Journalism 101: News Detectives - Finding the Story, the Spin, and the Scoop

Materials Needed

- Notebooks or blank paper (digital or physical)
- Pens/Pencils
- Access to 3 sample articles (one short news report, one press release, and one feature article—can be physical printouts or digital links focused on a single topic, e.g., a local sports team win, a new school policy, or a scientific discovery).
- Whiteboard, chalkboard, or digital screen for displaying notes.
- Optional: Graphic organizer template for the Inverted Pyramid structure.

Introduction (The Hook and Objectives)

The Hook: The Pizza Party Paradox

Imagine your local pizza shop just announced a contest winner. If you read about it in the local newspaper, it would sound factual and quick. If the pizza shop put out an announcement, it would sound exciting and promotional. If a famous food blogger wrote about it, it would be a long, descriptive story about the dough and the history of the shop.

All three pieces of writing cover the same event, but they sound totally different! Why? Because they are three different types of journalistic text, each with a different job to do.

Learning Objectives (The Goal)

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

1. Identify the three main types of journalistic writing: **News Reports**, **Press Releases**, and **Feature Articles**.
2. Explain the unique purpose and audience of each text type.
3. Successfully outline or draft a short example of each journalistic format based on a single event.

Body: Exploring the Three Text Types

I DO: News Reports and the Inverted Pyramid

1. News Reports (The Facts)

- **Purpose:** To inform the reader quickly and objectively about recent events.
- **Audience:** General public seeking quick facts.
- **Key Rule:** Stick only to verifiable facts; avoid personal opinions.

The Structure: The Inverted Pyramid

The most important information goes first, and the least important goes last. This is because if an editor needs to cut the story for space, they just chop off the bottom.

- **Tip (The Lede):** Who, What, Where, When, Why, How. (The essential facts)
- **Middle:** Supporting details, quotes, background information.
- **Bottom (The Flap):** Least important, extra details, related historical context.

Modeling Example: Let's say the news is, "Local Student Wins Major Science Fair."

(Educator models drafting the Lede using the structure):

"[WHO] Maya Santos, a 12-year-old from Northwood Middle School, [WHAT] won the coveted Regional Young Scientist Award [WHERE] at the City Convention Center [WHEN] Friday afternoon, [WHY] for her project demonstrating how sound waves can be used to repel mosquitoes."

WE DO: Analyzing Purpose and Spin

Now, let's look at the other two types and compare them to the News Report.

2. Press Releases (The Spin)

- **Purpose:** To promote, advertise, or announce something positive about an organization (a school, a company, a government office). It's often used by PR (Public Relations) teams.
- **Audience:** Media outlets (journalists) and stakeholders.
- **Key Rule:** Always highlight benefits and present the information in a positive light (the "spin"). It must look professional and official.

3. Feature Articles (The Scoop/Story)

- **Purpose:** To entertain, explore a topic deeply, or tell a human-interest story. It goes beyond the basic facts.
- **Audience:** Readers looking for entertainment, analysis, or inspiration.
- **Key Rule:** Uses descriptive language, storytelling techniques, and often includes the writer's perspective or deeper analysis.

Activity: Comparison Chart & Text Analysis

(Educator distributes the three sample texts.)

1. **Review:** Create a simple three-column chart (News, Press Release, Feature).
2. **Analyze:** Read the three sample texts aloud or silently.
3. **Discuss (Think-Pair-Share):** For each text, identify:
   - Which type is it?
   - How do you know? (Look for structure, tone, and whether it uses opinion/promotion.)
   - If the event is the same, how does the tone shift between the three versions?

YOU DO: Application and Drafting

Scenario: "The Great School Garden Heist"

An amazing prize-winning pumpkin, grown in the school garden, was stolen overnight. The principal has

solved the mystery, revealing it was a silly mix-up where the groundskeeper accidentally moved it to the wrong shed.

Task: Write Three Outlines

Draft a short plan or outline for how you would communicate this event using the three text types.

1. News Report Outline (Inverted Pyramid):

- Lede (Who, What, Where, When): State immediately that the pumpkin was found and where it was.
- Detail 1: Explain the initial confusion (the "stolen" aspect).
- Detail 2: Quote the groundskeeper or principal explaining the mix-up.
- End: Mention plans for the pumpkin now that it's safe.

2. Press Release Outline (Official Spin):

- Headline: Exciting, positive announcement (e.g., "Mighty Pumpkin Found Safe! School Celebrates Successful Recovery").
- Opening: Statement from the Principal praising the efficiency of the search.
- Body: Highlight how the confusion shows the community's passion for gardening.
- Call to Action: Invite the public to the upcoming pumpkin viewing. (Focus on promoting the school).

3. Feature Article Outline (Deep Dive/Storytelling):

- Hook: Start with a dramatic description of the empty spot in the garden ("The dirt was freshly turned, and the mighty orange sphere was gone...").
- Middle: Tell the "human interest" story—interview the student who grew it, describe the fear of the loss, and the relief of the discovery.
- Conclusion: Reflection on the value of the pumpkin and the importance of school projects. (Focus on emotion and detail).

Conclusion (Closure and Assessment)

Recap: Quick Check

Ask learners to summarize the main difference between the three types in one sentence each:

- News Report: _____
- Press Release: _____
- Feature Article: _____

Success Criteria and Summative Assessment

You have successfully mastered this lesson if your three outlines for "The Great School Garden Heist" clearly demonstrate:

1. The News Report prioritizes the facts and uses an objective tone.
2. The Press Release is focused on promoting a positive image for the school.
3. The Feature Article includes descriptive language and a narrative arc.

Reflection and Feedback

Which type of journalistic text do you think would be the most difficult to write accurately, and why?

Differentiation and Extension

Scaffolding (For Learners Needing Support)

- **Visual Aids:** Provide pre-printed graphic organizers (like a pyramid shape for the news report, and a story mountain for the feature article).
- **Fill-in-the-Blanks:** Provide the opening sentences for the News Report and the Press Release to help them launch their outline based on the scenario.

Extension (For Advanced Learners)

- **Full Draft:** Choose one of the three outlines (News, Press Release, or Feature) and write the full article (300-500 words).
- **Media Critique:** Find three examples of real news coverage (online or in print) covering the same major event (like a local festival or election result). Analyze which outlet chose to frame the story as a straight News Report versus a Feature Article, and discuss why they made that editorial choice.