

Tips from the Pros

You've just been assigned to write a story for your newspaper. Here are some tips to help you write a good one.

Who – What – When – Where – Why – How. Almost all newspaper stories start off by answering most of these questions. Try to answer these questions in your story. For example: "Sherry Smith won first place in the Cutest Pet contest yesterday at Columbia Mall." Check your local newspaper for more examples.

Accuracy. Your writing might be wonderful, but if you don't get the facts right, people won't believe what you write the next time. Make sure everything you say is true. And spell people's names correctly — they get upset when you don't.

What makes a good story? Anything that could interest or affect your classmates, teachers, school or family will make a good story. For example, science topics like the strange worlds of the planets and how the weather works ... school activities such as fund-raisers, what goes on in music classes, and the importance of safety patrols ... after-school activities ... a review of a book you enjoyed ... or how middle school will be different from fourth grade all could make good newspaper stories. Be curious. Ask yourself, "What would I like to know more about?" — then write a story about it.

Interviews. You may want to interview someone to get the facts. Here's what to do:

- Make an appointment. Call or meet with the person, tell them what kind of a story you want to write, then set a time and place for the interview.
- Prepare questions. Write down the questions you want to ask. For example, "How long have you been working here?" "What do you like most about your job?" and "Is there anything you would like to tell our readers?"
- Take tools. Take a small notebook and two pens or pencils to the interview.
- Write it down. Take notes as the person answers your questions — you want to be sure to quote the person accurately in your story. It's OK to ask the person to repeat what they said or ask them what they mean if you don't understand them the first time. The main thing is to get it right.

Research. Use encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs and other reference materials to get the facts you need. More and more reporters are doing their research on the Internet. Research includes interviewing people — such as a professor or doctor or coach — who know the facts. And your research may be just your own observation of an event: For example, reporting on the visit of a policeman and his dog to your class.

Writing the story. Start with a good lead — a sentence that grabs your reader and makes her want to read more: For example, "The fourth grade class painted one wall of their classroom with a picture so strange that their teacher immediately sent for the principal." Write your story plainly so that everyone can understand it. If possible, use quotes in your story to make it more interesting — for example, "The flames were so hot I thought my helmet would melt," the firefighter said. And remember to answer the questions **Who – What – When – Where – Why – How.**