

Name: _____ Date: _____

Main Elements of a News Article

There are certain elements that are common to almost all articles that you will read in the newspaper or find on the Internet. The following list explains the five major components, or parts, of a news article.

- **Headline (Heading)**

The headline is the title of the news article. The headline should be short, does not include a lot of detail, and should catch the readers' attentions. It is normally not a complete sentence, and tries to summarize the main idea or subject of the article. It is often printed in larger letters than the rest of the article, and the major words are capitalized.

- **Byline**

This line tells who is writing the article. It may also include the address of the author and the publication or news source for which he or she writes.

- **Location**

This is usually placed at the beginning of the article in bold print. If the city or location is well-known, the name can be written alone, but if the city is less famous, more information is included. For example, the byline of an article written in Atlanta, Georgia would read '*Atlanta*', while an article from Leary, Georgia would have to include the name of the state.

- **Lead Paragraph(s)**

The lead paragraph is found at the beginning of the article. The lead briefly answers the questions "who", "what", "when", "why", "where", and "how". The 'skeleton' of the story can be found here.

- **Supporting Paragraph(s)**

These are the paragraphs which follow the lead. They develop the ideas introduced by the lead, and give more information in the form of explanations, details, or quotes. In many newspapers, these paragraphs are found on subsequent pages.

Writing a News Article

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The Goals of a News Article

Most journalists (the people who write news articles) try to follow certain guidelines in their work. These principles of journalism help make sure that when people open a newspaper, they can believe what they read.

1. A news article tells the truth: the journalist writes facts that are, to the best of his/her knowledge, true. A careful journalist only states things that he/she can prove to be true, and will 'cite' the source of any uncertain information.

example: *“According to Mrs. Brown, principal of North Oaks High School, most high school freshmen take Spanish as a second language.”*

In the statement above, even if it is later discovered that more high school freshmen take French instead of Spanish, the journalist has not lied. He/she has only claimed that Mrs. Brown says more freshmen take Spanish, which is still a true statement.

2. News is factual. Something that is factual can be proved or disproved. For example, “Last Saturday was a rainy day,” is a factual statement, because it can be clearly shown that last Saturday either was or was not rainy. “Rainy days are depressing,” is not a factual statement, because it is a personal opinion.
3. News articles are objective. They do not reflect the personal opinions of the journalist. Quotes and opinions of witnesses and observers to events may be included in an article, but they must be cited.
4. News articles relate information that affects or is of interest to the public. Some newspapers print articles that are of interest to a smaller audience. When the audience is concentrated in a particular region, such as a particular city or state, the newspaper is known as a ‘local’ paper.
5. The purpose of a news article is to report the facts of a current event or problem. Although many people enjoy reading the news, the purpose of a news article is not entertainment.
6. The language used in news articles is often different from the language that is used in everyday conversation, or in stories or narratives. The style of writing is impersonal, and the vocabulary is often more formal.

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Model Behavior

The best way to develop an understanding of the way news articles are written is to read the news. The articles in the newspaper will expose you to the language and format, or structure, of a well-written news article. Published news articles are not perfect, however, and sometimes contain mistakes, misquotes, or opinions. Using an article from the newspaper, complete the following chart. (Some articles may not contain all the elements.) Can you find any mistakes?

Headline:
Author or News Source:
Subject Matter:
Target Audience:
5W-1H Questions in Lead:
Who/What:
When:
Where:
Why:
How:
Supporting Paragraph(s) Summary:
Eyewitness Accounts/Quotes:
Other Supporting Evidence:
Embedded Biases/Opinions:
Misprints/Convention Errors: