

What's a news story?

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January 2011

5 W's, an H & an S

- Who?
- What?
- Why?
- Where?
- When?
- How?
- So what?

WHO?

- The reader (or listener or viewer or audience) is the No. 1 person.
- You are the reporter/writer (not usually an expert).
- You depend on sources (authoritative ones — not the Flat Earth Society).
 - Talk to all sides because ...
 - It's right.
 - It makes a better story.
 - Use live sources (people you talk to, events you see).
- You write about subjects (often, people).



“I am not making this up.”

—Dave Barry,
humorist

WHAT?

- A news story (or a feature story) is a factual, written account that tells readers something they need or want to know.
- Tell 'em the truth.
- Leave your opinion out of it.
- When you make a factual assertion, back it up with detailed facts.

WHY?

- Purposes of a story
 - To inform
 - To enlighten
 - To entertain
 - Sometimes to inspire
 - ... But not to persuade
- You want an effective story because:
 - You have a product to sell — it must be attractive and readable.
 - You want to make a difference.

WHERE?

- The best stories are local.
 - In terms of geography, or ...
 - In terms of what they mean to the reader.
 - Why is it bigger news to us when 20 Americans are killed in Afghanistan than when 200 Afghans are killed?
 - Why would Alabamians care about a football game in Arizona?
 - Would you, at your age, care about a cost-of-living adjustment on Social Security payments to retirees? Would you care more about an increase in Social Security taxes withheld from your paycheck — or an increase in college tuition?

WHEN?

- Immediacy is important in news.
- News pegs (tie-ins with current events) make stories relevant.
- 24-hour news cycle sometimes results in trivia being treated as news.
 - You have space or broadcast time to fill whether it's a heavy news day or a light one.
 - One day's minor story might be another day's big story (remember Chandra Levy, then 9/11).

HOW?

- First, you go out and get the news (reporting).
- Then, you write it.
 - Simple
 - Direct
 - Easy to read
 - Strong lead (introduction)
 - Show them details.
 - Your own words, with quotes from other people
- Then, you publish it or broadcast it.

**“Find stuff out
and put it
in the
newspaper.”**



TOM SCARRITT

—Tom Scarritt,
executive editor,
The Birmingham News

What's a good lead?

- The lead (sometimes spelled *lede*) is the first paragraph or two.
- What it should accomplish.
 - Start strong.
 - Suck 'em in.
 - Don't waste words.
 - Give 'em a clue.

Publishing

- Newspaper
- Broadcast
- World Wide Web
 - Sound
 - Video
 - 2-way communication with readers
- Social networks
- Smart phones, iPads & other portable devices

SO WHAT?

- Why does this story make a difference to the reader?
- How can you make him care enough to read this story?
- Think like a reader: What would you as a reader want to know?

Remember the W's, H & S

- Using these questions as a mental checklist will help you avoid missing something significant.
- Apply these questions to the details of your story, as well as to the story as a whole.
- You won't have a problem making your story long enough. Instead, you'll be working to narrow it down and focus it.