

Ideas and Tips for Writers

“The 5 Ws and the H”
(writing a news story)



► *Definition: “The 5 Ws and the H”*
Answers to who, what, when, where, why, and how, appearing in the first paragraph of a news story.

The first paragraph of a news story is called the opening lead – often just called “the lead.” After answering the 5 Ws and the H, reporters then ranked the information they had left over. After the first paragraph, they asked themselves, “If I can tell the reader only one more thing . . . what would it be?”

One way to help decide was to ask, “What would the reader want to know next?”

Reporters kept asking themselves the same question over and over, until they told everything they knew. When they finished, the most important and most interesting information lay early in the story. The least important and least interesting information fell at the end.

⇒ Try this!

Here are the facts of an imaginary news story. Write a paragraph with the 5 Ws and the H, plus one more sentence that reflects the next most important fact.

Decide the order to tell what happened. Finish the story yourself, adding other details in the order you think is important.

- ✓ It’s been raining all week.
- ✓ The sheriff said, “Drivers should not drive into moving water.”
- ✓ The Missouri River is 10 feet above flood stage.
- ✓ Three people died.
- ✓ The flood happened on Sunday afternoon.
- ✓ The dead were in their cars trying to cross moving water.
- ✓ The fire department rescue squad rescued an 8-year-old boy from a maple tree.
- ✓ He had climbed the tree to escape the flood.
- ✓ The flood happened in Kansas City, Missouri.



This exercise for writers is excerpted from *The I Love To Write Book: Ideas & Tips for Young Writers*, by Mary-Lane Kamberg (Crickhollow Books, 2008). For more about that book and other ideas, tips, handouts, and more to encourage young writers, visit our website at www.LoveToWriteBook.org.

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