

# What is “Journalism?”



Journalism is a form of writing that tells people about things that really happened, but that they might not have known about already.

People who write journalism are called “journalists.” They might work at newspapers, magazines, websites or for TV or radio stations.

The most important characteristic shared by good journalists is *curiosity*. Good journalists love to read and want to find out as much as they can about the world around them.

Journalism comes in several different forms:

## I. News

- A. Breaking news: Telling about an event as it happens.
- B. Feature stories: A detailed look at something interesting that's not breaking news.
- C. Enterprise or Investigative stories: Stories that uncover information that few people knew.

## II. Opinion

- A. Editorials: Unsigned articles that express a publication's opinion.
- B. Columns: Signed articles that express the writer's reporting and his conclusions.
- C. Reviews: Such as concert, restaurant or movie reviews.

Online, journalism can come in the forms listed above, as well as:

- Blogs: Online diaries kept by individuals or small groups.
- Discussion boards: Online question and answer pages where anyone can participate.
- Wikis: Articles that any reader can add to or change.

The best journalism is easy to read, and just sounds like a nice, smart person telling you something interesting.

## Reporting

How do you get the facts for your news story? By reporting!

There are three main ways to gather information for a news story or opinion piece:

1. Interviews: Talking with people who know something about the story you are reporting.
2. Observation: Watching and listening where news is taking place.
3. Documents: Reading stories, reports, public records and other printed material.

The people or documents you use when reporting a story are called your “sources.” In your story, you always tell your readers what sources you've used. So you must remember to get the exact spelling of all your sources' names. You want everything in your story to be accurate, including the names of the sources you quote.

Often, a person's name is not enough information to identify them in a news story. Lots of people have the same name, after all. So you will also want to write down your sources' ages, their hometowns, their jobs and any other information about them that is relevant to the story.

Whenever you are interviewing someone, observing something happening or reading about something, you will want to write down the answers to the “Five Ws” about that source:

- *Who* are they?
- *What* were they doing?
- *Where* were they doing it?
- *When* they do it?
- *Why* did they do it?

Many good reporters got their start by keeping a diary. Buy a notebook, and start jotting down anything interesting you hear, see or read each day. You might be surprised to discover how many good stories you encounter each week!

## Writing

Here are the keys to writing good journalism:

- Get the facts. All the facts you can.
- Tell your readers where you got every bit of information you put in your story.
- Be honest about what you do not know.
- Don't try to write fancy. Keep it clear.

Start your story with the most important thing that happened in your story. This is called your “lead.” It should summarize the whole story in one sentence.

From there, add details that explain or illustrate what's going on. You might need to start with some background or to “set the scene” with details of your observation. Again, write the story like you were telling it to a friend. Start with what's most important, then add background or details as needed.

When you write journalism, your paragraphs will be shorter than you are used to in classroom writing. Each time you introduce a new source, you will start a new paragraph. Each time you bring up a new point, you will start a new paragraph. Again, be sure that you tell the source for each bit of information you add to the story.

Whenever you quote someone's exact words, you will put them within quotation marks and provide “attribution” at the end of the quote. Here's an example:

“I think Miss Cherng's class is really great,” ten-year-old McKinley student Hermione Granger said.

Commas go inside the closing quote mark when you are providing attribution.

Sometimes, you can “paraphrase” what a source says. That means that you do not use the source's exact words, but reword it to make it shorter, or easier to understand. You do not use quote marks around a paraphrase, but you still need to write who said it. Here's an example:

Even though the class was hard, students really liked it, McKinley fourth-grader Hermione Granger said.

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