

Storytelling; News Stories Lesson Plans (Grant Dinsdale and Barbara Quill)

Storytelling: News Stories

Week 4/Day 1

Elements of a News Story

Common Core Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5](#) Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#) Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Supplies: 2 Copies of the Inverted Pyramid per student (handout 1 & 2), news story (handout 3), News Determinants (Handout 4) and newspapers

Time of Lesson: 50 minutes

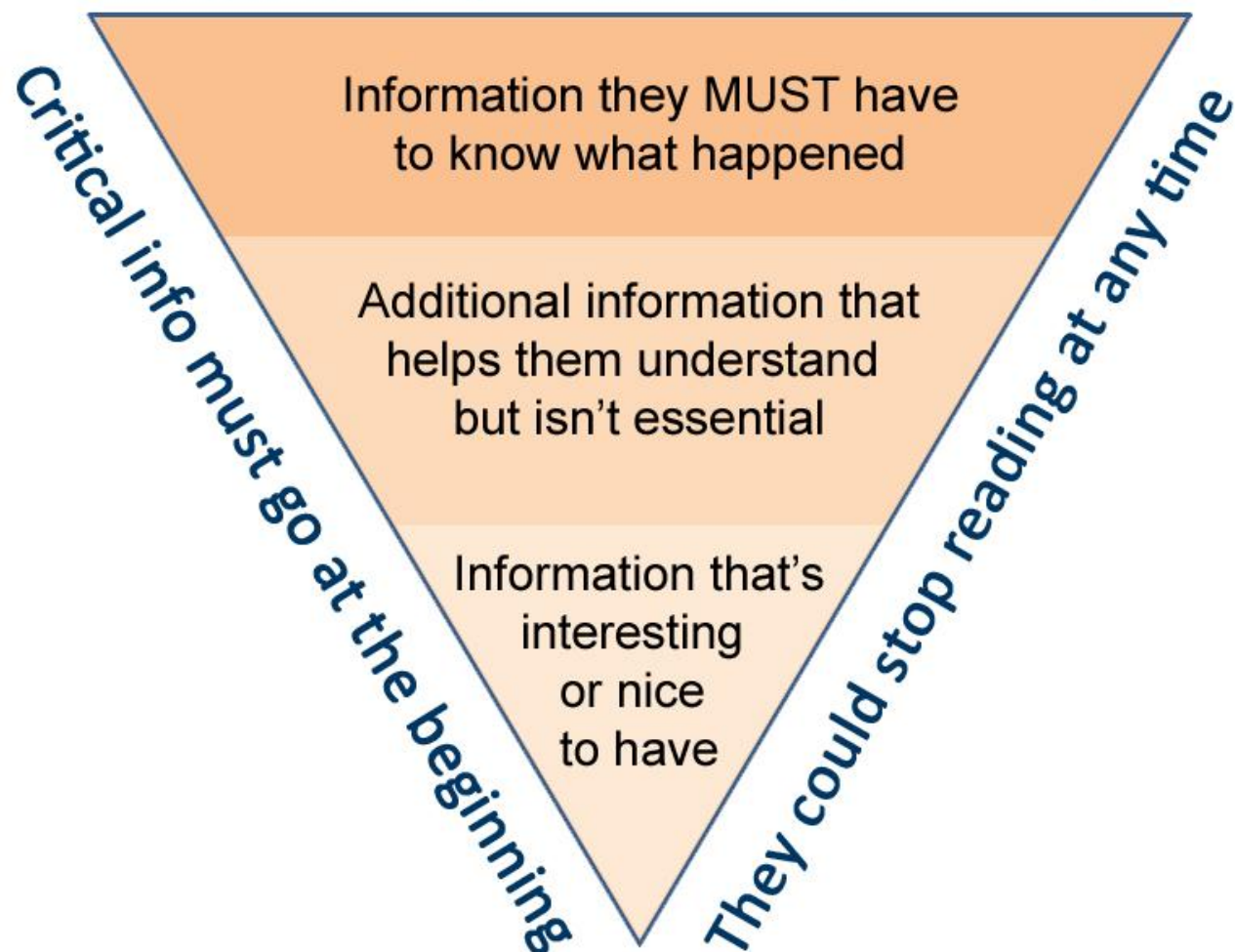
Objective: Students will identify the 5 W's and H of news writing: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How and understand their importance in the structure of the news story. Students will also study news qualities that determine how some stories are more "newsworthy" than others.

Lesson Plan:

1. Explain the elements of a news story: the 5 W's and H and their importance in the formation of the story.
2. Explain the use of the inverted pyramid that is used in crafting a news story (Handout 1).
3. After reviewing how the news story is assembled, use the blank inverted pyramid (Handout 2) to place the information from Handout 3 in the proper order. Note that the information in handout 3 is in chronological order. What is the LEAD in that story?
4. Explain the values that determine the newsworthiness of a story. (Handout 4)
5. List at least two news determinants for the Parent-Teacher Association story with a defense as to why that determinant applies to that story.

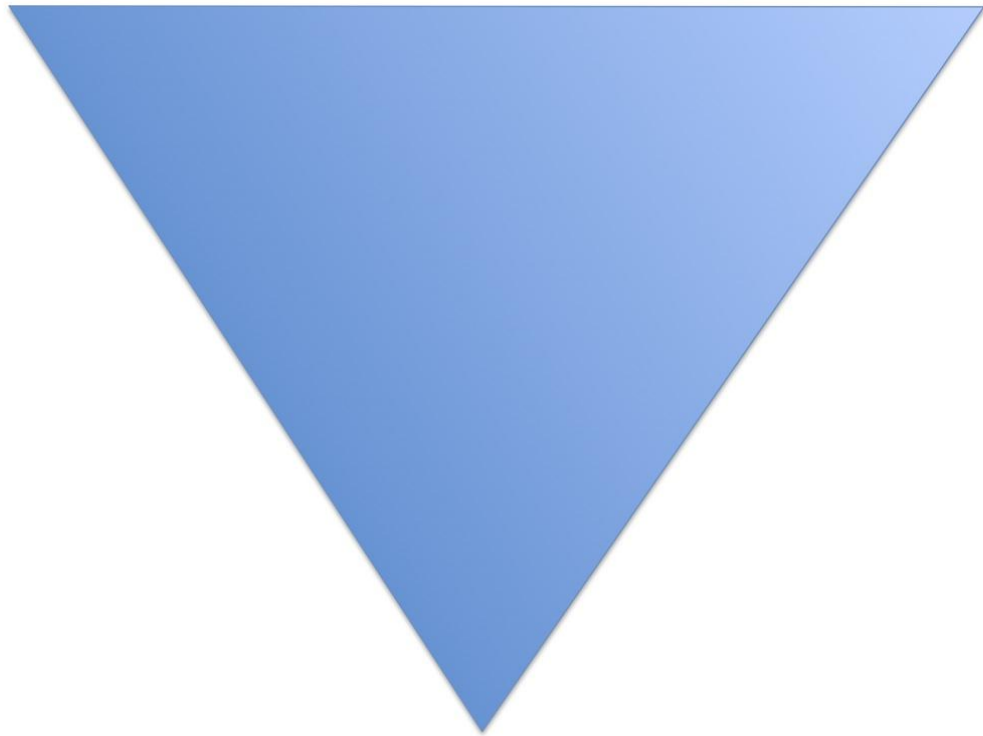
Evaluation: For homework, test your skills using Exercise 11A (pp 144-145) in the *School Newspaper Adviser's Survival Guide*, test your knowledge of the lesson by identifying the 5 W's and H. Share answers with the class.

Inverted Pyramid News Writing



Handout 1

Inverted Pyramid



Handout 2

The following is from Tim Harrower's *Newswriting Basics*. It is an actual copy of minutes from a meeting that took place in New Jersey, and which actually ran in a newspaper.

The Parent-Teacher Association of Cornelis Banta School held its regular monthly meeting Tuesday evening in the school cafeteria, for the election of officers for the coming year. Mrs. Noah ten Floed, president, was the chair. The nominating committee proposed Mrs. Douwe Taleran for president, Mrs. David Demarest for vice-president, and Mrs. Laurens van Boschkerken for secretary-treasurer. It was moved and seconded that the nominations be closed.

Mrs. Gianello Venutoleri arose and said that she wanted to nominate Mrs. Nuovo Cittadino, Mrs. Guiseppe Soffiate, and Mrs. Salvatore dal Vapore. Mrs. ten Floed ruled Mrs. Venutoleri out of order. Mrs. Venutoleri appealed to the parliamentarian, Miss Sarah Kierstad, who sustained the chair.

Mrs. Venutoleri took a small automatic pistol from her handbag and shot Mrs. ten Floed between the eyes. Constable Abraham Brinkerhof came and escorted Mrs. Venutoleri to the county jail. The body of Mrs. ten Floed was removed to Van Emburgh's Funeral Parlor.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned for refreshments, which were served by Mrs. Adrian Blauvelt's committee. The next meeting will be held on Friday evening, Sept. 10, for the installation of officers.

Handout 3

Handout 4 - News Determinants

Journalists consider news determinants when writing the lead. The determinants (or news value of the story) also determines what makes some stories more newsworthy than others.

- **Prominence:** How well known are the people involved in the story? If the people involved are well known to local readers, or are well known on a national level, readers will be more interested in the news. Think about how things celebrities do are often big news, but if you or your neighbors did the same thing it probably wouldn't be news at all . that's prominence at work.
- **Proximity:** Location, location, location. If the event is happening close by, it will impact local readers more than if it is happening across town, or across the world. Watch a local newscast when a tragedy or disaster strikes. Chances are they'll mention if any local people were killed or injured . that's proximity.
- **Timeliness:** If something is happening NOW, it has more impact than something that happened yesterday or last week. No one wants to read old news, so start off with the newest development to keep readers interested.
- **Oddity/Uniqueness:** Think Weekly World News and Ripley's Believe it or Not. If something is unusual, the oddity alone can make it newsworthy, because people want to know why it has happened.
- **Consequence:** An event or decision with consequence is one that will affect readers' lives in some way. The bigger the impact, the more readers will want to know about it. That's why big businesses laying off workers, construction projects that will cause detours and traffic slowdowns, distracted driving laws, and food recalls are news -- they will make a difference in people's lives, and they need to know how they will be affected.
- **Human interest:** Human-interest stories appeal to reader's emotions. They may make a reader happy, nostalgic, sad, angry or sympathetic.

Thanks to **Susan Fergusson** journalism teacher at Mount Si High School, Snoqualmie, Wash.

Storytelling: News Stories

Week 4/Day 2

The Lead (Yes, it's different from a Feature Lead!)

Common Core Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5](#) Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6](#) Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Supplies: newspapers, handouts, *School Newspaper Adviser's Guide*

Time of Lesson: 50 minutes

Students will: be able to locate leads in a story, and learn how to construct effective leads for news stories. They will recognize the difference between a hard news lead and a feature lead.

Lesson Plan:

1. Introduce the summary lead (pp 146-147) in *School Newspaper Adviser's Guide* and go over the tips for writing good leads
2. To check student knowledge of the instruction, hand out copies of three summary leads from a professional newspaper and have students (in pairs if desired) complete the exercise on pp 148-149.
3. Examine the kinds of feature leads (Handout 1)
4. Students will be assigned to groups of three or four. Each group will be given a feature story and a hard news story (Handout 2).
5. Within their groups, students will be asked to read each story and discuss and list the differences and similarities. Then they will be asked to explain which story is a feature and contains a strong narrative lead and thread. They may use the dictionary to look-up and define narrative.
6. Their primary objective within their groups is to begin to recognize that news stories may be told in different styles. Each group will choose a spokesperson to explain to the class which story was a feature and what makes a strong narrative.
7. What were elements in the feature story that compelled them to continue reading? (Students should be able to determine that a strong narrative is about the ability to tell a story in a compelling manner that uses basic, powerful language within a limited space.)

Evaluation: For homework, choose a news story and a feature on your own, explain the differences and similarities, and determine how the leads "work" for each story.

Handout 1 - Examples of feature leads

from Wanda Garner Cash editor, The Baytown (Texas) Sun

Striking statement

- Short, snappy statement intended to surprise the reader.
- “Britney Spears paid a visit to PHS last week.”
- “You don’t have to look far to find discrimination at PHS.”

Contrast

- Plays up opposites or extremes.
- “Snow still covers the ground, but practice for spring sports is in full swing.”
- “Juan Vasquez dropped out of school after the sixth grade, but now he is one of Robstown’s wealthiest citizens.”

Literary or historical allusion

- Uses reference to history, literature or popular culture to help reader identify with the situation to be explained in the story.
- “Like the story of David and Goliath, tiny Pecos High School defeated Presidio, the state’s reigning football giant, in spectacular fashion Saturday night.”
- “Stephenville’s state championship hopes sank quicker than the Titanic when Terry Kirby broke his ankle in the first quarter of last week’s game.”

Suspended interest

- Entices readers to continue reading by slowly adding or inserting interesting surprising facts into introduction, or using sly, humorous references or information to whet readers’ appetite or tease reader’s curiosity.
- “Suzanne Kwan was involved in a two-car, one-bicycle, one-snake accident in late October.”

Quotation

- Gets main character(s) of story into the opening immediately. (Even the best writers have a hard time with this one. Paraphrase or partial quote works much better in the lead paragraph.)
- “Unless there is a dramatic improvement in student behavior, we soon will be forced to resort to torture and corporal punishment,” said senior Larry Johnson, who was acting principal in last week’s Student Government Day.

Handout 2

The Little Prince Gets a Name: George

By [JENNIFER PRESTON](#), *The New York Times*

Published: July 24, 2013

George Alexander Louis is the name of the world's most famous baby.

Less than a day after the newborn was taken home from a hospital by Prince William and his wife, the former Kate Middleton, royal officials on Wednesday announced the name of the boy, who is third in line to the British throne.

"The baby will be known as His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge," Clarence House, the official residence of the new parents, announced in [a Twitter post](#).

Although it has been common royal practice for the public to have to wait days, even weeks for the royal naming, the announcement came surprisingly quickly. Royal officials insisted that the couple chose the name themselves. The baby was born on Monday at St. Mary's Hospital in London.

George had been a top choice with betting firms. It was among the names of former kings in the 1,000-year monarchy that people had placed bets the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge would choose. Other favorites included James, Philip, Henry and Edward.

James was a popular bet because of James I, the first Stuart king. Some people saw James as a way for the royal family to perhaps send a message to the people of Scotland 14 months before they are scheduled to vote in an independence referendum.

But the name George was considered the best bet because of King George VI, the father of Queen Elizabeth II. The queen, great-grandmother to the new baby, had voiced strong affection over the years for her father, who died of lung cancer in 1952 while in his 50s. He was portrayed by Colin Firth in the 2010 movie "The King's Speech," which won an Oscar for best picture.

Franken Finally Sworn In, and Hugs Ensur

By Perry Bacon Jr., *The Washington Post*

Al Franken turned the normally staid floor of the United States Senate into a virtual hugathon as he embraced his new colleagues after being officially sworn-in today as the chamber's 100th member.

Franken took his oath of office with a Bible once owned by the late Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone, who Franken has called his political hero. The ceremony completed what was essentially a three-year campaign for the former Saturday Night Live star, including two years of actual campaigning and 246 days of waiting after the November election.

Franken didn't take any questions before or after his swearing-in, but showed his excitement in the hugs he delivered to Democrats, Republicans and Sen. Bernie Sanders, one of the chamber's two independents. Watching from the Senate gallery, his wife Franni waved and offered two thumbs up to Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), who had helped raise money for Franken's campaign.

The new senator displayed a little of the humor that made him famous before he entered politics, joking "I'm an extremely good-looking person" as more than two dozen photographers took pictures of he and his family during a photo-op after the official swearing-in, which was led by Vice President Biden.

"You're going to do great," Biden told Franken, who said simply "thank you."

By Post Editor | July 7, 2009; 1:28 PM ET

Storytelling: News Stories

Week 4/Day 3 (and continuing throughout the course as needed)

Identifying Elements of a Good News Story - News Journal

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Supplies: handouts, news stories, newspapers

Time of Lesson: 50 minutes

Student will: identify the elements of a good news story by dissecting them on a regular basis throughout the course; identify good stories and less effective stories in professional papers by applying elements of a good lead and news determinants; keep a News Journal to master concepts.

Lesson Plan:

1. Understand what news determinants make a news story “newsworthy.” The same handout was used in Day 1 (Handout 1)
2. To test knowledge of leads and news determinants (or qualities), complete the exercise on pp. 152-153.
3. Find a news story in a newspaper or news source online.
4. On a separate sheet of paper, identify the following and answer the questions, being specific when answering:
 - the lead - Where is the lead? Write it down. What kind of a lead is it? Is it effective? How many of the 5 W’s or H does it answer? How long is it (words)? Is it too long or too short?
 - the story - Does the story contain all of the W’s and H or answer all questions the reader may have about the subject?
 - Which news determinants influenced the newspaper’s choice to print the story? Explain. A news story may contain several determinants.

Evaluation: Continue the process by repeatedly completing this exercise on a regular basis to expose the student journalist to good and not-so-good news stories, and test student mastery.

Handout 1 - News Determinants

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Thanks to **Susan Fergusson** journalism teacher at Mount Si High School, Snoqualmie, Wash.

Storytelling: News Stories

Week 4/Day 4

Piecing Together the Pyramid

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

Preparation:

1. Find 3 recent news stories written in the inverted pyramid format.
2. Print/photocopy 5-10 copies of each, depending the number of students in your class.
3. Cut each individual copy into strips, 1 paragraph per strip.
4. Shuffle strips and place in an envelope.
5. Repeat for each individual copy. Each envelope will have one story cut into pieces. Have at least 1 envelope for each member of the class.

Supplies:

- Inverted pyramid (Handout 1 from day 1)
- 3 selected news stories
- Envelopes of “shuffled” stories
- “A Whitebread Family Thanksgiving” handout

Time of Lesson: 50 min.

Students will explore, hands-on, the proper structure of an inverted pyramid story.

Lesson Plan:

1. Review the elements of a news lead and the inverted pyramid format.
2. Distribute envelopes, 1 per student

3. Students will empty their envelope and place the paragraph strips in the order they think best follows the inverted pyramid format.
4. When students complete their reconstruction of their given story, choose 1 of the 3 stories and go over each element in the correct order. ("Which paragraph should be the lead? Why? Which paragraph should come next? etc.) This might work best if done visually on the classroom screen/smartboard.
5. Repeat with remaining 2 stories.
6. Distribute handout "A Whitebread Family Thanksgiving" (see below), an account of a fictional family's Thanksgiving day, listed chronologically.
7. Students should begin by numbering the events from most to least important.
8. Students are to write the story using the inverted pyramid format, including a proper news lead. Begin in class, to be completed for homework and due the following day.
9. Remainder of class period, guide individual students in constructing an outline and composing a lead.

Evaluation:

"A Whitebread Family Thanksgiving" assignment; determine how well students construct a news story written in inverted pyramid format using the given scenario. Recommend sharing 1 or 2 strong student examples with the rest of the class in the immediate future.

A Whitebread Family Thanksgiving

The following list is a chronological account of what occurred at the Whitebread household last Thanksgiving.

Your assignment is to write a news story based upon the information provided. Your story should follow the inverted pyramid format including a proper news lead and an attention-grabbing headline. What information is essential to the story? What information doesn't need to be used at all?

4:30 am Charlene Whitebread, wife of Randy, mother of 3, awakes to begin preparation of Thanksgiving meal.

7-9:00 am Sandy, 7, Liam, 9, and Rachel, 10, wake and get ready for the day.

9:30 am Charlene banishes the children to the backyard so she may continue preparing the Thanksgiving meal.

9:34 am Liam pushes his younger sister facedown into a puddle of mud. She retreats to the house in tears.

9:46 am Rachel rescues Bolo, the family cat, from the inside of the Weber barbeque while Liam has gone to search for matches. She also retreats to the house.

10:30 am Randy Whitebread awakes, has a beer for breakfast, and settles in to the recliner to watch college football.

11:03 am Liam begins to play "Mad Scientist," mixing various liquid ingredients from the shelves of the garage into an empty paint can.

12:13 pm Charlene's mother, Lauren Smither, calls wondering why Randy has not picked her up yet. Randy, on beer #4, stares blankly at the television. Charlene leaves to pick up her mother.

12:16 pm Liam stirs in equal portions of his mad scientist concoction into the mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce, gravy, and salad dressing.

12:45 pm Charlene returns with her mother.

1:18 pm Charlene's brother Thomas, his wife Nancy, and their son Jason arrive.

1:48 pm Randy retreats to his bedroom after arguing loudly with Thomas, his brother-in-law, over Tea Party politics.

2:10 pm The entire family gathers in the dining room for the Thanksgiving meal.

2:16 pm Thomas, after several bites of the mashed potatoes, runs to the bathroom and throws up.

2:17-2:19 pm Each member of the gathered party, with the exception of Liam, begins to vomit uncontrollably at the dining room table.

2:20 pm While attempting to stand, Lauren Sitter knocks over the carafe of salad dressing and the candelabra centerpiece. The table ignites.

2:25 pm The entire dinner party, minus Thomas, assembles on the front lawn.

2:27 pm Thomas emerges from the front door shouting "He's killing us all!" and is followed by a wall of flame. He rushes to Randy and lands a right hook on his jaw. The two men fall to the ground and begin a savage wrestling match. The rest of the family - minus Liam - continues to vomit on the lawn.

2:38 pm Police, fire and ambulances arrive at the scene. Randy and Thomas are handcuffed and taken to the hospital, as are the rest of the family (without handcuffs).

2:50-10:00 pm All members of the dinner party - with the exception of Liam - are hospitalized and treated for various degrees of food poisoning. Liam spends this time in the hospital cafeteria with a friendly hospital volunteer and eats several helpings of the complimentary ice cream.

10-11:00 pm Charlene and her two daughters are released from the hospital. They, along with Liam, find a room at a local Motel 6 and await Randy's release from police custody.

Storytelling: News Stories

Week 4/Day 5

Write Your Own News Story

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

Supplies:

None beyond those of a regular classroom. Teacher may wish to schedule time in the computer lab for the applied practice portion of the lesson.

Time of Lesson: 50 min.

Each student will create his or her own news story using the inverted pyramid structure, based upon an event of the student's choice that he or she personally witnessed or participated in in the past month.

Lesson Plan:

1. As a class, brainstorm significant or interesting events that have happened in or around school in the past month (this will most likely occur around the beginning of the school year, so there shouldn't be a lack of ideas).
2. Do the same for events that have happened in journalism class.
3. Now, have students individually brainstorm significant or interesting events that have occurred in their own lives in the past month.

4. Give the assignment below:

Assignment:

Each student will create his or her own news story using the inverted pyramid structure, based upon an event of the student's choice that he or she personally witnessed or participated in in the past month.

The lists generated in the brainstorming activity may be a source for an idea, or the student may come up with another that fits the criteria.

The story must be between 300-350 words.

Students will compose the story using Google Drive/Docs and share it with the instructor and the class group.

5. Review the inverted pyramid structure.
6. Explain that they may want to outline the story chronologically first and organize the events from most significant to least, or they may want to draw a blank inverted pyramid and place items accordingly. The form of the prewrite is up to the individual.
7. The remainder of the class may be spent assisting students in creating their outlines, leads, and getting started on writing the story.

Evaluation:

Use the completed assignment to evaluate student understanding of the inverted pyramid structure. Teachers may wish to insert comments via Google Docs and require a second draft, have students comment on each other's work, and/or present a particularly strong student story to the rest of the class.