

# NEWSPAPER STORY PLANNING

## KEY QUESTIONS TO ANSWER AS YOU PLAN AND WRITE

Why is this story important?

What does the reader need to know?

Why should the reader care?

### STEP ONE: PLANNING

1. Who do I need to interview for this story? Remember, you must have at least THREE quoted sources in your final story; at least one source must be a student. Also, remember that most stories we cover have more than one point of view. It is your responsibility to make sure those points of view are represented.
2. What questions do I need to ask my sources? Remember, open-ended questions are probably best. (Reminder: You need to have these questions ready to go before you schedule interviews)
3. As you interview, be sure you are writing down what your sources say verbatim. If you're not sure you got it correctly, ask them to repeat themselves.
4. Before you leave, make sure you read back anything you have that is particularly confusing or controversial. You want to give the source a chance to clarify before you leave.
5. Don't forget to ask "is there anything else I should know about this?" and thank the source for his or her time.
6. After you've conducted an interview or two, do you need to go back and re-interview for clarification or interview more people to get the full picture?
7. Once you have completed your interviews, you need to go back to your key questions. What is the most important information for people to know? What makes it relevant or interesting? That should be the focus of your story.

### STEP TWO: DRAFTING

1. News story? You need to lead with the most important information, and follow in the inverted pyramid format, using the LT-QT-QT structure. Feature story? You need to start with an anecdote, then tell the important information, then wrap up by returning to the anecdote.
2. Remember, factual information should must be attributed, but should not really be contained in quotations. Those should be to explain, expand or comment on the factual information.
3. Don't lose sight of your key questions, making sure to provide the information your readers need most and answer any questions they may have.
4. Feel free to move elements around until you have a story that answers all of the important questions, flows well, and meets professional journalistic standards

### STEP THREE: REVISING

After you turn in your rough draft, you will need to revise. This doesn't mean run spell check, it means reworking your story (or portions thereof) to make the story clear and easy to understand. This is not an optional step.

1. Read your story aloud. Are there sentences that don't make sense, or are so long and complex that they may be confusing? If so, rewrite them until they make sense.
2. Check for smooth transitions between quotations to help the story flow
3. Make any specific changes the editors or adviser have suggested, and/or rewrite or rephrase to address their concerns.
4. Re-read the story to make sure that alternate points of view, if any, are represented

### STEP FOUR: EDITING

1. Run spell-check one last time to catch any errors.
2. Check spelling of all names in the locator or staff list. Same with grades and job titles. Reminder: an error of fact, including a misspelled name, means a grade of F on the assignment.
3. Check for common AP Style errors, especially dates, courtesy titles, times, and use of numerals.