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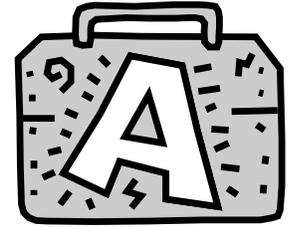
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# What Leaders Need to Know



## Introduction

Whether your group writes song lyrics, “how-to” instructions, term papers or newsletter articles, the ability to write allows them to entertain, teach, inform or enlighten others.

Writing is a nearly universal way of communicating feelings, knowledge, ideas and intuition across generations and even across cultures.

This section of the *Communications Toolkit* is designed to help young people practice writing in many ways. Through the resources in this section, you can:

- Explore ways to help kids become more comfortable with written communications.
- Use written communications skill sheets to find out how to use written communication in your youth group.
- Explore creative and practical uses of written communications.
- Explore careers that require written communication.
- Discover activities that help kids explore the writing process.
- Find out ways to learn more.

## Definition of Writing & the Writing Process

In this section of the *Communications Toolkit*, we have defined “writing” as “using language to compose

a set of ideas or concepts for purposes of communication.” Language, in this instance, can be words, musical notes or any understandable and appropriate character used to communicate a concept.

Although “The Writing Process” skill sheet on page 17 has numbered steps, writing as a process doesn’t always flow into any particular pattern or line. Each step can lead to any other step that’s part of the process. For instance, once you draft your work, you may discover that a different format would work better, or that you need more information. Although all the steps are integral to the process, each writer is responsible for deciding the order in which he or she will use the steps to create a written work.

Again, whether it’s a poem, a song, a term paper, a news story, a short story or even directions for completing a task, writers must incorporate each of these steps to effectively express themselves in writing.

## Helping Kids Become More Comfortable Writers

### Reading to Write

How do you motivate kids to comfortably take pen in hand? One easy way is to encourage them to read – or to read to them – written works of all sorts. These could include comic books, short stories, newspapers, novels, magazines, CD liner notes, poetry and sheet music. When kids can appreciate the sound, the motion, the

rhythm of words that are spoken, it gives them an excellent idea of what their own written words can do for an audience. Consider these ideas for helping kids learn to appreciate good writing:

- Read out loud to the group from a variety of works. For instance, read a short story out loud and have the members critique it for interest, entertainment value and writing style. Ask them whether the information would have worked better in a different format. Were there passages that were boring or hard to understand? Ask them to improve the text, change the ending or reformat the information into a better presentation.
- Have the kids turn a front-page newspaper article into a two-minute television news story or a newspaper display ad into a 30-second radio spot.
- Ask the young people to put the words of a poem to music. Read the poem out loud, then have the kids adapt the words to familiar musical tunes. Tell them it’s okay to change the words to fit the music better.
- Ask for a volunteer to read a short story out loud to the group. Then have the volunteer read it again, changing the story’s ending. (Short, fictional stories that can be read in 15 minutes or less work best. Your local librarian can help you identify books that would work well.)
- As kids show an interest in different forms of writing, encourage them to learn more about that form by reading other people’s work.

Have them study how a piece is organized, how long it is (and whether that length was appropriate) and what the author emphasized in it. Have the group experiment with writing the piece from their own point of view or experiences. If the piece is about a subject they know something about, ask them if the piece contained new or unfamiliar words. If there were, have the kids think of simpler or easier ways to express the same thought or information.

- Have your group members expand on the typical book report by reading a newspaper story, a written piece on a subject they're interested in, a poem, short story, novel or children's book. Then have them write the answers to several questions about what they read:

- How did the story make you feel?
- What did the story explain or talk about?
- Was the work a fair treatment of the subject matter?
- What information was important for you to know that was left out of the story?

## Understanding the Meaning of Words

When kids look at words as fun puzzles to explore and solve, instead of as stumbling blocks to understanding, their comfort with reading and writing increases.

Strategies for increasing kids' comfort with words include:

- Have kids read a newspaper, short story, speech or any written communication. Ask them to jot down words that are new to them, that they don't understand or that they like and would like to learn more about. Then have the kids look up the words in a dictionary to discover their meaning or in a thesaurus to

discover a simpler word the author could have used to increase the reader's understanding.

- Have the group work together to choose a word of the month. Write the word on a sheet of newsprint and post it somewhere in your meeting room that is visible to everyone. Challenge kids to use the word as often and as creatively as they possibly can in their written work for the group that month. Make a chart to track the members' use of the word. Place a star by each person's name each time he or she successfully uses the word. At the end of the month, reward the person who was able to incorporate the "word of the month" into the most writing exercises or group writing experiences.

- Develop a list of words that may be unfamiliar to the group. Ask them to guess the complicated words' definitions by breaking them apart. For example, by breaking "malodorous" into its smaller root words, ("mal" or "bad" and "odorous" or "having an odor") they can learn that the word means bad odor or bad smelling. This exercise can help kids learn not to be intimidated by large words.

## Life Skills

The ability to write well is itself an important and marketable life skill. The writing activities and skill sheets in this section will help develop young people's ability to:

- Communicate and express themselves effectively.
- Judge the value of information for a given purpose (for example, evaluating information for news writing).
- Ask questions to gain more information.

- Organize and plan for a final product.

- Work as a team member (for example, creating a newsletter with others).

- Build personal awareness and self-esteem by understanding their abilities and having an opportunity to experience success.

- Manage feelings (for example, using writing as an expression of feelings).

So, you may be asking, how do you get kids to write? Well, there's only one way – encourage them to write, write and write some more! The best way to develop writing skills is just to do it. Use any and all opportunities to encourage kids to practice writing.

Also, allow kids to write simply to express themselves. Kids (and adults) can be intimidated and avoid writing altogether if they're afraid it won't be "perfect." Tell kids to forget about spelling and grammatical details at first. Those things can certainly be addressed some other time if the work is intended for publication.

This section of the *Communications Toolkit* offers a variety of activities and suggestions to help you help kids write! It also offers resources to help you and your kids better understand the concepts and tools of written expression and communication. Included are definitions of different forms of written expression, a list of writing resources and ways to extend learning experiences "beyond the toolkit."

## Self-Assessment & Evaluation

After each activity or project you lead with young people, please help them think about what they learned. Make copies of the "What

I Learned” self-evaluation form on page 8 and distribute them to your group. Ask them to think quietly about the questions and make notes about what they learned, how they

feel about their skills in that area and what they’d like to learn more about. Then lead a discussion with the whole group and ask if anyone wants to share what they came up

with. Young people may want to keep their “What I Learned” self-evaluation forms to refer to later and as a way to document their learning process.

## Glossary

### Personal Expression

**Book** – A set of written, printed or blank sheets bound together into a volume

**Creative writing** – Stories, poems, songs, plays or lyrics (see the “Creative Writing” skill sheet on pg. 19)

**Journal** – A record of experiences, ideas or reflections kept regularly for private use

**Mission statement** – A statement that defines or outlines a calling, vocation or specific task with which a person or group is charged

### Public Information

**Fact sheet** – A printed sheet that presents information that is true or has objective reality

**News release** – A compilation of material that is newsworthy and appropriate for distribution in a newspaper, news periodical or newscast

**Newsletter** – A printed sheet, pamphlet or small newspaper containing news or information of interest chiefly to a special group

**Public service announcement** – A promotional message broadcast in the public interest on television and radio stations at no cost to the provider

**Speech** – Communication or expression of thoughts in spoken words; a public discourse or address

**Video scripts** – Written text used in production or performance of a videotape

### Promotion

**Advertisement (Ad)** – An act or process (that is, broadcast) or notice used to make something known, announce publicly or call public attention to

**Brochure** – A pamphlet or booklet containing descriptive or advertising material

**Flier** – A form of advertisement distributed by hand to, or picked up by, a particular audience

**Jingle** – A short verse or song marked by catchy repetition

**Poster** – A bill or placard for posting in a public place

### Other

**Case statement** – A written statement describing a situation requiring action; usually used for campaigns to raise financial or emotional support for a project

**Communication outline** – A plan or preliminary account of how you plan to communicate; can help writers organize their thoughts to write for any media

**Copy** – Manuscript or text material

**Essay** – An analytic or interpretative literary composition usually dealing with a subject from a limited or personal point of view

**Grant proposal** – A written request for financial support that outlines an action plan, budget, and rationale and support for why the money is needed

**Project proposals** – A written synopsis of a proposed activity that includes goals, intended outcomes and a plan of action

**School reports** – Written reports designed to explain, educate about or describe a subject or topic, usually for academic credit or a grade





## Careers

Most jobs require some writing skills, but a few jobs require (or allow, depending on your point of view) higher-level, full-time writing skills. As the group considers the following list of career options, ask the participants what form of written communication a person in each field would use. (You can use the glossary on pg. 11 as a resource.)

- Advertising, marketing or public relations professional
- Author
- Clergy member
- Curriculum developer or specialist
- Editor
- Fund-raiser
- Journalist
- Label/packaging writer
- Legislative aide
- Novelist
- Playwright
- Poet
- Professor
- Script writer for film, television, radio
- Songwriter
- Speech writer
- Technical writer

## Notable Writers

Having excellent writing skills has enabled many historical and notable personalities to make important contributions to our lives and to society.

**Louisa May Alcott** – Her classic works have become standard classroom literature for many young students. In 1994, her most famous work, *Little Women*, again was made into a major motion picture, a mere 126 years after the book was first published!

**Maya Angelou** – The actress, poet and novelist earned national attention in 1993 when she read her poem, “The Pulse of the Morning,” at President Clinton’s inauguration.

**Judy Blume** – Adolescents around the world have enjoyed and learned from the entertaining books about growing up written by this author.

**Hillary Rodham Clinton** – The First Lady of the Clinton Administration, who is also a lawyer, has written landmark briefs during her legal career. And her book, *It Takes a Village to Raise a Child*, written during her husband’s first term in the White House, has been a rallying cry for people working on behalf of children, youth and families.

**Charles Dickens** – The words of this classical writer have made him immortal.

**Martin Luther King Jr.** – Dr. King was a wonderful writer who used language to create memorable and history-making speeches. His words helped convince people of the merits of racial equality and world peace.

**Charles Schultz** – The creator of the *Peanuts* comic strip happens to be an excellent illustrator, too! He’s a great example of a writer who uses another medium to communicate his ideas.

**Dr. Seuss** – This genius of rhyme and imagination taught kids and adults alike how much fun words and writing can be!

**Will Smith** – “The Fresh Prince” is expert at using verse to communicate contemporary ideas in a language and style that kids can understand.

## Ways to Involve Parents in the Writing Process & Practice

The very best way for young people to become better writers is for them to write as often as they can. Enlist the help of parents in your efforts to encourage writing in the following ways:

- Encourage parents to write letters to their kids and have the kids write them back. If parents have electronic mail (email) addresses, have them share the address with their kids and encourage them to exchange messages or short letters. Even without email, parents can use a similar technique by stamping and addressing 12 envelopes to their work addresses. Once a month, parents can encourage their children to send a letter that captures their thoughts and what’s going on that month. Parents can write back through the mail.
- Poll parents to see if there are writers in the group. If there are, invite them to be a part of a session that focuses on the kind of writing they do professionally or personally.
- Ask parents to encourage journal writing at home. Have them help their kids keep holiday or vacation journals.
- Plan a parent’s night where kids can formally present and showcase their written works for their parents.
- Have parents become partners with their children in creating stories about the family history.

Other ideas for parent involvement might become apparent in the process of helping kids develop their writing skills. You also could ask the kids to talk about ways they would like to work with their parents on their writing skills and help encourage that involvement in your interactions with parents.

## Using Written Communication in Your Youth Group Creative Writing as a Group Project

One great way for young people to explore creative writing is to do so with friends or other young people who share the same interests. Kids can learn about themselves and each other through the opportunities for personal expression that creative writing provides. Activities include writing poetry, short stories and novels, songs and plays.

Consider having your creative writing group try one or more of the activity ideas that follow.

**Explore writing forms** – Each month choose a form of creative writing your group would like to explore. Spend the first part of your time together reading or reviewing an acknowledged quality work in that form. For example, for a close look at poetry, the group could read works by one of our nation’s poet laureates such as Robert Frost or Maya Angelou. To study song lyrics, check out works by artists on the top ten lists published by outlets such as *Billboard* magazine. (Song lyrics are often printed on album jackets or CD liner notes.) Your local library or bookstore can help you find examples of popular kids books or books that kids have been assigned to read in school.

Then offer kids a way to express themselves and their thoughts or ideas through that same medium. Some forms (books) may take longer to explore than just one meeting. By the end of the project year (or by county fair time), they could have several works completed for exhibit or recognition.

**Publish a creative writing newsletter or magazine** – Have each member submit at least one piece for each issue to share with other group members, parents, all county 4-H families or whatever audience your group has identified. If they choose to do a magazine, they could help pay for it by seeking local sponsorship from a publishing company or printer, or by selling ads.

**Organize peer review sessions** – Encourage the members to practice some form of creative writing between meetings. Require each writer to bring at least one completed work or work-in-progress to each meeting for review. Establish guidelines to ensure that criticism is productive and valuable to the writer, so that his or her creative energy isn’t crushed. As the peer reviewers read or listen to a work, have them think about and be ready to answer the following questions:

- What did the work make you think about while you read or listened to it?
- How did it make you feel? Did you feel anything after listening to or reading the work?
- What did you learn that you didn’t know before, either about the writer or the subject?
- What did you want to know that the writer failed to share or illuminate in the writing?
- What would have made the work more powerful for you?

Have each writer go through the same review process. Think about sharing some of your own writing, too. Ask the group to discuss the responses. This activity should be set up and run as a safe environment, one that nurtures the creative growth of the writer. Writers should be willing to listen to and learn from the peer reviewers, and to understand how their writing affects others.

## Using a Group Newsletter to Explore Writing Skills

Newsletters are designed to deliver specific information to an identified audience on a regular basis. Youth groups could use newsletters to communicate important information to their members, recognize the activities or accomplishments of their members and showcase their members’ knowledge or skills (such as in creative writing).

How can your group decide whether they need to produce a newsletter? A newsletter can be a good communication tool when the information you want to communicate is:

- Intended for people with an obvious common interest.
- Confined to limited interests or deals with one subject matter (such as the operations of the local 4-H club or group).
- Relevant and useful to the readers.
- Reliable, accurate and considered trustworthy by the audience.
- Familiar and personal. That is, the publishers are people the readers know and can contact easily.
- Short and to the point. The information can be read quickly.
- Timely, referring to the recent past, present or near future.

See the “Steps to Creating a Newsletter” on pg. 22 for more information.

## Writing as a Club Project

If you have a group of kids whose primary interest is in writing and communications, consider starting a writing club. Your group could serve as a resource to other clubs or groups in your community that are interested in making writing a part of their program.

Your group could be responsible for:

- **The county 4-H newsletter.** Group members could be responsible for gathering news from throughout the county, writing stories, editing submissions, and producing and distributing the newsletter. This could be a year-long responsibility or a one-time issue to note a major event or occasion.

- **Writing and illustrating greeting cards** that are unique to your group or program.

- **All promotion and publicity activities for a county 4-H program or youth organization.** The group could serve as the program’s public relations firm. They could work with the local staff to prepare and distribute news releases, brochures, advertisements, public service announcements, special histories or written pieces for special events. These writing, production and me-

dia relations opportunities can give kids portfolio pieces that could strengthen later college or job applications.

- **Creating county 4-H program exhibits or ads for your organization.** If your group members are interested in strengthening their written and visual communications skills, this could be an excellent project that benefits the county program and provides a wealth of practical experience.

## Writing to Strengthen 4-H Project Knowledge

4-H offers kids many opportunities to practice their writing skills. Making writing an integral part of the 4-H project can ensure that young people:

- Develop a broad knowledge of their project area.

- Become confident of their skill in a project through their ability to write about it.

- Are able to communicate with others about the skills and talents they have learned in a project area.

You can help your kids use writing to strengthen their project knowledge or knowledge on any subject by encouraging them to write:

- Instructions on how to perform a project task.

- Descriptions of pieces they have created, whether those pieces are photographs, works of art, pieces of clothing or new or easier methods for doing a project.

- Journals in which they regularly record progress on their project or work they are doing as part of the group.

- Promotional pieces (news releases, public service announcements, ads, fliers, brochures) about fund-

raisers, about their group to recruit volunteers or members, or about an upcoming special event.

- Histories of the project or their club in their county.

- Speeches to deliver during a meeting about the project.

- Résumés featuring project or group experiences that can translate into employment options.

- Project manuals for younger kids interested in taking up a project.

Any of these activities can become a part of any project work in which 4-H’ers or other young people engage. And it gives them what they need to become good writers – practice, practice and more practice.

## Beyond the Toolkit: More Ideas & Resources

### The Community as a Resource

#### Libraries

What better place to explore all kinds of writing – from journals, periodicals and legal writings to novels and nonfiction literature – than your local library?

On a visit to a local library you can have group members check out books, then read and write reviews of them.

Libraries are excellent places for writers to research possible topics, or to learn about other writers and people whose success or fame is based on their use of the written word. Libraries are also good sources of information on how other people feel about an author’s work.



## Newspapers

Your local newspaper can be a place for your group to see professional reporters and writers in action or for you to find writers to speak to your group. It can also be a place for your members to test their writing skills through letters to the editor, opinion columns, or placement of news releases or other work.

Many newspapers solicit work by outside writers in an effort to include a variety of viewpoints and opinions on events and issues that affect their coverage areas. Some newspapers even dedicate a page or section each week to teen issues, featuring articles submitted by young adult writers. Look on the editorial page for guidelines on submitting letters to the editor and other types of articles, or call the newspaper's editorial offices.

## Broadcast Media Outlets

Writing for radio and television differs from writing for a print medium. Air time is – literally – money, and the writing reflects that. News and opinion pieces are generally shorter and written with more of an ear for how they sound than similar pieces intended for print. Arrange a tour of a radio or television station and a talk by a staff writer to help your group learn about the unique skills required when writing for broadcast. Audio- or videotape a radio or television news broadcast and play the tape at a later meeting. Have the group time the stories and listen for differences in the writing style for news stories, advertising copy and public service announcements.

## Bookstores

Schedule a group visit to a bookstore. While you're there, survey the bestseller lists to take a "snapshot"

of what the public wants to read. Ask the manager to talk to your group about what people come to the store to buy, what themes or titles are popular in literature today and what kind of how-to information is selling well in the store. Visiting a bookstore can be especially informative for someone considering becoming a professional writer.

## City Magazines

Many major cities have magazines that focus primarily on local stories. If your city has a dedicated magazine, arrange for your group to interview the editors and find out what kinds of stories they're looking for. Do they accept creative works from freelance authors or writers? Do they accept contributions from young people? Do they hire paid or volunteer interns or correspondents to cover issues that affect young people in the community?

## Books & Electronic Resources

### Books on Developing Language Arts Skills

- A dictionary and a thesaurus. All writers need these reference tools to help them improve their writing skills
- *Language Arts Activities for Children* (3rd edition), by Donna E. Norton and Sandra Norton. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University, Merrill Press, 1994.
- *Picture This: Teaching Reading Through Visualization*, by Laura Rose. Tucson, Arizona: Zephyr Press, 1989.
- *Spuntz I: Language Arts Activities for Self-Awareness*, by Merrill Harmin, Ph.D. Tucson, Arizona: Zephyr Press, 1992.
- *Whole Language in Action! Teaching With Children's Literature*, by

Nancy Polette. O'Fallen, Missouri: Book Lures Inc., 1990.

### Books on Developing Writing Skills

- *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual*, edited by Norm Goldstein. New York: The Associated Press. 1996. The most widely used and taught reference book for news-style writing; useful for newsletter development, news releases and broadcast writing. It is updated periodically.
- *Plan It: Your Personal Guide to Making a Plan and Carrying It Out* (4-H 1501), Michigan 4-H Youth Programs, 1991. This worksheet helps kids construct plans by anticipating their needs and obstacles, with the ultimate goal of sharing what they learn. (Available from the Michigan State University Bulletin Office, 10B Agriculture Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824-1039.)
- *Recipes for Writing: Motivation, Skills and Activities*, by Murray Suid and Wanda Lincoln. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc., 1989. A comprehensive resource for exploring the writing process and a variety of writing forms. The book includes copy-ready forms and activities for helping young people write. "Recipes for Writing" can serve as a great companion to this toolkit.
- *So You've Been Elected Reporter of Your Club* (4-H 1472), Michigan 4-H Youth Programs (reprinted with permission from the Iowa State University and Illinois State University Cooperative Extension Services), 1989. This bulletin offers guidelines for promotional and news writing, with an example of a news story's development and tips for writing effective news articles. It also includes a practice worksheet. (Available from the Michigan State University Bulletin Office, 10B Agriculture Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824-1039.)

- *Ways to Learn More Packet* (4–H 1499), Michigan 4-H Youth Programs, 1991. Expanding kids’ knowledge is the goal of this folder! Kids are given information on writing in 18 areas – from business letters to pen pals, field journals to questionnaires and surveys, résumés to telephone resources – in a fun and exciting way. (Available from the Michigan State University Bulletin Office, 10B Agriculture Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824-1039.)

- *Writing: How and Why*, by Matthew Lipman with Ann M. Sharp. Upper Montclair, New Jersey: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, 1980.

### Electronic Resources

The following Internet or World Wide Web (WWW) resources feature opportunities for language arts and writing skill development. Keep in mind that Internet and WWW addresses tend to change fairly often. Use the general categories listed here as search terms with any of the Internet search engines: “writing,” “creative writing,” “news writing,” “poetry,” “literature,” “children’s literature,” “authors,” “novelists” or “publishers.” You could also have the participants come up with their own set of search terms. (See pg. 134 for information on Internet safety.)

**The Big Busy House** (<http://www.harperchildrens.com/index.htm>) – This commercial site, a section of the HarperCollins Pub-

lishers site, offers information on children’s literature and activities that encourage reading and language arts skill development.

**The Children’s Literature Web Guide** (<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/>) – Provides a comprehensive listing of children’s literature and access to sites where kids can publish their works online.

**Cyberkids** (<http://www.cyberkids.com>) and **Cyberteens** (<http://www.cyberteens.com>) – Two online commercial magazines that publish original electronic stories and art created by kids and teens.

**Elements of Style** (<http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html>) – Columbia University offers an online version of this invaluable writer’s tool that is also published by MacMillan Publishing Company Inc., New York.

**Kids Web** (<http://www.kidsvista.com>) – A digital library of World Wide Web resources appropriate for kids. Each subject section, including literature, music and drama, contains a list of links to information that is understandable and interesting to school kids. It also features links to more advanced material on each subject.

**MidLink Magazine** (<http://longwood.cs.ucf.edu/~MidLink/>) – An electronic magazine for kids in the middle grades (generally aged 10 to 15) that provides an interactive space to enjoy art and writing.

It links middle school students all over the world.

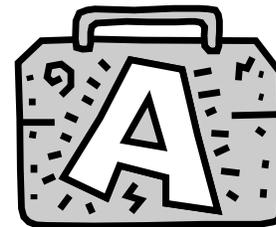
- **Schoolhouse Rock** (<http://genxtvland.simplenet.com/SchoolHouseRock/index-lo.shtml>) – An online compilation of the educational series that airs on the ABC television network between Saturday morning cartoons. The site provides a great way to help kids explore how words and music can be combined to teach complicated concepts.

- **Word Play** (<http://www.wolinskyweb.com/word.htm>) – A guide to sites that feature fun with words. The listing is an extensive, reviewed list of Web sites that explore words in their many forms. Also features word games that you can adapt and use with your group to get them feeling more comfortable with words. As with all Web sites, an adult should review the suggested sites for age and content appropriateness before sharing with kids.

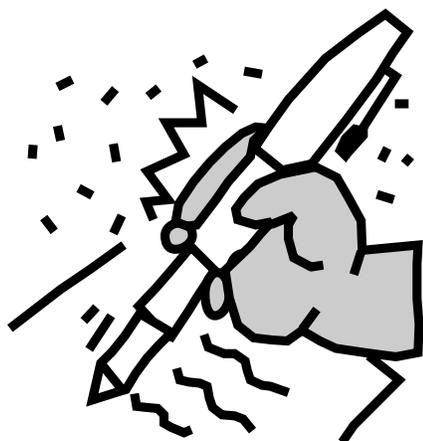


## SKILL SHEET:

# The Writing Process



There are seven basic steps to writing. Use this skill sheet to help you through the steps. And remember, writing as a process doesn't flow into any particular pattern or line. It doesn't matter so much how you incorporate the steps, but that your writing should include some attention to each of the steps.



## Step 1: Find Ideas

Ask yourself what and who are people talking about? What's been on your mind a lot lately? What would you like to do something about? What do you find most interesting? These are the start of ideas you can write about. Now write them down and save them. When you're ready to begin your writing project, pull them out and pick out the idea that most appeals to you.

## Step 2: Plan

Once you've picked out the idea that most appeals to you, decide who most needs to read or hear your idea. Who is your audience? What is the goal of your work? Do you want to entertain, inform or teach your audience? Do you want to express your opinion or describe your idea? Or do you want to change people's minds or the way they act? In planning you should:

- Define your audience.
- Decide on the purpose of your writing.
- Decide if you will give an overview or discuss a small part of your idea.
- Write your title.
- Decide on your format – will it be a song, a poem, an essay, a news article, a feature story, a poster, a videotape, a bumper sticker?
- Decide the length of your piece.

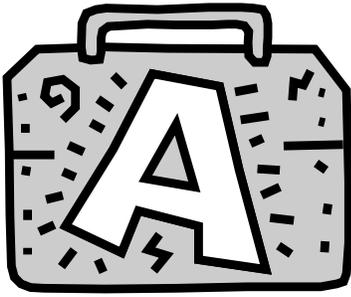
- Decide whose point of view you will write from – yours (first person – I), your audience (second person – you) or some other person's (third person – he, she or they).
- Determine your tone. Will your writings show strength, humor, fear, celebration? Will you be quiet, easy, restful or loud, boisterous, wacky? Deciding this point will help you choose the words you need to make your point.

## Step 3: Research

There are many places you can go and methods you can use to research a story. First determine what you most need to know about your story idea. Then decide how you will find out what you need to know. Will you go to the library or surf the Internet? Will you interview people? Will you watch, look and listen? Once you determine what you need to know and how you can get the information, go to the source and record what's necessary to help you write your piece. Be sure to check your sources to ensure that the information is up-to-date and accurate. This might require checking more than one source for all the information you need to gather.

## Step 4: Organize

Decide how you'll approach the information. You can present information in chronological order (measured by time), spatial order (from top to bottom, from end to beginning, from left to right or vice versa), rank order (best to worst,



## The Writer's Toolkit

- Research notes
- Dictionary
- Thesaurus
- Grammar book
- Style manual
- Editing pencil or marker (preferably in a different color than what you're using to write with)
- Stick-on note pads

most important to least important, first to last, biggest to smallest) or even emotional order (from happy to sad, from anger to resolution, from uninformed to informed).

### Step 5: Draft

Take your idea, and your plan for the best way to approach that idea, and all of the information you've gathered in your research about that idea and your outline for organizing your idea – and write! Develop a practice version of the piece you want to create.

### Step 6: Revise

Now, take a break from the piece. Sometimes even a 30-minute break helps you see it much clearer, but the best break would be between group meetings, if you have the time. When you pick up your work again, read it first to decide if it meets your goals. Does it entertain, inform, educate, encourage or excite you? Is everything you need to be there in your manuscript? The best way to determine this would be to have a friend or partner read and react to your work. Have the person tell you if there are parts he or she doesn't understand or feels you left out. Ask the person to share how the piece made him or her feel. Did it achieve what you wanted to achieve with your audience? Also have the person point out any ob-

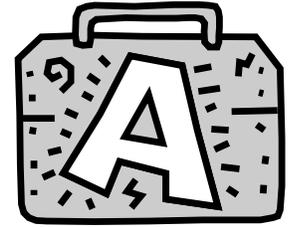
vious inconsistencies, misspellings or incorrect uses of grammar. Use the tools of writing (see "The Writer's Toolkit" on this page) to help you correct or check things like spelling, grammar, dates and usage. Note all of these issues or changes on your draft so that you can correct them, and make the changes on another draft. Then have someone else, a teacher or your volunteer group leader, read and review the piece again before you publish it.

### Step 7: Publish

You can print it in long hand, type it on a word processor, videotape it or design the words into a poster or flier. However you choose to do it, it's time now to put your work in its best, final form for sharing and communicating with your audience. Once it's done, share it! Publish your essays, poems, feature or news articles, and song lyrics in a newsletter, your local newspaper, your school newspaper or a book. Publish your script on video or audio and play it for your group, or share it as part of an exhibit at an event. Talk to your local cable television company about airing your tape on a local access channel. Incorporate your slogans, phrases and thoughts into a poster design, a bumper sticker or flier. Be creative in thinking of ways to share your work with others!

## SKILL SHEET:

# Creative Writing



## Use the Seven Steps

Whether you decide to write a cartoon or comic strip, a play, a poem, a song or a story, it's very important that you follow the seven steps of the writing process:

1. Finding ideas.
2. Planning how you will create the piece.
3. Gathering the information you need to complete the piece.
4. Outlining how you will present the information.
5. Creating a first draft.
6. Editing or revising that draft.
7. Publishing the work.

Use the "Writing Process" skill sheet (see pg. 17) as a companion to this one when you begin creative writing. The special features of some creative writing forms can help you work through the process of writing.

## The Cartoon or Comic Strip

A cartoon or comic strip is a drawing or series of drawings designed to entertain or make a point. The words in cartoons or comic strips are there to:

- Provide the characters' thoughts or dialogue (usually appear in balloons over the character's image or at the bottom of the cartoon panel).
- Identify or label graphic images. This is particularly important when the drawing itself doesn't clearly and completely convey the point the cartoonist is trying to make.

Cartoonists typically use very few words in this creative format, so they must choose the words they use with great care.

## The Play

One of the key elements that distinguishes plays or dramas is the importance of dialogue and physical action. Dialogue and action are used to illustrate or tell the story to an audience. Plays or dramas usually include all of the elements found in a written story, but

they have the added advantage of helping people hear and visualize the feelings, emotions and conflicts of the characters through live performance.

## The Poem

A poem is a work composed of lines of verse that may or may not rhyme. Poems – whether they rhyme or not – often have a rhythm to them, especially when read aloud. Although rhyming lines of verse can be easy, it is more important that the rhymes have meaning or make sense to the reader. The mix of verse should clearly lead to the reader understanding a message, idea or concept. In writing a poem, the writer also must decide where the lines will rhyme. Will every other line rhyme or will the rhyme come at other times? What will be the rhythm or beat of your poem? This question is important whether your verse rhymes or not. Short poems (one or two lines) can be used to create greeting cards. Unlike the freedom of poems and other prose, greeting card poems are often guided by the occasion the card is designed to recognize.

## The Song

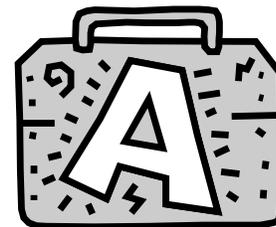
A song is a work of words (the lyrics) and music (the tune). Songs are distinguished by the ability to flow words and their meaning to a tune you've identified. Often songwriters adapt the music of nursery songs or adapt their verses to popular music. Works of poetry often can be put to music to create songs. Make sure the mood of the music matches or complements the mood and tone of your words.

## The Story

A story is an account of events, incidents or situations. The format for most stories includes an introduction of the key characters or locations, the development of some kind of conflict or problem one or all of the characters face, descriptions of all the interesting things readers need to know about the character(s) and the conflict, a dramatic resolution to the conflict or problem (the climax) and then a conclusion.

## SKILL SHEET:

# News Writing



Whether you're writing news releases to send to the media or writing a story for your group's newsletter, following these news writing tips will help you successfully communicate what people really need to know.

## What Is News?

The best way to decide what is "news" in your community is to read, listen and watch. What are reporters writing about in your local newspaper? What are broadcasters talking about on the local nightly newscast? What are people talking about in your community? In most cases, news consists of the events, people and ideas that are:

- **Local** – Happening in your community, to your community, with your community.
- **Timely** – Happening now or near to now.
- **New** – Unique, different or never been done before.
- **Important** – Affects lots of people in your community.
- **Progressive** – Improves the way we live, learn and do things.
- **In conflict** – Involves tension or struggle.
- **Of human interest** – Makes people feel or react.

## The Five W's and the H

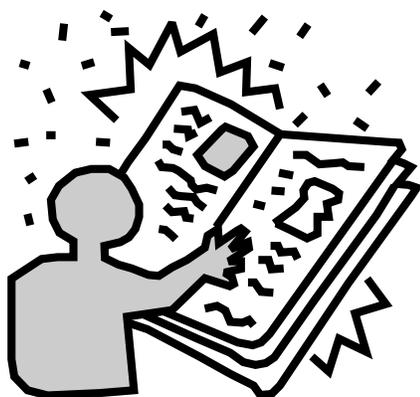
The very first thing a person should read in your story are the Five W's, and maybe the H!

- **Who** is your story about?
- **What** is your story about?
- **When** did or will the story occur?
- **Where** did it or will it take place?
- **Why** did or will it take place?
- **Why** does or should anyone care?
- **How** did or will it happen?

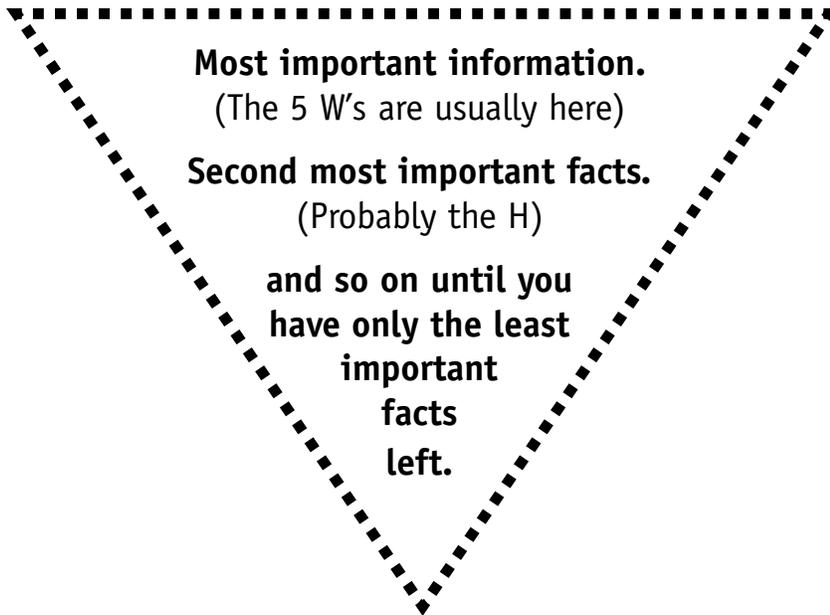
By identifying the who, what, when, where, why and how of your story idea, you help the media and your intended audience decide whether the story is worth their time to read. The five W's are typically the elements that make up the first sentence or paragraph of the story – the lead. The H is more often found in the balance or the detail of the story, but it still needs to be one of the first things the reader gets from your story.

## Inverted Pyramid

Make your point and make it fast (your five W's and H lead) and then give the facts and details from most important to least important as your story progresses. In news writing this is called the inverted pyramid. Your writing should allow an editor to cut from the bottom and not lose the essence of the story you're trying to tell.



## The Inverted Pyramid



### Just the Facts, Please!

It is very important that in news writing, you include only the facts. Opinion does not belong in a news story; it is more appropriate in an editorial. Always check for accuracy. Be sure to double-check all information, especially names, dates, times, titles and phone numbers. Never guess!

### Write Well!

News writing is a great way to practice writing well. Your sentences should be short (no more than 20 words). Your paragraphs should be short (no more than four sentences, preferably less). Your words should show action and grab readers' attention. Your words should be simple and easy to understand.

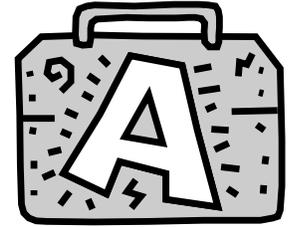
## News Release Format Toolkit

Use these tips in formatting your news releases for distribution:

- Use no more than 500 words or two double-spaced, typed pages.
- Always double space to leave space for editor's notes and to ease reading.
- Include an attention-getting headline that summarizes your lead.
- Always type news releases. Never submit a handwritten release.
- Use photos or illustrations (such as graphs or graphic timelines) to increase the impact of your story.
- Include a contact person's name and a phone number where he or she can be reached days and evenings.
- Include a date on the release.
- If your release has two or more pages, put "-more-" at the bottom of the first and subsequent pages and "-30-" at the end of the final page.
- Include your headline and the page number (such as "page 2") at the top of the page.
- When possible, use a letter-head for news releases that identifies your group and gives a contact address.

## SKILL SHEET:

# Steps to Creating a Newsletter



If you decide a newsletter is a good communication tool for your group, the steps and questions on this sheet will help you get started.

### Step 1:

**Establish goals and objectives for the newsletter to guide the content, design and budget.**

### Step 2:

**Identify the newsletter's audience.** Who do you most need to communicate with to reach your goals for publishing? Do you have a way to distribute the newsletter to this audience? What information and format will interest the audience?

### Step 3:

**Decide on the newsletter's format.** Will it be text only? Will it include photographs or artwork? What paper and ink colors will you use? What size will each page be? How many pages will each issue have?

### Step 4:

**Decide how often you will publish.** Monthly? Quarterly?

### Step 5:

**Decide on the quality level you want and can afford for your newsletter.** Will the newsletter be photocopied, offset printed or delivered to your readers electronically, via computers?

### Step 6:

**Name your newsletter.**

### Step 7:

**Develop a production time line.** Decide when you want the newsletter to reach your readers, and work backwards from that date to set up the production schedule.

Decide on the deadlines for:

- Copy to be submitted.
- Editing and proofreading to be completed.
- Pages to be designed and laid out (keylined).
- The date the pages will go to the printer or photocopier (or, in the case of an electronic newsletter, posted to the mailing list or put up on the World Wide Web).
- The newsletter to be delivered to readers.

### Step 8:

**Assign production responsibilities to group members.** Assignments could include reporters or writers, editors (you may need separate editors for news, arts and features), graphic artists and designers, photographers and distribution personnel.

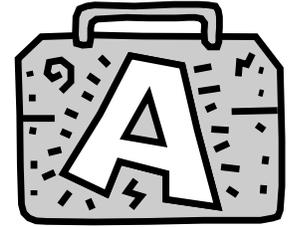
### Step 9:

**Publish your newsletter.** Starting up and publishing a newsletter helps kids to learn to write concisely, meet deadlines and work as a team. This wonderful group project can incorporate a variety of skills group members may have. See the "News Writing" skill sheet (on pg. 20) for tips on how to write the news stories and other pieces your group might decide to include in the newsletter.



## ACTIVITY:

# Group Story Writing



## FOCUS:

Building creative communications skills

## PURPOSE:

To encourage kids to work as a group and use their creative thought processes to create a credible, meaningful story

## MATERIALS:

- 5.5-inch by 8.5-inch pieces of paper or 5-inch by 8-inch index cards
- Thin point markers
- "What I Learned" self-evaluation form (on pg. 8; one per person)

## SETTING:

A large indoor space with an open wall, floor or bulletin board

## TIME:

5 minutes per contributor

## PROCEDURE:

### Before the meeting:

1. Write a number in the upper left corner of each sheet of paper or index card, beginning with 1 and continuing through the number of participants you expect at the meeting.
2. On the first card, write a story starter such as those that follow, or one that is related to your groups' interests or experiences.
  - Thirteen-year-old Joshua was skateboarding down the sidewalk when...
  - Cindy has run out of options...
  - Michael had been observing Billy since the beginning of class...
  - The 4-H Teen Club had three days to go before the county 4-H fair...
  - When Chantal was seven, she...
  - Running through the park, he caught...

### During the meeting:

1. Tell the group they are going to work as a team to write a story. Their challenge will be to formulate a beginning, an action middle and an end. Each writer will have no more than five minutes to continue the story, building on the work of the previous writer.
2. Give each participant a numbered paper or index card and a marker.
3. Read the story beginning written on the first card, then ask the person with card 2 to continue the story. Have the participants add a phrase or sentence to the story in the order of the numbers on their cards.
4. When the last person has completed the story, ask for a volunteer to read the entire story out loud, or have the participants read their pieces of the story in order.

## TRY THIS TOO:

Before you start the "Group Story Writing" activity, try this icebreaker. Have the group stand in a semicircle. Have the first person introduce himself or herself with these words:

"My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I most like \_\_\_\_\_."

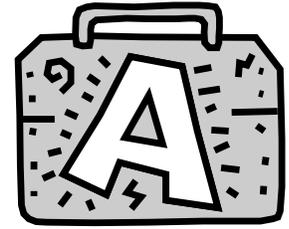
Have the second person in the circle pick up the story by saying, "(Name of first participant) may like (what that person liked)" and either "but I'm partial to \_\_\_\_\_" or "and I do too!"

Each person in the group picks up the story and gives his or her opinion on the previous person's likes or dislikes, then offers his or her own opinion, until everyone has been introduced.



## ACTIVITY:

# The ABC's of Me



## FOCUS:

Building creative communication skills

## PURPOSE:

To have the participants create their own alphabetical autobiographies

## MATERIALS:

- Newsprint
- Marker
- Masking tape
- Paper
- Pencils or pens
- Dictionaries or thesauruses
- "What I Learned" self-evaluation form (on pg. 8; one per person)

## SETTING:

A large space with writing surfaces

## TIME:

30–40 minutes

Adapted from *Recipes for Writing: Motivation, Skills and Activities*, by Murray Suid and Wanda Lincoln (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc., 1989)



## PROCEDURE:

### Before the meeting:

Write a sample ABC autobiography on a sheet of newsprint and display it so that everyone can see it.

**A**s my mother lay in labor at the hospital, she thought that she would surely love an ice cream cone. **B**rother Bobby was wondering, he told me once, whether he would finally get a male playmate or whether I would be born a girl he would have to keep all his buddies away from. **C**assie I was dubbed and protector he became...

### During the meeting:

1. Tell the group they're going to write "The ABC's of Me," an autobiography composed in 26 sentences. The first sentence starts with a word beginning with the letter "A," the second sentence with a word beginning with the letter "B" and so on through the end of the alphabet. Read the sample ABC autobiography that you wrote on the newsprint to the group.
2. Tell the participants that proper names and titles are acceptable and that they can use a dictionary or thesaurus if they are stuck.
3. Pass out paper and pens or pencils.
4. Give the group about 20 minutes to work on their autobiographies. When they're done, have the participants take turns reading their autobiographies to the group.

## TRY THIS, TOO:

Have the group write:

- ABC stories about their project areas.
- ABC biographies about a friend or family member.
- ABC adaptations of published stories or fairy tales.
- Autobiographies using the letters of their first name to start sentences. For example:

### Justice

Just a little bit into August, I was born.

Under the astrological sign of Leo, that vivacious lion.

Soon my parents named me "Justice," because they saw great potential for me as a police officer or lawyer.

Thus I spent my life developing the tools of peacekeeper and negotiator.

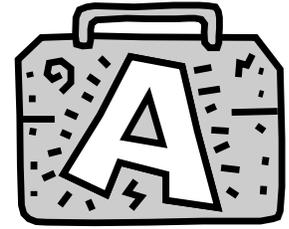
In fact, as a youngster I often found amicable resolution to the squabbles of my playmates.

College helped me hone my choices, much to my parents dismay.

Ever since I left the place, it's a most artistic life I've led.

## ACTIVITY:

# Who's in the News?



## FOCUS:

To build news writing and analysis skills

## PURPOSE:

- To help participants understand the purpose of news writing and how the audience determines the style of the news article
- To help participants write a clear, informative and accurate news story

## MATERIALS:

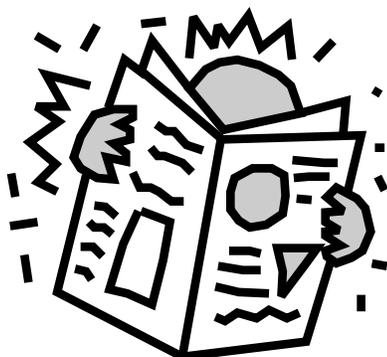
- Newsprint or chalkboard
- Markers or chalk
- Easel or masking tape
- Local daily and weekly newspapers
- Pens or pencils
- Equal numbers of name tags that say "Reporter" and "Source"
- "What I Learned" self-evaluation form (on pg. 8; one per person)

## TIME:

90 minutes or more (depending on size of group)

## SETTING:

A room with desks or tables and chairs



## PROCEDURE:

### Before the meeting:

1. Collect several editions of local daily and weekly newspapers.
2. Prepare equal numbers of name tags that say "Source" and "Reporter."

### During the meeting:

1. Tell the group they'll have about 15 minutes to look through the front (news), business, sports and feature sections of the newspapers. They should look for stories that feature the activities or actions of one person.
2. Take about 15 minutes and ask for volunteers to read aloud the articles they selected. Tell the group to listen for the purpose of the article, the kind of information it included, and its intended audience. Have a volunteer chart this information on the newsprint or chalkboard.
3. Have the group divide into pairs. Have each team pick up one "Source" and one "Reporter" name tag and decide who will play each role.
4. Now tell the reporters they will have 15 minutes to interview the sources. The reporters should look for story angles (something newsworthy, interesting, unique) that would appeal to the entire group. Encourage them to look for the kinds of angles they identified in the newspaper articles.
5. After the 15-minute interviews are completed, give the reporters about 20 minutes to "write up" their interview notes into articles.
6. If time allows, have the original "reporters" and "sources" trade roles and repeat the interview and article-writing process.
7. Ask for volunteers to read their articles to the group. Again have the group listen for the purpose of the article, the kind of information it included, and its intended audience. Have a volunteer chart the information on newsprint or the chalkboard.

## TRY THIS TOO:

Publish a group newsletter featuring the members' articles. (See the "Steps to Creating a Newsletter" skill sheet on pg. 22.)

## ACTIVITY:

# Find Those W's & That H!



## FOCUS:

To build news analysis and writing skills

## PURPOSE:

- To help participants understand the elements of news writing
- To help participants identify the most important elements of a news story

## MATERIALS:

- Daily and weekly newspapers
- "Find Those W's and That H" handout (on pg. 28; two per participant)
- Pens or pencils
- Newsprint or other large paper
- Markers
- "What I Learned" self-evaluation form (on pg. 8; one per person)

## TIME:

30 minutes or more, depending on size of group

## SETTING:

Room that allows kids to work in pairs, either seated in chairs or on the floor

## PROCEDURE:

### Before the meeting:

1. Collect several editions of local daily and weekly newspapers, or copy several different front-page stories from different sections of one newspaper to distribute to kids.
2. Make two copies for each participant of the "Find Those W's and That H" handout.

### During the meeting:

1. Group the kids into pairs to locate the "W's" of the news stories you've selected.
2. Explain the "5 W's and the H" of news writing to the group – **Who** is the story about? **What** is the story about? **Where** does the story take place? **When** did the story take place? **Why** is the news important or why did the story take place? **How** did the story take place? Distribute a news story to each participant. Tell them they have about 5 minutes to locate all of the W's and to note how far they had to look to get them all. They can use the "Find Those W's and That H" handout to note them all. (All five W's and the H should show up in the first two paragraphs of a news story. If they appear lower in the story, have the kids discuss and decide whether the story is a news or feature story.)
3. After 5 minutes, have the kids switch news articles with their partners and repeat the process.
4. When they're done, have each pair compare their sheets to see if they identified the same "5 W's and the H." Have the partners note those stories where they had trouble finding all of the elements or disagreed on which was the right W and H.
5. Now have the partners work together to decide what is the most important of the elements they found in the story. Then have them write a new and different lead paragraph for the news story.
6. Bring the group back together and ask for volunteers to share their work. Have them read the first two paragraphs of their news story and identify each of the "W's and the H" of the story. If the partners disagreed on how they identified the elements of the story, have them share where they differed and why. (You also could just have them read the story and see if the full group can identify the same elements that they did.) After both partners have shared their discoveries, have the team share their new lead paragraphs. Have them share why they chose the elements they did to create the new lead.



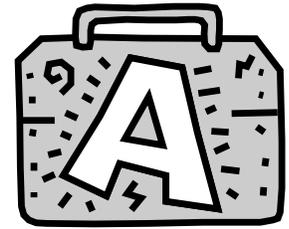
7. If time permits, have the group do a creative critique comparing the new lead to the original story lead.

**TRY THIS TOO:**

As an icebreaker, have pairs find out the most important “W’s and H” about their partners and write lead paragraphs using that information to introduce the partner.

**HANDOUT:**

# Find Those W's & That H!



Look through a news article and see if you can locate the following elements:

**Who:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What:** \_\_\_\_\_

**When:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where:**  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Why:** \_\_\_\_\_

**How:** \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the six was the most important or “newsy” of the elements? Why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Write a new lead paragraph for the news story using the most important element you found in it.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **TRY THIS TOO:**

Instead of using this handout with a news article, use it to find out about a friend or a person in your group. Write a lead paragraph to introduce the person to the rest of the group.