout Template

- Journalism Ethics Code Poster
- Final Publication Rubric

UNIT OVERVIEW

This comprehensive **Student Journalism & News Writing Unit** is designed for students in **Grades 6–10** and spans **4 weeks (20 lessons)**. The unit takes students from understanding the fundamental principles of journalism through the full process of producing a class newspaper or news blog. By the end of this unit, students will have developed skills in ethical reporting, interviewing, writing across multiple story types, editing, and publication design.

UNIT AT A GLANCE

Week	Theme	Key Focus
Week 1	Foundations of Journalism	Ethics, 5Ws, inverted pyramid, leads
Week 2	Gathering the Story	Interviewing, research, source-based drafting
Week 3	Writing & Refining	Hard news, features, opinion writing, editing
Week 4	Publication	Planning, layout, proofreading, production, reflection

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is the role of journalism in a democratic society?
- How do journalists gather, verify, and present information responsibly?
- What distinguishes different types of news stories, and why does structure matter?
- How can we use the writing process to produce clear, accurate, and engaging news stories?
- What does it take to publish a collaborative news product?

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Identify and apply core journalism ethics including accuracy, fairness, and independence.
- Use the 5Ws + 1H to gather and organize key information for a news story.
- Structure news stories using the inverted pyramid model.
- Distinguish between hard news, feature, and opinion writing and write in each style.
- Prepare for and conduct effective interviews with appropriate questioning techniques.
- Write compelling leads, headlines, and captions.
- Edit and revise writing using peer feedback and a structured checklist.
- Collaborate to plan, design, and produce a class newspaper or news blog.

SUGGESTED PACING & MATERIALS

Each lesson is designed for a **45–60 minute** class period. Lessons can be extended over two days for deeper exploration if your schedule allows. The unit culminates in a class-produced newspaper or news blog. Ensure access to writing materials, devices for research and word processing, and printing capabilities for the final product.

WEEK 1: FOUNDATIONS OF JOURNALISM

This week establishes the groundwork for responsible journalism. Students explore the purpose of a free press, examine ethical principles, learn the fundamental 5Ws + 1H framework, master the inverted pyramid structure, and practice writing effective leads.

LESSON 1: WHAT IS JOURNALISM? THE ROLE OF THE PRESS

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Define journalism and explain the purpose of a free press in society.
- Identify different types of journalism and the audiences they serve.
- Distinguish between journalism and other forms of media such as advertising, entertainment, and propaganda.

Materials Needed: Chart paper or whiteboard, Student notebooks, Sample news articles (printed or projected), Sticky notes

OPENING / HOOK

Display three short text excerpts on the board: a news article, an advertisement, and a social media post. Ask students: *"Which of these is journalism? How do you know?"* Give students 2 minutes to discuss with a partner, then share responses. Record student thinking on chart paper.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Explain that journalism is the practice of gathering, verifying, and presenting news and information to the public. Discuss the key characteristics that distinguish journalism: **accuracy**, **fairness**, **independence**, and **accountability**. Present a brief overview of the role of a free press: informing citizens, holding power to account (watchdog role), providing a forum for public debate, and serving as a record of events. Use real-world examples appropriate for the grade level, such as student reporters covering school board decisions or investigative journalism uncovering community issues.

GUIDED PRACTICE

Distribute sample news articles. In pairs, students read and annotate articles, identifying: (1) who the story is about, (2) what information is being reported, (3) who the intended audience seems to be, and (4) what makes this journalism versus another form of media. Pairs share findings with the class. Create a class anchor chart titled **"What Makes It Journalism?"** listing the key criteria students identified.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students write a brief reflective paragraph (5–7 sentences) responding to the prompt: *"Why does journalism matter? How could a lack of journalism affect a community?"* Encourage students to use at least two specific examples from the lesson in their response.

CLOSURE

Students share one sentence from their reflection with a partner. Then, as a whole class, create a working definition of journalism to display in the classroom for the duration of the unit.

ASSESSMENT

Check reflective paragraphs for understanding of journalism's purpose. Listen for accurate use of key terms (accuracy, fairness, watchdog) during class discussion. Review the class anchor chart for accuracy.

DIFFERENTIATION & EXTENSIONS

Support: Provide a sentence starter for the reflection ("Journalism matters because..."). Offer a word bank of key terms. **Challenge:** Ask students to research a famous journalist and write a brief profile explaining how their work exemplified the principles discussed. Students can also compare how the same story is covered in different outlets.

LESSON 2: JOURNALISM ETHICS & THE CODE OF CONDUCT

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Identify core ethical principles that guide responsible journalism.
- Analyze ethical dilemmas journalists may face.
- Draft a personal journalism ethics statement.

Materials Needed: Journalism Ethics Code Poster (included in resources), Scenario cards (prepared by teacher), Student notebooks, Chart paper, Markers

OPENING / HOOK

Present the following scenario: *"A student journalist discovers that a popular teacher is leaving mid-year due to a personal issue. Should the student report this story? Why or why not?"* Allow 3 minutes for students to discuss in small groups, then share their reasoning with the class. Highlight how different students weighed competing values such as the public's right to know versus personal privacy.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Introduce the core principles of journalism ethics: **Truth and Accuracy** — report facts and verify before publishing; **Independence** — do not serve special interests; **Fairness and Impartiality** — present all relevant sides; **Humanity** — minimize harm to sources and subjects; **Accountability** — own and correct mistakes. Reference the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Conduct (adapted for students). Discuss each principle with concrete, student-appropriate examples.

GUIDED PRACTICE

Divide students into small groups and distribute scenario cards. Each card presents an ethical dilemma a student journalist might face. Examples: "Your best friend asks you not to report on a story that could get the school team in trouble," "You overhear a conversation in the hallway that would make a great story but you were not given permission to listen," "A source gives you information but asks to remain anonymous." Groups discuss: What is the ethical issue? Which principles apply? What would you do and why? Each group presents their scenario and decision to the class.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students draft a personal Journalism Ethics Statement (5–8 sentences) that outlines the principles they commit to following as a student journalist. The statement should address: truth and accuracy, fairness, respecting privacy, and correcting errors.

CLOSURE

Students share their ethics statements with a partner for feedback. Collect statements and display selected ones on an "Our Journalism Ethics" bulletin board. Introduce the Journalism Ethics Code Poster that will hang in the classroom throughout the unit.

ASSESSMENT

Review personal ethics statements for understanding of core ethical principles. Observe group discussions for thoughtful engagement with dilemmas. Note whether students can identify relevant ethical principles when

LESSON 11: WRITING A HARD NEWS STORY

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Define hard news and identify its key characteristics.
- Apply the inverted pyramid structure to write a complete hard news story.
- Maintain an objective, third-person journalistic tone throughout a news story.

Materials Needed: Hard news article examples, Inverted pyramid outline from Lesson 9, Drafts from Lesson 10, Student notebooks, Highlighters

OPENING / HOOK

Display two articles side by side: one hard news story about a local event and one feature story about the same topic. Ask: *"What is the difference between these two articles? How does each one start? How is the information organized?"* Guide students to see that the hard news story gets straight to the point with the most urgent facts, while the feature takes a more narrative approach.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Define **hard news**: stories about timely, important events that directly affect the audience (e.g., accidents, laws, school closures, elections). Hard news follows the inverted pyramid strictly: the most critical 5Ws + 1H are in the lead, followed by supporting details and quotes in order of importance, with background information at the end. Review the **journalistic tone** rules for hard news: write in third person (no "I" or "we"), remain objective, use neutral verbs ("said" instead of "claimed" or "exclaimed"), and attribute all opinions to a source.

GUIDED PRACTICE

Review the drafts students wrote in Lesson 10. As a class, identify one draft to revise into a polished hard news story. Work through it together: Is the lead a clear summary of the most important facts? Are quotes properly attributed? Is the tone objective? Is the information ordered from most to least important? Make revisions on the board, modeling the editing process.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students revise their own Lesson 10 drafts into final hard news stories. They must ensure: (1) a summary lead with the most critical 5Ws, (2) at least two properly attributed quotes, (3) strict inverted pyramid structure, and (4) an objective, third-person tone. Students who need a new topic may use a provided prompt (e.g., *"The school board voted to extend the school day by 15 minutes starting next semester."*)

CLOSURE

Students highlight their lead and their best quote. They share these two sentences with a partner and explain why they structured their story the way they did.

ASSESSMENT

Collect hard news stories. Evaluate for strict adherence to inverted pyramid structure, objective tone, proper quote attribution, and a strong summary lead.

DIFFERENTIATION & EXTENSIONS

LESSON 14: HEADLINES, BYLINES & PHOTO CAPTIONS

Duration: 45–60 minutes

Learning Objectives:

- Write concise, engaging headlines using active verbs.
- Write a standard byline.
- Write informative photo captions that answer key questions.

Materials Needed: Newspaper or printed articles (headlines covered), Photographs (printed or projected), Student notebooks, Index cards

OPENING / HOOK

Display three articles with the headlines hidden. Read the first paragraph of each and ask students to guess the headline. Discuss: *"What makes a good headline? Why do headlines matter?"* Explain that headlines are often the only thing a reader sees — they must grab attention and inform.

DIRECT INSTRUCTION

Teach the three components: **1. Headlines:** Should be 5–7 words, use active verbs, be accurate, and avoid unnecessary words (a, an, the). Use present tense for past events (e.g., "School Board Approves New Schedule"). **2. Bylines:** The reporter's name, typically formatted as "By [First Name Last Name]" placed under the headline. **3. Photo Captions:** Must answer Who and What (and sometimes When/Where). The first sentence describes the action in the photo (present tense); the second sentence provides context or background (past tense). Always identify people in the photo from left to right.

GUIDED PRACTICE

Practice writing headlines: Give students three articles with the headlines removed. In pairs, students write a 5–7 word headline for each. Share and compare. Then, display a photograph and write a two-sentence caption together as a class, identifying people from left to right and providing context.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

Students return to the hard news and feature stories they drafted this week. For each story, they write: (1) a headline (5–7 words, active verb, present tense), (2) a byline, and (3) a two-sentence photo caption for an imagined photo that would accompany the story.

CLOSURE

Students share their best headline with the class. Class votes on the most eye-catching and accurate headline. Discuss: How does a strong headline help the reader?

ASSESSMENT

Review headlines for conciseness, active verbs, and accuracy. Check captions for proper Who/What identification and use of present/past tense conventions.

DIFFERENTIATION & EXTENSIONS

Support: Provide a word bank of active verbs for headlines. Offer a caption template: "[Who] [does what] in [where] on [when]. [Context sentence]." **Challenge:** Have students write three different styles of headlines for

NEWS WRITING ANCHOR CHART

THE 5Ws + 1H: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF NEWS

Who	What	When	Where	Why	How
Who is involved? Who is affected? Who are the sources?	What happened? What is the event or issue?	When did it happen? When is it relevant?	Where did it take place?	Why did it happen? Why does it matter?	How did it happen? How does it work?

THE INVERTED PYRAMID: STRUCTURE OF A NEWS STORY

LEAD (1st Paragraph)

The most essential information: Who, What, When, Where. Hooks the reader immediately.

BODY (Following Paragraphs)

Supporting details, direct quotes, context, and additional facts in order of importance.

TAIL (Final Paragraphs)

Background info, less critical details, related links. Can be cut for space.

LEAD WRITING TIPS

- Keep it under 35 words.
- Answer the most important of the 5Ws + 1H.
- Use active voice and strong verbs.
- Don't start with the date unless it is the most critical fact.
- Hook the reader while informing them.

JOURNALISM ETHICS: THE CORE 5

- **Truth & Accuracy:** Verify facts before publishing. Never guess.
- **Independence:** Report the news without favoring special interests.
- **Fairness & Impartiality:** Present all relevant sides of a story.
- **Humanity:** Minimize harm. Respect privacy and dignity.
- **Accountability:** Own and correct your mistakes promptly.

STORY TYPE WRITING GUIDE: HARD NEWS

What is Hard News?

Hard news covers timely, important events that directly affect the audience. It is factual, objective, and urgent. Examples: school closures, election results, accidents, new laws, major announcements.

HARD NEWS STRUCTURE

Section	Purpose	What to Include
Lead	Tell the most important facts immediately.	Who, What, When, Where (and sometimes Why/How). Keep to 1-2 sentences, under 35 words.
Body	Support the lead with details and evidence.	Key facts in order of importance. 1-2 direct quotes from relevant sources. Context for the event.
Tail	Provide background and less critical info.	History of the issue, related events, links to more information. (Can be cut for space).

STEP-BY-STEP WRITING PROCESS

- **Step 1: Gather the Facts.** Use the 5Ws + 1H. Conduct interviews and verify information with multiple sources.
- **Step 2: Write the Lead.** Craft a summary lead that delivers the most critical information in one clear sentence.
- **Step 3: Add Quotes.** Integrate 1-2 direct quotes using proper attribution (e.g., "Quote," said Principal Smith).
- **Step 4: Build the Body.** Add supporting details in descending order of importance.
- **Step 5: Write the Tail.** Conclude with background information or related context.
- **Step 6: Edit for Objectivity.** Remove all personal opinions, first-person pronouns (I, me, my), and biased language.

DO'S AND DON'TS

DO	DON'T
Use the inverted pyramid structure.	Bury the most important facts in the middle or end.
Use neutral verbs like "said" or "stated".	Use emotional verbs like "claimed" or "insisted".
Write in third-person (he, she, they).	Use first-person (I, we) or second-person (you).
Attribute every opinion to a source.	Include your own opinion in the story.

PUBLICATION LAYOUT TEMPLATE

Use this template to sketch and plan the layout of your class newspaper or news blog page before final assembly. Remember the principles of hierarchy, columns, and white space.

LEAD STORY HEADLINE <i>By [Reporter Name]</i>			SIDEBAR HEADLINE <i>By [Reporter Name]</i>
<i>[Lead story body text placeholder. Use inverted pyramid. Include quotes.]</i>			<i>[Sidebar body text placeholder. Supporting facts or related short story.]</i>
[PHOTOGRAPH] <i>Caption: [Who & What in present tense].</i> <i>[Context in past tense].</i>	" <i>[Pull Quote: Place a powerful quote here to break up text]</i> "	FACT BOX / STATISTICS <i>[Bullet 1]</i> <i>[Bullet 2]</i> <i>[Bullet 3]</i>	
FEATURE STORY HEADLINE <i>By [Reporter Name]</i>			
<i>[Feature story hook & nut graph placeholder.]</i>	<i>[Feature body & quotes placeholder.]</i>	<i>[Feature kicker or additional context placeholder.]</i>	

Layout Checklist:

- Does the most important story have the largest headline and best placement?
- Are all photos paired with captions?
- Is there enough white space so the page doesn't look cluttered?
- Are bylines included under every headline?

FINAL PUBLICATION RUBRIC

Criteria	Exemplary (4)	Proficient (3)	Developing (2)	Beginning (1)
Individual Contribution (20%)	Consistently met deadlines; fulfilled all role responsibilities with exceptional effort; actively supported peers.	Met most deadlines; fulfilled role responsibilities adequately; helped peers when asked.	Missed several deadlines; partially fulfilled role responsibilities; limited collaboration.	Rarely met deadlines; did not fulfill role responsibilities; hindered group progress.
Content Quality (30%)	Stories are compelling, well-researched, and thoroughly answer the 5Ws+1H. Quotes are seamlessly integrated and highly relevant.	Stories are clear and informative. Most 5Ws answered. Quotes are included and attributed correctly.	Stories lack clarity or depth. Missing key 5Ws. Quotes are sparse or lack proper attribution.	Stories are incomplete, confusing, or missing essential facts. No quotes included.
Structure & Style (20%)	Flawless use of story structure (inverted pyramid, hook/nut graph). Strong, objective tone. Engaging leads and kickers.	Correct use of story structure with minor lapses. Generally objective tone. Leads answer main questions.	Inconsistent use of structure. Tone occasionally shifts to opinion in news stories. Lead is weak.	No discernible structure. Tone is highly subjective or inappropriate for the genre. Missing a clear lead.
Layout & Design (15%)	Publication is visually striking. Excellent hierarchy, white space, and image placement. Easy to navigate and read.	Publication is organized and readable. Good use of headlines and columns. Minor design flaws.	Publication is cluttered or confusing. Hierarchy is unclear. Images or captions are missing.	Publication lacks organization. No discernible columns or layout. Difficult to read.
Ethics & Accuracy (15%)	100% accurate. All sources treated fairly. No plagiarism. Adheres strictly to the Journalism Ethics Code.	Highly accurate. Minor errors that do not change the meaning. Sources treated fairly.	Contains factual errors or unfair representations. Plagiarism concerns addressed but present.	Contains significant factual errors, bias, or plagiarism. Ignores the Ethics Code.

Section	Weight	Score (1-4)	Weighted Score
Individual Contribution	x 5		
Content Quality	x 7.5		
Structure & Style	x 5		
Layout & Design	x 3.75		
Ethics & Accuracy	x 3.75		
TOTAL	/ 100		

Teacher Comments:

THANK YOU!

Thank you for purchasing this **Student Journalism & News Writing Unit!**

I hope this resource saves you time and engages your students in the powerful process of journalism.

Your feedback is incredibly valuable!

Please take a moment to leave a review on Teachers Pay Teachers.
It helps other educators find quality resources and lets me know how to improve.

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