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**Level:** Grades 6-9

**About the Author**

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**Lesson Plan**

**Writing a Newspaper Article**

**Overview**

In this lesson, students will write a news article for the school newspaper. The lesson begins with a discussion about freedom of speech and the important role it plays in journalism. Next, students will learn how to create news articles by developing 'lead paragraphs' and by using the 'inverted pyramid' model. Once this is done, they will be given time during class to select topics, conduct research, write their articles and proof read and peer edit their own and other's works.

**Outcomes**

Students will:

- understand journalistic terms and vocabulary
- understand the structure of news articles
- produce and publish written work, using appropriate technology
- analyse and assess the information and ideas gathered from a variety of print and electronic sources
- develop keyboarding skills
- develop peer editing and proof reading skills

**Preparation and Materials**

- Photocopy the following student handouts:
  - Creating a Newspaper Article
  - Formula for a Well-Written News Article

**Procedure**

This unit should take approximately one-and-a-half weeks.

- Freedom of speech – 1 day
- Introduction to school journalism/brainstorming – 1 day
- Research articles – 2 days
- Write/revise – 3 days

**Daily Lesson Plans**

**Day One**

Start out your journalism unit with a discussion about freedom of speech and what it means. Intermediate school students have many strong opinions on this topic and it gives the teacher a nice opportunity to play *Devil's Advocate*. Begin by asking the following questions:

- Have you heard the term "freedom of speech"?
- Where does this phrase come from?
- What is the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and how does it affect freedom of speech?
- Do you think we have freedom of speech in Canada? Why or why not?
- Should we have complete freedom of speech, so we can say anything we want?"

If the class as a whole seems to agree that "yes, we should have total freedom of speech" ask them:

- Should racist remarks be allowed in the classroom?
- Should a teacher be allowed to swear in a classroom?
- Is it okay to tell lies and spread rumours about other classmates?

If the class as a whole seems to agree that "no, we should not have total freedom of speech" ask them:

- Do you think newspapers should get permission from the person they are writing about before a story is printed?
- What if the person won't give permission?
- What if a story is important and the key person won't give permission? For example, if you found out that the principal was embezzling money from the school, do you think the principal would give you permission to print the story?

*(A good background resource for this discussion would be the teaching lesson *You be the Editor and You Were the Editor*, which presents several fictitious "freedom of speech" scenarios faced by a news editor.)*

Tell students that they will be writing articles for a school newspaper. They will each be responsible for one article, but may work in pairs to write two articles. Tell them to think about a topic and bring ideas to class tomorrow.

## **Day Two**

Distribute *Creating a Newspaper Article*

Lay out a big sheet of bulletin board paper on a table in the middle of the room. Ask students to form a circle around the paper. Brainstorm ideas for newspaper article topics. Encourage students to include all facets of the school, and its activities. You may need to remind them their topics will have to be approved by the principal. Explain what limitations there might be. In some cases, students may censor themselves too much, and you will need to explain that it is okay to take risks. Once the list is finished, allow students to sign up for topics and form pairs if they wish. Limit the number of feature articles. Explain to students that space in a newspaper is an issue. Space costs money and we only have so much money, therefore, we only have so much space.

Talk about how to write a newspaper article. Distribute the *handout Formula for a Well-Written Article*. Tell them that the 'lead' is the opening to their article and should hook the reader. It should answer the 5 W's: Who, What, When, Where, Why (and sometimes How). Tell them about the inverted pyramid. This means that articles should be written with the most important information first and the least important last.

### **Day Three**

Take your class to the library. Read your students an article that includes facts or statistics. Explore with them how the facts or statistics support the article. Ask them where they think the reporter found these facts or statistics. Tell students they must try to find two or more facts or statistics to support their topic. This gives them practice in research and adds substance to their article. If your students wish to do school wide surveys to get their facts, you will need to prepare a short lesson on statistics and what makes them valid and invalid. Find out ahead of time if teachers will allow your students to interrupt their classes to conduct surveys. Some teachers will appreciate the opportunity for their students to be involved in a survey, others will resent the disruption. Limit the number of survey topics for students to do.

### **Days Four and Five**

Continue researching and writing news articles. Tell students they will be due in two days.

### **Day Six**

Have students exchange news articles and ask them to check that the 'lead' paragraph answers the 5 W's. Ask them to answer the questions, "Did this article 'hook' you into reading more? Why or why not?" You may want to make up a check sheet that the students can fill in and return to the article writers. Ask students to revise their articles if it is necessary.

### **Evaluation**

Completed articles, including peer edited drafts.

## **Creating a Newspaper Article**

- 1. Outline the purpose of your article**
- 2. Choose an article topic**
- 3. Research the article**
- 4. Write the article**
- 5. Edit the article – have a friend proofread it**
- 6. Rewrite the article and type it on the computer**
- 7. Do a spell check**
- 8. Optional class activity: Use a software program such as PageMaker or QuarkXpress to create a newspaper that will contain all the articles**

## **Formula for a Well-Written News Article**

### **1. First paragraph**

In your first one or two sentences tell who, what, when, where, and why. Try to hook the reader by beginning with a funny, clever, or surprising statement. Go for variety: try beginning your article with a question or a provocative statement.

### **2. Second/Third/Fourth paragraphs**

Give the reader the details. Include one or two quotes from people you interviewed. Write in the third person (he, she, it, they). Be objective -- never state your opinion. Use quotes to express others' opinions!

### **3. Last paragraph**

Wrap it up somehow ( don't leave the reader hanging. Please don't say...."In conclusion" or "To finish..." (yawn!) Try ending with a quote or a catchy phrase.

- Use active words (verbs that show what's really happening.)
- Take notes when you interview. Write down quotes!
- Tell the really interesting info first!