

# Let's Write a Newspaper Story!

An exciting, real-life writing course for elementary and middle school students.

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## Course Preview

### Let's Write a Newspaper Story! Get Your Students Hooked on Writing

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Imagine your students working cooperatively, motivated and staying focused on the task at hand. They're hooked on writing!

**They are writing real-world newspaper stories.**

With this easy-to-follow course, you will help students write authentic newspaper stories based on training developed during an educational partnership between the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory and the Hammond Elementary School in Laurel, MD.

During this lesson students will:

- \*Work cooperatively
- \*Research and write stories
- \*Learn valuable writing tips
- \*Write a newspaper story
- \*Edit articles
- \*Add graphics and captions
- \*Write a headline
- \*Lay out and produce a newspaper.

Kids will love this stimulating and educational lesson in writing and so will you. The course supports many standards in writing.

**Teacher, get ready!**  
**Your students are about to become REAL REPORTERS!**

# Performance Standards

**Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to:**

- \*Create a piece of writing that enhances the reader's understanding of key ideas and information, using effective introductory and concluding sentences, logical sequencing of ideas and transitional words.
- \*Create a clear organizing structure that includes descriptions placed in a logical or chronological sequence in ways that help the reader follow the line of thought.
- \*Understand and use available resources to locate relevant information to accomplish the writing task.
- \*Connect relevant descriptions, including sensory details, personal experiences, observations, and/or research-based information – linking paragraphs and ideas in ways that make a topic or message clear to the reader.
- \*Improve the organization and consistency in ideas among paragraphs by revising writing based on given or self-generated criteria and on others' responses.
- \*Self-edit writing using knowledge of Standard English conventions of language (e.g., punctuation, sentence structure, language usage, spelling) and appropriate print and nonprint resources (e.g., dictionary, thesaurus, spelling check software).
- \*Prepare writing for publication by using electronic or other resources and use photos or graphics to enhance the final product.

# Essential Objectives

**Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to incorporate elements of effective writing known as DOAL:**

- \***D**evelopment: information, arguments or ideas are fully developed and expanded upon.
  - \***O**rganization: information, arguments or ideas are logically and purposefully organized and consistently maintained throughout the piece according to an established plan.
  - \***A**ttention to Audience: effectively addresses the needs and characteristics of the identified audience.
  - \***L**anguage: consistently uses good language choices to enhance the text.
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**Students will also be able to demonstrate the ability to:**

- \*Write a lead sentence that introduces the information in an interesting way.
- \*Include purposeful and accurate information, supported by appropriate resources, to fully explain the topic.
- \*Write a conclusion that ties the information together.
- \*Include appropriate vocabulary related to the topic.
- \*Vary sentence structure, using linking or transitional words as appropriate.

# Lesson Plan

## Let's Write a Newspaper Story!

### Goal:

Students will be transformed into reporters who write newspaper stories that can be pasted up into a class newspaper.

### Objectives:

Students will:

- \*Identify the purposes of a newspaper
- \*Apply the Who –What –When –Where –Why –How writing technique
- \*Write an effective lead
- \*Use basic editing principles
- \*Apply basic layout principles
- \*Produce a class newspaper (optional)

Students will demonstrate the ability to write a newspaper story following guidance given by this course with state standards and objectives.

### Lesson Overview

After learning about writers and what they do, each student will write a newspaper story. Students will choose their own story topic based on ideas they develop from reading the newspaper. Students will edit their own stories, write a headline, lay out the newspaper (including photos or graphics, as appropriate), and may produce a class newspaper.

# DAY ONE

## Motivation and Prior Knowledge:

**Think, Pair, Share Exercise** Ask the class, “Who wants to be a writer? Why?” Have the class think quietly about this question for a minute. Ask students to pair up with a partner or in groups and share their thoughts. Then have the students share with you. Record their answers on a blackboard, making sure to write the child’s name after each shared idea.

Ask the class, “What are some of the different types of professional writing in the world?” Record the responses of the groups, which may include:

### Types of Writing

- \*Novels
- \*Short stories
- \*Non-fiction
- \*Plays
- \*Movies
- \*Poetry
- \*Newspapers
- \*Magazines
- \*Television
- \*Radio
- \*Advertising
- \*Public relations

On the board write the title - What is it like to be a writer? Underneath the title have two columns:

- 1) Good and
- 2) Not so good.

Ask the class, “What are some good and not so good things about being a writer?” Record their answers, which may include:

### Good

- \*Travel
- \*Meet interesting people
- \*Learn new things
- \*Get to create
- \*Many readers
- \*Can influence people

### Not so good

- \*Deadlines
- \*Editors change things
- \*People may not like what you write

**Think, Pair, Share Exercise** – Ask the class, “What does it take to be a writer?” Have the class think silently about the question for a minute. Have students pair with a partner or in groups and share their thoughts. Then have them share their thoughts with you and record them on the board.

## Being a Writer

\*Good knowledge of English. Think of CUPS: Capitalization, Use of words, Punctuation, Spelling.

\*Good knowledge of your field, general knowledge of everything.

\*Good observational skills: What did the team do after they won? What did the woman say when she got her lost dog back? Remember colors, sounds, sequence of events, and words of people — what you need to create the event.

\*Persistence. Write and rewrite until you think it's perfect — go after the story, dig for facts, get quotes to make it interesting, do your best for the readers.

\*Thick skin. Not every teacher or editor or reader will like everything you write. Get used to it.

\*Hard work. Writers are made, very seldom born. Tiger Woods has a great natural swing but he works out a lot and hits at least 1,000 practice shots a day.

## Additional Exercises:

**How to Read a Newspaper** — Bring newspapers to class and ask students why reading a newspaper is important. When that has been discussed, hand out the newspapers. Go through the “Before-During-After” reading strategies below for understanding and getting the most out of a newspaper story.

### **Before:**

\*Preview the text

\*Read captions

\*Look at subtitles

\*Predict what the story might be about

### **During:**

\*Look at the bold print words

\*Look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary

\*Clarify information by rereading text

### **After:**

\*Summarize the text

\*Create a visual image

\*Think of prior knowledge

\*Connect new information with prior knowledge

\*Share new information with someone

Have students practice these strategies with their newspapers, then share what they've learned with you and the class. The test of whether you understand a newspaper story is: “Can you explain it to somebody else?”

**Importance of Newspapers** — Ask the class, “Why are newspapers important to our community — what kind of information do they provide to link us to our political and social structure?” Have the class think silently about the question for a minute, then ask them to pair with a partner or in groups and share their thoughts. Have them share their thoughts with you and the class and record them on the board.

**Scavenger Hunt** – Prepare a list of items students will have to locate in the newspaper (headline, a sale price, comic strip, sport scores, movies review, etc.). Give a time limit for the scavenger hunt.

## DAY TWO

### Writing:

Review previous lesson as a lead-in to today's activities, which is writing a newspaper story. Hand out the "Task: Let's Write a Newspaper Story" sheet and discuss it.

Talk about the five different story scenarios. Show students the information sheet for each story. Ask them to pick which story they want to write and, using the Task sheet, write three reasons why they chose that topic.

Discuss any criteria the class thinks should be included in their stories and tell them to record this information on their Task sheets. Tell them that there will be more criteria as the lesson advances.

Distribute the "Tips From the Pros" sheet to all students. Read and discuss the items. Ask if any more criteria should be included on their Task sheet. Guide them.

Distribute and discuss the "Writing to Inform" sheet, which explains the DOAL (Development, Organization, Attention to Audience, Language) guidelines for effective writing. This sheet also contains a list of Linking Words and Phrases that students can use to introduce and organize ideas, work details into their story, and begin the conclusion.

Distribute and discuss the "Visual Organizer" sheet, which helps students include vital information in their stories and write a good lead sentence that grabs the reader.

Give students a word count limit (e.g., 200) and a deadline for their stories. Have the students begin writing, using their different resources:

- Task Sheet
- Tips From the Pros
- Writing to Inform
- Story Information Page
- Visual Organizer

**NOTE:** This writing assignment can be started in class and continued at home, with perhaps a one-week deadline.

## DAY THREE

### Editing:

Distribute the "Edit Your Story" page. Review the basic principles of editing and have the students complete the short editing exercise at the bottom of the sheet. Go over the exercise with the class.

Ask students to edit their own stories, applying the principles they have just learned. Allow enough time for the process and stand by to answer any questions the students may have. Option: – Ask students to edit each other's stories.

At the end of the editing process, all stories should be in a printed, one-column format.



# DAY FOUR

NOTE: At this point, you may decide to use the students' stories to produce a newspaper — in fact, several newspapers.

Divide the class into several groups, each working on their own separate newspaper. For example, with a class of 30, there could be two groups of 15.

## Producing the Newspaper:

With edited stories in hand, distribute the "Newspaper Layout" sheet and discuss layout principles with the class.

Within each group, assign students the following different job responsibilities:

- 1) Have each group decide on a name for their newspaper. Record all ideas and have the group vote.
- 1) Design the newspaper banner (using the voted-on newspaper name).
- 2) Draw pictures for the stories (as needed).
- 3) Locate photographs or cut out pictures from magazine to illustrate stories.
- 5) Lay out the paper, placing stories according to their importance.

The end product for each group will be a pasted-up, two-page (or more) newspaper. The paper can then be reproduced and distributed.

NOTE: For sample layouts, see the three student newspapers at the end of this lesson.

## Options:

- 1) Xerox the newspapers.
- 2) If PageMaker or other design/layout software is available, the class can produce a "slicker" version of the newspaper, which can then be printed (perhaps in color) for distribution.
- 3) Take the finished product to a printing store and have them print it in color for a nominal fee.

## Closure:

Think, Pair, Write Exercise – Distribute the "What I Have Learned" worksheet. Have students preview and think about the different questions:

- 1) What have you learned about writing a newspaper story? List five specific examples.
- 2) What did you like about being a reporter? Give two specific examples to support your answer.
- 3) Would you ever want to become a reporter? Give two reasons why or why not?

Have students pair up with a partner to discuss the questions and record their ideas on their worksheets.

When the students have completed the worksheets, lead a class discussion of the three questions and the various student answers.

## Assessment:

Observe student participation.

Read newspaper stories and compare to criteria.

Read and evaluate "What I Have Learned."

# Task: Let's Write a Newspaper Story!

During this project you are going to become a real newspaper writer. Your teacher is going to offer you four story ideas to choose from, or you can pick your own story.

Think about what interests you. Also think about what you need to do to write a successful newspaper story – things like writing a good lead sentence, spelling correctly, and putting an interesting quote in your story. Your story and the stories of other students will go together to make a class newspaper.

There are hundreds of stories all around you. Every person, every school, every community has a story to tell. Just keep **Who**, **What**, **Where**, **When** and **Why** in mind as you start off with a great lead, tell the story – maybe throwing in a quote or two – and finish off with an eye-catching headline. To make a REALLY great story, use a photo or a graphic.

To start you thinking, here are some of the stories recently turned in by students for their newspaper:

All About Jupiter.	Be Smart! Don't Start Smoking
Will the Yankees Win the World Series?	Construction in Our Community
My Dog Mia	Help Save Asthma Sufferers
Cherry Tree Farms Construction	Motocross Action
The Best Grandmother	Scooter Safety
People Like Ice-skating	Horseback Riding Dangers
The Funniest Teacher in School	The Blizzard in Buffalo
What is a Twin?	The Secrets of Soccer
What It's Like to Be in Middle School	Don't Do Drugs
Sounds of Wind Instruments	A New Teacher
Dangerous Reptiles	Kids' Right to Vote
Harry Potter	Chorus Concert
Do Kids Have Too Much Homework?	A Hero in Our Midst
Nintendo's Next Game	My Soccer Team
The Best Book Fair	Halloween Safety Rules
The Vice Principal Talks about School	Elementary School Beginner's Band
My New Baby Sister	A Motorized Tricycle
Online Safety	Homemade Costumes
Kids for President	Taking a Look at Space
No Fingerboards in School	Homeless (A True Story)
What It's Like to Be a High Schooler	Being the Oldest
What's Your Favorite Sport?	Why is P.E. a Popular Subject?
The Annual Turkey Trot	Mia Hamm: A Great Soccer Player
Where is Celion Dion Now?	What Boys and Girls Like to Wear

**Give you an idea? Cool. Let's write a newspaper story!**

**What story did you choose to write? Give three reasons for your choice.**

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

**Write down what you should do to make this a successful newspaper story - one that your readers will understand and enjoy.**

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

4) \_\_\_\_\_

5) \_\_\_\_\_

# Tips from the Pros

You've just been assigned to write a story for your newspaper. Here are some tips to help you write a good one.

**Who – What – When – Where – Why – How.** Almost all newspaper stories start off by answering most of these questions. Try to answer these questions in your story. For example: "Sherry Smith won first place in the Cutest Pet contest yesterday at the local mall." Check your local newspaper for more examples.

**Accuracy.** Your writing might be wonderful, but if you don't get the facts right, people won't believe what you write the next time. Make sure everything you say is true. And spell people's names correctly — they get upset when you don't.

**What makes a good story?** Anything that could interest or affect your classmates, teachers, school or family will make a good story. For example, science topics like the strange worlds of the planets and how the weather works ... school activities such as fund-raisers, what goes on in music classes, and the importance of safety patrols ... after-school activities ... a review of a book you enjoyed ... or how middle school will be different from fourth grade all could make good newspaper stories. Be curious. Ask yourself, "What would I like to know more about?" — then write a story about it.

**Interviews.** You may want to interview someone to get the facts. Here's what to do:

- Make an appointment. Call or meet with the person, tell them what kind of a story you want to write, then set a time and place for the interview.
- Prepare questions. Write down the questions you want to ask. For example, "How long have you been working here?" "What do you like most about your job?" and "Is there anything you would like to tell our readers?"
- Take tools. Take a small notebook and two pens or pencils to the interview.
- Write it down. Take notes as the person answers your questions — you want to be sure to quote the person accurately in your story. It's OK to ask the person to repeat what they said or ask them what they mean if you don't understand them the first time. The main thing is to get it right.

**Research.** Use encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs and other reference materials to get the facts you need. More and more reporters are doing their research on the Internet. Research includes interviewing people — such as a professor or doctor or coach — who know the facts. And your research may be just your own observation of an event: for example, reporting on the visit of a policeman and his dog to your class.

**Writing the story.** Start with a good lead— a sentence that grabs your reader and makes her want to read more — for example, "The fourth grade class painted one wall of their classroom with a picture so strange that their teacher immediately sent for the principal." Write your story plainly so that everyone can understand it. If possible, use quotes in your story to make it more interesting — for example, "The flames were so hot I thought my helmet would melt," the firefighter said. And remember to answer the questions **Who – What – When – Where – Why – How.**

# Writing to Inform

## **Development**

- \*All necessary information needed to understand the story is present
- \*Ideas and actions are fully developed and explained

## **Organization**

- \*Ideas are organized logically (Beginning, Middle, and End)
- \*Topic sentence (the story lead) introduces the topic
- \*Sufficient, appropriate details fully support the topic
- \*Concluding sentence ties the story together

## **Attention To Audience**

- \*Enough information is presented so reader can understand the topic
- \*Story answers questions the reader might have

## **Language**

- \*Vocabulary is appropriate for the topic
- \*Precise, appropriate, and descriptive language adds meaning to the story
- \*Variety of sentence structures and use of linking words or phrases, as appropriate, make the story easy to read and understand

## Linking Words and Phrases

**To introduce and organize ideas**

First, ...To begin with, ... Next, ... Another ...In addition

**To introduce details**

For example, ...For instance, ... In fact, ... such as ... including

**To compare and contrast**

Similarly

Compared to

Have in common

Even though

Rather than

On the other hand

On the contrary

Although

As opposed to

However

In contrast

Otherwise

# Visual Organizer

Almost all newspaper stories start off by answering most of these questions. Try to answer these questions in your story.

Who: \_\_\_\_\_

What: \_\_\_\_\_

When: \_\_\_\_\_

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

Why: \_\_\_\_\_

How: \_\_\_\_\_

**Lead Sentence** (a sentence that includes some of the information above and that grabs the reader)

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# Edit Your Story!

You've written a GOOD story. But before you turn it in, **edit** it — go over the story again, fixing mistakes, maybe rewriting some things — and turn it into a GREAT story. Here's how.

1. Make sure you have included **who – what – when – where – why – how**.
2. Don't editorialize . That means, don't put in what you think or believe. For example, don't write: "Science is the most useful subject you can take in school." That's your opinion and other people might disagree with you. And, besides, how can you prove it?
3. Write clearly, using simple words. Imagine that you are telling the story to your friend.
4. Check the spelling of all words, especially people's names.
5. Make sure your quotes are accurate and in the proper form, like this: "I enjoy being a safety patrol," Carol said. **Remember:** the comma goes inside the quote mark.
6. Numbers. Spell out numbers 1 to 9, and use figures for 10 and above. For example, "We have two cars and 12 children." Spell out a number at the beginning of a sentence.

Wrong: "120 children are in the fourth grade."

Right: "One hundred and twenty children are in the fourth grade." Or, "There are 120 children in the fourth grade."

It is OK to start a sentence with the number of a year: "2001 has been an exciting year."

**Practice your editing skills with the story below, and then edit your own story.**

A large family of bats is pretty scary. They have started living on the roof of hometown elementary. Every night at that time of day when the sun is just going down they fly off the roof and circle overhead in search of food and then after about 1 hour they all return to the roof to sleep for the night. "Bats help the environment by eating mosquitoes and other harmful insects", says Mrs. Robbertson, our science teacher.

# Newspaper Layout

You've all written great articles that will become part of a newspaper. Your articles will have a headline and your byline, but how do you decide where to place them in the paper? Consider these **general guidelines**:

- Top priority are the articles near the front (pages 1 – 2). These are the news items of interest to all students in your class and perhaps to the whole school: for example, the opening of a computing center, safety topics, or a new principal coming to school.
- Next come the “feature” articles, such as:
  - Stories on a teacher, classmate or event at the school (say, a book fair or a school concert)
  - Articles about topics outside of school (story about a relative, pet, hobby, etc.)
  - Sports and entertainment stories.
- Group similar subjects together on a page:
  - Science articles on animals, the planets, the sun, etc.
  - Articles on academic subjects
  - Feature stories on teachers, a principal or other school personnel
  - Reviews of Harry Potter books and a biography on author J. K. Rowling.
- Do you have a picture or graphic to go with the article? Placement of an article sometimes depends on how much space you have for an illustration. Always put the picture with the story.
- How long are your articles? If your main story is long and has a photo to go with it, it could take up most of the front page. So, to make room for other stories start your main story on the front page to draw the reader's attention, then continue – or “jump” – it to an inside page.