

Decoding the News: How Structure Shapes Meaning

Materials Needed:

- A notebook or paper and a pen/pencil
- Highlighters or colored pencils (at least 3 different colors)
- Access to the internet or pre-printed copies of the following types of articles:
 - One sports news report (e.g., game summary)
 - One sports feature article (e.g., a profile of an athlete)
 - One sports opinion/editorial (e.g., a columnist arguing why a coach should be fired)
 - One science/tech news report (e.g., announcement of a new discovery or product)
 - One science/tech feature article (e.g., the story behind a scientific breakthrough)
 - One science/tech opinion/editorial (e.g., an argument about the ethics of AI)
- (Optional) Article Analysis Graphic Organizer (a template is described in the "You Do" section)

Lesson Plan

I. Introduction (10 minutes)

Hook:

Imagine your favorite team just played a huge game. You read one article online that just gives the final score and key plays. Then you read another that talks all about the star player's childhood dream of winning that exact game. And a third article says the referee made a terrible call and the game was unfair. Same game, three totally different stories. Why? It's not just about the information, it's about *how* the information is built. The structure of the writing changes everything.

Learning Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify three main types of journalistic articles: News, Feature, and Opinion/Editorial.
- Describe the purpose and common structure of each article type.
- Analyze different articles to determine their structure and purpose.

II. Body (35 minutes)

Part 1: The Three Flavors of Journalism (I Do - 10 mins)

Think of journalistic articles like different tools in a toolbox. You wouldn't use a hammer to turn a screw. In the same way, a writer chooses a specific structure to achieve a specific goal. Let's look at the three main tools.

1. News Articles (The "What Happened")

- **Purpose:** To inform. To give you the essential facts quickly and accurately.

- **Key Question it Answers:** Who, What, When, Where, Why?
 - **Structure:** The "Inverted Pyramid." The most important information is at the very top of the article. As you read down, the details get less and less critical. This is so a busy reader can get the main idea in the first paragraph alone.
 - **Tone:** Objective and neutral. It shouldn't have the writer's personal feelings.
2. **Feature Articles (The "Full Story")**
- **Purpose:** To entertain, to explore a topic in-depth, to tell a human-interest story.
 - **Key Question it Answers:** What is the story behind the facts?
 - **Structure:** More like a story. It might have a real beginning, middle, and end. It uses descriptions, quotes, and anecdotes to paint a picture and connect with the reader on an emotional level. It's less about breaking news and more about a timeless topic.
 - **Tone:** Can be more personal, creative, and descriptive.
3. **Opinion/Editorials (The "What I Think")**
- **Purpose:** To persuade. The writer is trying to convince you to agree with their point of view.
 - **Key Question it Answers:** What should we think or do about this?
 - **Structure:** Like a persuasive essay. It starts with a strong claim or thesis. The body paragraphs provide evidence, reasons, and arguments to support that claim. It ends with a conclusion that calls the reader to think or act in a certain way.
 - **Tone:** Subjective and biased (on purpose!). It uses persuasive language and expresses the writer's personal viewpoint.

Part 2: Let's Analyze One Together (We Do - 10 mins)

Let's take one of the articles—how about the sports **news report**. We'll read the first few paragraphs together.

- **Step 1:** Read the headline and the first paragraph. What information do we get immediately? (e.g., Which team won, the final score, where the game was). This looks like the Inverted Pyramid!
- **Step 2:** Let's get our highlighters. With one color (e.g., yellow), let's highlight pure facts (names, scores, dates).
- **Step 3:** With another color (e.g., pink), let's try to find any opinions. Are there any sentences that say "The team played badly" or "That was a great play"? There might not be many in a news article.
- **Step 4:** With a third color (e.g., blue), let's highlight descriptive language or storytelling elements.
- **Discussion:** Look at our highlighting. It's almost all yellow, right? The main goal is to give facts. So, we can confirm this is a **news article**. Its structure is designed to deliver information clearly and quickly.

Part 3: You're the Editor (You Do - 15 mins)

Now it's your turn. Choose either the sports articles or the science/tech articles. For each of the three articles in your set (news, feature, and opinion), I want you to do the following in your notebook. You can set up a page for each article like this:

Article Analysis

Headline: _____

1. My Guess (What type of article is it?): News / Feature / Opinion

2. Main Purpose: To Inform / To Entertain & Explore / To Persuade

3. Evidence from the Text (Why I think so):

- Does it use the Inverted Pyramid? (Most important info first?)
- Is it structured like a story with descriptions and emotion?
- Does it make a claim and try to argue a point?
- (Use your highlighters to mark facts, opinions, and descriptions in the text itself to help you decide!)

Your goal is to become a detective and use the structure as your clue to figure out the writer's true purpose.

Success Criteria:

- You have correctly identified the type of each article.
- You have supported your choice with at least one piece of specific evidence from the text's structure or language.

III. Conclusion (5 minutes)

Recap and Reflection:

Let's go over your analysis. Why did you label the feature article a feature? What was the biggest clue that the opinion piece was trying to persuade you?

Let's summarize the big ideas:

- **News Articles** use the **Inverted Pyramid** structure to **INFORM**.
- **Feature Articles** use a **Narrative/Story** structure to **ENTERTAIN & EXPLORE**.
- **Opinion Articles** use a **Persuasive/Argument** structure to **PERSUADE**.

The next time you read anything online, from sports to science, you now have the power to see beyond the words and understand the blueprint underneath. You can see what the author is trying to do and decide for yourself how to react to it.

IV. Assessment & Differentiation

Formative Assessment:

The questions and discussion during the "We Do" guided practice will check for initial understanding.

Summative Assessment:

The completed "You Do" activity, where you analyze the three articles, serves as the main assessment. Success is determined by your ability to correctly identify each article type and justify your reasoning using evidence of its structure.

Differentiation:

- **Scaffolding for Support:** If you're finding it tricky, let's do the first "You Do" article together.

You can also use a "cheat sheet" with the key characteristics (Purpose, Structure, Tone) of each article type laid out side-by-side.

- **Extension for Challenge:** Find your own set of three articles online about a topic you love (like video games, movies, or a hobby). Analyze them using the same graphic organizer. Or, for a bigger challenge, try writing three short paragraphs about the same event (e.g., what your family had for dinner last night), each in a different style: one news report, one feature, and one opinion piece.