HIT THE HEADLINES

EXCITING JOURNALISM ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVING WRITING AND THINKING SKILLS

COLIN MACFARLANE

A **David Fulton** Book

photocopiable

Hit the Headlines

Hit the Headlines charts out a series of fun and inspiring cross-curricular journalism workshops that enhance key skills and confidence in areas such as:

- writing and editing
- critical assessment
- interviewing and observation
- mental flexibility and resourcefulness
- role-playing and teamwork.

This book will enable teachers of 9–15-year-olds to involve their students in a number of effective and well-tested exercises, games and scenarios, which will encourage them into enthusiastically seeking out further knowledge in areas such as news, journalism, social issues, IT, data assessment, 'intelligent observation' and enhanced questioning and listening. This is 'organic learning' at its best!

An introduction to the theory behind the book summarises the short- and long-term learning outcomes that your students can achieve through these methods, explaining why scenarios which feel 'real' can immerse students and inspire them to achieve greater proficiency. The author also encourages teachers to read and use the book systematically, as well as to take on specific challenges themselves in order to assist their students more effectively in the writing and editing challenges that the book contains.

Practical photocopiable templates for many chapters are provided for use as classroom or out-of-classroom exercises, as are examples and solutions to exercises. Through these engrossing journalistic scenarios, students will learn how to critically assess the levels of 'interest' and 'importance' attached to diverse facts, and so begin to understand that report or presentation writing of any sort involves a critical balance between these two factors.

Readers can go on to customise their own scenarios, drawing on the stimulating techniques outlined to improve their students' factual writing and related thinking skills. In particular, classroom teachers in primary, middle and secondary schools and all literacy co-ordinators will find this book extremely useful, as will NQTs and PGCE students.

Colin Macfarlane is an educational consultant, writer, professional performing poet and ex-journalist. He has had considerable experience over the past 20 years in developing and running a great number of highly acclaimed writing workshops in schools, and intensive residential courses around the country.

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for KM
who is always good news

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1 Introduction and theory

Simply because you are reading this book, you must be a teacher or tutor who understands the educational limits of paper-based exercises and who feels the need to teach beyond the narrower confines of the curriculum. You are obviously someone who is prepared to take time to discover skills and techniques that will enthuse and engross your young students and get them learning in the broadest way possible.

This is great news because two of the most essential elements involved in the effective use of the kinds of hands-on, cross-curricular teaching methods described in this book are inspiration and enthusiasm!

Many of the activities use role play in some form or another to make the workshops really come alive, be it in acting the part of a witness or participant in a convincing news story scenario or playing the role of a reporter, sub-editor, or even news presenter.

Learning subtler English writing and related thinking skills without spending a lot of time sitting staring at a real or simulated sheet of paper might seem contradictory to some, but of course that only needs to be part of the process. We all know that too much of that kind of thing can quickly cause less 'bookish' pupils to lose interest, and that this is especially true for boys.

The techniques described in this book

The techniques described in this book have been developed to:

- make learning about English exciting, absorbing and fun;
- make learning about news journalism equally exciting, absorbing and fun;
- bring greater enthusiasm for learning and improving in English to a wider range of children and especially to boys;
- develop those important thinking skills that lie behind better writing, as well as improving 'hard' writing skills themselves;
- increase skills, knowledge and confidence in a wide range of learning areas;
- challenge and inspire more able students;
- create such wholehearted immersion through exciting role play and amusing games that pupils learn organically, proven to be the principal way young people learn and perhaps the principal way some children learn;
- motivate as many participants as possible to the point where they want to take on learning responsibility for themselves and seek out further knowledge both in areas central to their projects, such as news, journalism and English, and also in related areas, for example, social issues, politics, history, the law, science, medicine, IT, layout, graphics, photography, etc.;
- generate personal legacy skills which students can take into other areas of learning and life. These may include reasoning skills; observational skills; mental dexterity in assessing and organising levels of importance and interest; improved ability to 'read between the lines'; increased confidence in drama work; greater resourcefulness, flexibility and ability to think under pressure; IT skills; layout, graphics and photographic skills; and increased proficiency in planning and writing all sorts of reports, articles, presentations, leaflets, coursework, exam essays, etc.;
- generate legacy skills for teachers, students and the institution of which they are part.

This might all sound too good to be true, but over many years of running intensive courses and workshops employing these sorts of techniques, their effectiveness has been proven over and over again, and the highly positive feedback received from a great many students, former students, families, teachers and education advisors is testament to that.

Some of my students have been so enthused by these courses that they have chosen journalism as a career, and many have moved on to creating, or becoming involved in, school, college or university newspapers. At least one ex-student, who was quickly promoted to editor of a major university newspaper, used some of these techniques to train her large editorial staff so successfully that she was given a specially-created media award by her institution. Significantly (this stems from personal experience and testimony, and not the report of any scientific study), those students who became involved in journalistic roles in their learning centres often appeared to jump forward significantly in their results in other areas of their studies.

This book is overwhelmingly designed to be a practical guide to the techniques developed in, and for, these courses and school workshops, but I will begin by describing in the rest of this chapter some of the ideas underlying these activities. As a teacher who craves having sufficient practical teaching time, you may feel you have had enough of educational theory and could be tempted to skip to later chapters in this book, but the small amount of theory is here to explain the thinking behind how and why the techniques work so effectively, and to convince readers why it is worth putting that extra effort into making the practical side run as well as possible.

Learning is effective when it feels 'real'

Although the old adage says that no news is good news, making learning fun and effective for all abilities is always good news. For children and young people, throwing oneself into the processes of inventing dramatic 'news' happenings, developing associated characters, acting these characters out or being an intrepid reporter trying to ferret out the real truth about them is terrific fun. Even relatively weak students in a group can become ridiculously caught up in the excitement of creating dramatic news stories together, perhaps also finding props or dressing up and taking on adult roles in the scenarios.

More able children particularly relish thinking and writing in 'real' and 'adult' situations and, in all of these activities, can be challenged and re-challenged relative to their particular age, ability and developmental stage. The extra enthusiasm generated is partly to do with the fun of the game elements and partly because they sense that these more grown-up activities have 'value' as well as clear personal and group goals.

This element of making a news scenario seem real is important because, to an extent, it *feels* important when it feels real. Scenarios are playing . . . drama . . . a 'play'. Children learn by playing, that's much of what play is for. Baby mammals such as wolf cubs learn co-ordination and basic hunting skills through play with each other and sometimes with their parents. They also develop social skills in their own 'mini scenarios' in which they learn how to bite, scratch or throw their siblings down a slope just hard enough to make the game adequately realistic for them to test and improve their strength, strategies and conditioned reflexes, but not so hard that they get hurt themselves, temporarily ostracised by their playmates, or receive a quick 'educational' nip from mum. It is not long before these developing skills are joined by the even more complex skills involved in learning sophisticated teamwork and beginning to function together as a pack, even if they might only be hunting grasshoppers to begin with. It's organic learning.

Learning the organic way

Watch a pack of young human newshounds' immersion and pleasure in learning through exciting structured play and you also see organic learning at work!

Although a news story has fundamental differences in form compared to a piece of fiction, the enthusiasm generated by involvement in creating exciting, life-like 'event' scenarios means that participants automatically start taking on other English challenges such as team writing, plot creation and adaption, the refining of story logic, character development, and discovering – in a simplified form of script creation – more about how to devise and slant a story to fit a specific purpose.

All of this entails the use and development of quite subtle skills and yet, to the participants, it doesn't feel like hard work: it feels like fun. This active, joyful form of working is typical of organic learning at its best. Interestingly, the 'realistic' feel of many news scenarios can often enthuse relatively disenchanted students almost as much as the more predictably 'involved' learners. Motivation is fundamental to learning and these methods can greatly increase it. Children begin to learn actively rather than passively because they are immersed by their roles in the exhilarating scenarios and motivated to achieve their goals.

Learning is more effective when it has goals

It is not surprising, then, that these cross-curricular techniques fall broadly under what is sometimes referred to as 'goal-based learning', of which there are two sorts, somewhat confusingly called 'natural' and 'artificial'. As you may know, the former means learning while involved in the actual activity in real life (as a craftsman's apprentice would do), and the latter usually relates to participation in scenarios designed to replicate all or part of the real thing.

For children, of course, the first sort is often impossible. The ultimate 'natural' goal-based learning in journalism might, for instance, involve your young pupils in becoming real miniature trainee reporters, racing around the country or world, mentored by a hard-bitten old hack while ferreting out gripping news stories for an important adult newspaper or television station. Unsurprisingly, that would not be safe, practicable or even possible, and of course children don't have enough base knowledge or skills to cope with that kind of adult role while learning, so the second form, the 'artificial' type, is the predominant type used in this book.

It can be argued that the artificial sort is often preferable in many ways because scenarios, or scenario 'rules', can be deliberately constructed to cover learning desired skill sets while the scenario still feels relatively like the real thing. When you think about it, invented news stories can be more dramatic and exciting than a great many of the real stories that genuine news reporters cover on a daily basis (have you ever had to sit in a town hall meeting for several hours listening to a discussion about drainage?) and 'teacher-editors' don't have to worry about their young charges going to dangerous places or getting embroiled in the subtler complications of the laws on libel and contempt of court, with which real journalists have to contend in the regular course of their work!

Processes matter more than facts

It is important to remember that in journalism, and to a large extent in English, our young participants, for the most part, really need to be learning processes rather than facts. Learning a process is learning a skill, and immersion in each process is a potentially exciting journey where necessary sub-skills and facts are gathered readily on the way. This includes not merely facts about the fictitious or real news stories they are dealing with, but facts about journalism and

English and all of the other allied areas of learning already mentioned. Sadly, institutions such as schools and colleges sometimes attempt to teach processes but end up simply teaching facts and theory because these are more easily testable. In attempting to learn a process well, however, it is much more effective to *do* it than to be *taught* it in a sort of realism vacuum.

Can you imagine an airline pilot learning to fly a passenger jet only by being told about the process in a classroom? How did your holiday pilot really learn how to fly a jumbo jet? Well, of course, there was a certain amount of classroom theory and straight factual learning, but he could still probably learn to fly a plane, to some extent, without most of that. As a pilot he had already learned to fly, principally through natural, goal-based learning, by manoeuvring a small plane with an instructor beside him. As he moved on to learning the more complex, challenging and massively responsible process of controlling a large flying machine with hundreds of passengers on board, 'artificial' goal-based learning came strongly into play.

Before they would let him loose in the real thing, they put him in a flight simulator a great many times and ran through scenario after scenario after scenario, including some where he was allowed to feel what it was like to exceed the limits of successful flying control and even crash the jet . . . only in simulation, of course. Why were they doing all that? To make the simulations as lifelike as possible, of course, and to cover as many situations that might arise as possible . . . without having to jeopardise the lives of his passengers!

Similarly, those wolf cubs mentioned earlier learned many of the early stages of the hunting processes by so-called 'artificial' methods through play and involvement in simple scenarios, then went on to learning by 'natural' methods while out on the job with mum and the rest of the pack. I prefer to call both those routes 'organic' learning rather than 'goal-based learning'. Firstly, this is because this type of learning feels more 'organic' than narrow classroom learning. Secondly, it is unlikely that, as the tiny cubs were playing with their siblings in the early stages, they were aware of a conscious goal of becoming successful adult hunters, although they would already have, or have quickly acquired, the goal of wanting to beat their little opponents in the games.

Harnessing the natural drive to learn

Human babies and young infants are driven to want to play, experiment, make mistakes and learn from them, not because they have clear mental goals yet to become writers, bankers or teachers, or even just to be adults, but because they are pre-programmed with the all-powerful goals of human development: to keep attempting to succeed in crawling, walking, manipulating objects, etc. Their built-in drive to succeed, reinforced by encouragement and example provided by those around them, will soon lead to increasingly complex play and games (which are really just more 'scenarios') from which they will learn organically . . . all practice for the ultimate game known as adult life.

Just as is the case for the trainee airline pilot in his relatively life-like simulator, it is much easier to learn when one is convinced about the 'realness' of the situation and/or the 'realness' value and purpose of that learning, so it's not surprising that as children grow and become more aware, they learn most effectively when that learning feels well connected to both purpose and real life. This brings us back to why it is helpful that your young students' roles as reporters, editors, witnesses, interviewees or broadcast presenters, are made to feel reasonably real and the scenarios created seem equally realistic and relatively grown-up. After all, much of the point of children's play is learning, and children learn in order to grow up successfully.

2 A few words on how to use this book

Please read this!

Although, as a busy teacher with too much to read, you may be tempted to dip in and out of this book to begin with, it's important to realise that it has been constructed so that the best learning outcomes will be achieved by reading it from the beginning, and using the activities suggested in the way they have been explained and in the same general order as in the book. Once you become familiar with using the techniques you can dip in and out to remind yourself of ideas and suggestions for parts of the process, and to stimulate your own ideas about how to customise, develop or transfer these.

Fundamental to everything that follows it is the Basic Sequencing Exercise described in Chapter 3. It was designed early on in the development of these workshops as a response to my discovery that an amazingly high percentage of children, even in early secondary school, have never, or hardly ever, read a newspaper or a full news story, and the related realisation that a surprisingly high percentage have only the vaguest sense of what the structural form of a news story (and, to an extent, of any relatively complex report or presentation) is like.

Other possible reasons for this are described in the relevant chapter, but my repeated experience has been that most young people tend to struggle to fit material tightly and successfully into the format of a proper news story, although they struggle much less if they have taken part in the basic sequencing exercise beforehand. Once they have worked on it in a well-run session, they begin to understand the essential principles of the form and can then work progressively through many of the activities suggested in the book and towards developing the surprisingly sophisticated skills required to structure and write a news story well. They will then acquire greater understanding of the process and improve their skills naturally over time. The Basic Sequencing Exercise itself has been designed to be as organic as possible, which is one reason why participants do not need to write anything physically with a pencil or word processor while working on it.

Creating a perfectly structured, well-written and balanced news story or report is surprisingly hard for young people (and indeed for many adults). It's important to remember that it can even take professional trainee journalists (who are obviously older and have had much more general writing experience) quite some time to master the form. Indeed, their editors may send their copy back with suggested improvements and changes to what the lead should be and how parts should be written.

As a result of young people's general lack of familiarity with newspapers, it is important for your group to look at papers in some depth at an early stage so they gain an organic feel for the structure and look of articles and how they vary in different newspapers and news sources, the shortness of paragraphs and sentences, the varying choice of leads, the use of different typefaces, etc. Most teachers in primary and secondary education will have led some of this kind of activity as part of their curriculum work, but additional suggestions will be given on things to talk about and ideas on how young students can discover many of these for themselves. You

can even turn this process into a game: as always, a more organic and effective form of learning for people than just having facts thrown at them.

Basic sequencing comes first

This may seem surprising, but I prefer to run the basic sequencing exercise first and look at the papers after that. There are several reasons for this, the first being that I want students to start from scratch and learn the essentials of sequencing by spending lots of time on the activity while slowly discovering how to improve. The second reason is that, once they have a concept of sequencing, you can look at the articles together in a more informed light so your learners can enjoy recognising parts of the form in different news stories.

To have the greatest effect later, you may have to lay down a reasonable amount of groundwork in this way, so it will probably be best to run preparatory sessions, covering things such as basic sequencing, looking at the papers in depth, leading a little competition to find how different newspapers treat the same story, playing caption games, etc. That way, this essential basic knowledge can be recapped briefly before further journalism days, so that participants already have a better sense of a news story's structure and a reasonable idea of essential things like the look of a story on the page or website; how to decide on and construct lead paragraphs; the use of bold type, headlines and captions and how to create them . . . before they are let loose on the more exciting and physically active components of creating and performing dramatic scenarios and acting as busy, intrepid reporters in however large a physical environment you can allow.

Challenging Changes, described in Chapter 11, is an excellent activity for older and more able groups but should probably be avoided by most groups aged below about 13. On more than one occasion, I have even seen top 17–18-year-old students laughing manically during this activity, banging their heads on their computers and crying out in mock pain: 'This is SO hard!'

However, please note that Challenging Changes is a very useful exercise for you (and any assistants) to attempt before the day comes to work with students on activities in this book, as you may well develop better personal skills in journalistic writing and editing. Please read the first part of Chapter 11 to understand how to approach it, and allow enough uninterrupted personal time to complete the challenge.

Later activities such as Headline Games and putting the stories produced into a small 'newspaper' or 'news website' can be taken on by teachers who wish to move the learning processes further, or simply to celebrate the work produced. Either way, reproducing the work in some sort of newspaper-like format is another helpful motivator for young, goal-based learners.

Working towards producing a 'newspaper' of fictitious stories is also a good way to build stronger legacy skills and is an excellent learning tool for those training up a team to run and produce a group/class/school newspaper, or for a group project in a residential setting. It is especially satisfying to have taken the process to its logical conclusion by giving the students involved something concrete to take home with them that packages and celebrates all their hard work.

A minimum sequence of workshops

A suggested minimum sequence of workshops is as follows:

- the Basic Sequencing Exercise with preamble and recap sessions including showing and discussing The Pyramid pictogram;
- looking at one day's newspapers and news-sites together in depth;
- the Challenging Changes exercise (only for more able or 13-year-old+ groups . . . but also for you to attempt in advance!);

- group scenarios (sometimes called 'live tableaux') which involve creating complex news stories and roles, acting them out, being intrepid journalists ferreting out the truth of another group's scenario then writing and editing these stories under moderate time pressure.

As you read through the book you will see that you can use the other proposed exercises to gain greater breadth and depth in journalism and English skills. Given more time (such as in a class or year group journalism focus or project, a book week, writing or journalism week or residential camp or course), this sequence can be expanded effectively into an exciting cycle of busy and very enjoyable workshops, each building on the confidence and skills acquired in previous sessions.

It is worth remembering that these sorts of skills (of intelligent questioning, reading between the lines, weighing and sequencing information, planning and writing relatively complex reports, essays and presentations of all sorts) are going to become some of the most fundamental required by your students as they move through secondary, higher and tertiary education and, indeed, in most future employment.

An enhanced sequence of workshops

The following is a useful sequence of workshops if more time is set aside:

- the Basic Sequencing Exercise with preamble and recap sessions including drawing and discussing The Pyramid pictogram. Include the changing leads game based on the 'five Ws and an H';
- looking at a day's newspapers together in depth;
- participating in the news-finding Story Quest or the Challenging Changes exercise (the latter only for more able 13+ age groups);
- group scenarios known as 'live tableaux' – creating complex news story scenarios and roles in groups, acting them out, being intrepid journalists ferreting out the truth of another group's scenario, and writing and editing the news stories under moderate time pressure;
- making it real – creating and running realistic and unpredictable news scenarios for your young, trainee reporters to follow up. This might include happenings you've set up, objects, incoming and outgoing phone calls from 'correspondents' and 'witnesses', witness statements, press conferences, documents, internet and library research, etc., then writing and editing the stories based on this;
- discussing headlines then playing the Vibrant Verbs game, the tabloid and quality headline-writing game, etc.;
- discussing the use of informal/colloquial/emotive and formal language in news reports, and playing the related learning games;
- asking small groups of students to compare print news with internet news sites and blogs and write down the differences;
- looking at captions and playing caption games;
- looking more at photos, cropping, graphics, typography and layout;
- tightening up a 'waffly' story in the sub-editing challenge;
- putting stories into mini newspaper sheets or making up a bigger group 'newspaper' containing the work achieved;
- finishing a topic or project and asking students to put their results into the form of a newspaper story, news website article or blog. The stories could also be based on anything from an interesting or dramatic event in a fiction book that students are reading, to a 'hot news' item about a remarkable event in history, to a science and technology report about something 'discovered' by your young scientists, or a report of an actual dramatic happening in or around school.

3 Sequencing is the secret

Basic sequencing – the essential first exercise

As I remarked at the start of this book, throughout all the years in which I have run variations of these workshops in schools and on intensive residential courses for able, gifted and talented (AG&T) students, I have continuously been surprised by children's lack of understanding of the underlying form of a news story and, indeed, of familiarity with newspapers themselves. This might seem a little surprising in a modern world where news pours out from programmes on family television sets, on 24-hour news channels, from the radio, the internet, mobile phones and, of course, from newspapers in homes, cafes, libraries, schools, and shops everywhere.

There is a continuous stream of news about politics, foreign affairs, social interest, science and technology, sport, the arts and celebrity, and some of these subject areas even have their own newspaper sections/magazines/slots/blogs/channels. However, no matter how different the content, all of these news reports have something in common: the fundamental form of the story.

The form of a news story in brief

Younger students have a pretty good excuse for being confused over the structure of a news story because they have usually had the beginning–middle–end make-up of a fiction story drummed into them for years. A news story is not like that. My favourite way to describe it is the shape of a pyramid with a little cloud overhead. The cloud is the headline, the narrow top part of the pyramid is the lead, which contains a tight summary of the most important and most interesting facts, while the remainder (the wider part of the pyramid) expands the story, gives more details and sometimes provides description through the form of quotes. In some cases, there is something at the bottom part of the pyramid that acts like its 'foundation' – a closing or rounding off sentence or two. We will come back to this shape later in this chapter, as it is a very effective pictogram to draw on a flipchart or whiteboard at the end of the basic sequencing exercise.

The most crucial, and by far the hardest, part for the writer is the top section of the pyramid because the sentences have to be tight, relevant and catchy, yet contain all, or the majority, of the most important and interesting facts (MIAIF) which make up the chosen lead. Sometimes the lead almost writes itself, because what is most important and interesting is obvious. In this case, there is very often only one good way to write the story and placing the MIAIF in order is relatively simple. This is what I call a 'single lead' story, and the story in the basic sequencing exercise is one of these.

Much harder are what I call 'multiple lead' stories because, firstly, the writer or his editor have to choose which angle on the story they want to use, or at least use at the very beginning of the article, and so the slant or spin of the rest of the story may be affected by that choice. Secondly, it is harder to write the lead sentences for these sorts of stories because the potential multiple leads offer the writer different angles and many related facts that are essential to squeeze into that first sentence or two. The three part exercise for older and more able students described in Chapter 11 (Challenging Changes) utilises an example of an increasingly complex and challenging multiple lead story.

In some news stories, the amount of important and interesting facts that vie for inclusion in these first one or two sentences can mean that they stretch into ridiculous mega sentences and destroy the punchy effect required to grab the reader's attention. After all, that is what the first part of the story is largely about: grabbing the reader's attention and, hopefully, holding it sufficiently long to induce them to read the rest of the article. This area of writing can be very challenging for young writers, but working with it intensively can accelerate their ability to manipulate written language. We will therefore look at how to deal with all of that in greater depth in the chapter on editing.

To put it simply, the one thing we need to remember is that a news story generally runs from the most important and interesting facts at the top, down to the least interesting and important ones at the bottom. That's what the Basic Sequencing Exercise is designed to teach.

The essential Basic Sequencing Exercise

Materials required

- A4 photocopies of the basic sequencing template at the end of this chapter – enough for one sheet to approximately every three students, plus a couple of spare sheets and your own (well-hidden) key sheet. Cut off any reference to sequencing at the top;
- scissors for each student (try the art department!);
- the furniture in the room arranged so that tables are as far apart as possible and so that about three students can sit at each table, looking towards the A4 sheet without it being upside down for any of them;
- a handy paper recycling bin;
- whiteboard/flipchart and fat board markers;
- a long clear plastic ruler for each group is helpful but not essential; and
- at least one literate assistant/teacher/parent and/or a couple of much older and able students who have been shown the perfect sequence and understand the reasons why it is like that and how to help without giving too much away.

Time required

I allow 1½ to 2¼ hours for this activity on residential courses and a little less in a school setting, but its effectiveness depends partly on how hard the students keep working at re-arranging the story into an increasingly improved form. As usual, with a mixed ability or weaker group, you may have to move it along more quickly to sustain interest, or because is not such a physical activity as, for example, the group scenarios.

Organisation and preamble

Prior to delivering the session you will need to have closely familiarised yourself with the best possible sequence of text (as shown in the photographic key for the Basic Sequencing Exercise) and the rest of this chapter. The story in this exercise is slightly unusual in that it has been designed to have only one 'best order' of facts and quotes.

Once you have the little groups of students organised and seated, you can hand out one basic sequencing sheet to each table – but don't allow the students to turn it over until you have given them the preamble to this activity. They need to listen carefully.

After explaining that they are going to be starting an exciting set of journalism activities, it might be a good idea to show the groups a couple of national quality daily newspapers very

briefly, such as *The Times* (of London), *The Independent*, *The Irish Times*, *The Scotsman*, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, etc., depending on your country and location. With younger, less experienced or less able groups you may need to read them the first part of a story from one of the papers to give them a little orientation. You don't need to look at newspapers in depth at this point, because you will be doing so after this exercise and it is better for the effectiveness of the current exercise if they have to work hard at getting it right without any previous guidance as to the form of a news story.

What you say in the preamble to this activity is important. The exercise depends on not giving much away to start with, but the students need to know certain bits of information.

The rules of this scenario

You need to tell your pupils the rules of this scenario.

- They are sub-editors; that is journalists working inside a newspaper office in the capital city or large media centre where those example papers are produced.
- The newspaper for which they work is a national, quality, daily newspaper. Ask them to explain those terms to the group until you are satisfied that they all understand them (it is helpful to have already read the chapter on looking at the papers yourself, even though it is best to do that activity after the sequencing exercise).
- Tell them that they would probably be working on the story in the late afternoon or evening as the newspaper will be printed overnight and distributed early next morning.
- The information on the sheet has just come into their office by email/fax/satellite phone from a foreign 'stringer' – a correspondent who lives in another country. This is probably a local journalist who sometimes sends stories into your reporters' imaginary newspaper from that country, but isn't directly employed by it.
- Explain that the information has come into their newspaper in a rather random way, and your young sub-editors 'have to make a story out of it'. These last words are crucial because you must not say that they have to use all of the information as that is not the case, nor do you want to say that they do *not* have to use all of the information, because that gives away a useful part of the exercise.
- Point out that there is almost no punctuation and very few capital letters, and ask them why. Someone is sure to say 'to make it harder', which is true. It is specifically designed to make it difficult to tell which bit follows which other bit, where sentences and paragraphs begin and end, and thus force them to read it carefully and think hard about every little part.
- Tell them that, when you say to start, they should cut the sheet along the solid lines, keeping all single-line-spaced blocks of text together. Show them this with your finger on a spare sheet as you explain, and point out that there are two other little fragments on the right that also need to be cut out and kept: 'as she' and 'and'.
- Explain that you want them to lay out each little part of their story in a vertical fashion, one section beneath the other (see the photo for your own reference) so that you can scan their progress quickly.
- Inform them that this story is special, in that there is one 'perfect' way of doing it.
- Before allowing them to turn over the sheet and begin cutting, point out that they need to be very careful to keep all of the text on the table when they are throwing away any trimmings, and not to chop off any words by accident.

Starting the exercise

It is obviously much faster if all the students have scissors so they can first cut the paper into equal parts, along solid lines, then each person can cut up a part. Once they have cut out all of the little strips of words and thrown away any trimmings, you can explain that the clear plastic ruler on each table is to hold down their story-so-far if they need to take a break, move about for some reason, etc. Beware of laughing or sneezing too strongly!

Again, it is probably worth reminding your proto-journalists that they work for a national, quality, daily newspaper and they simply 'have to make a story' with the information on the table.

It is most effective to help the students as little as possible at this stage, but to move around the room from group to group, watching their strategies for creating the story, checking they haven't lost any bits and reminding them that the cut sections of text have to be laid out in a vertical manner as their story-forming progresses.

What you are looking out for early on is the arrangement of parts of text into logical sections and, hopefully, some groups identifying the generally most interesting and important starting facts. However, *at this initial stage it's important not to mention 'most important' or 'most interesting facts', or any concept of sequencing, or – unless they are below about ten years old – to mention that a news story isn't based on a beginning–middle–end sequence in the way that a fiction story is***.** You want them to persevere a bit because (1) it can show you which individuals and groups are getting the idea themselves; (2) they need a surprising amount of time to read and think deeply about all the parts and how they might fit together best as a news story; (3) doing this exercise well will help give them an understanding of how to plan all forms of factual and report writing; and (4) the more they think about it themselves, the more the basic principles will sink in.

After a while, you will begin to see which students and groups are gaining some concept of what to put at the beginning of the story, although that section will usually be a bit jumbled to start with. By this point, some may also have correctly placed the rounding off 'foundation' statement about the weather department spokesman at the bottom and may well be able to explain why. This is a good time to begin boosting their confidence, asking why certain facts have been put in certain places and saying 'well done' accordingly, but still not giving too much away.

Asking leading questions

The most effective method of assistance at this stage is to ask leading questions of individual groups, beginning with deliberately vague questions and talking quietly as you move around the tables so that other groups don't overhear or copy the layouts of more advanced groups.

You can begin by asking general questions like 'Why did you think that this section should come after this one?' or 'What sort of things should be in this area of the story?' while pointing generally towards the top part of it. They might say words such as 'better things', 'big things' or 'less boring things', or they might mention 'exciting stuff that grabs the reader's attention', possibly because they also know that concept from fiction stories. Again, boost confidence wherever possible by nodding positively, or saying well done, or cheerfully tell them vague things like, 'you've got the right sort of things up here but you can still make that section better', 'that part looks good but is there something that doesn't fit in it? (or is missing from it?)', or point out a fact that they have placed at or near the top, such as the number of reported deaths so far, and ask them what sort of fact would normally go with that (e.g. the number of injured reported). Make them do the thinking!

Slowly, you can begin to pose questions based on their answers to make them follow through their lines of thinking. Their answers to what they think should be at the beginning of the article will determine what key leading questions you should introduce, so, when they say something

like ‘interesting stuff’ or ‘stuff that grabs the reader’s attention’, you can ask them what comprises the ‘stuff’ to which they are referring. If they are still stuck, you can ask whether this is this meant to be true or whether it is a fiction story, as in a story book.

Eventually, with a little work, you will have helped them to come up with the words ‘facts’ or ‘information’, and then you need to get them to think about what *sort* of facts or information should be in that top part. Hopefully, you can guide each group towards using the crucial phrases ‘most important’ and/or ‘most interesting’ when referring to the facts at the start of the story. The recipe for a well-formed news story usually contains a mixture of the two and the proportions of that mixture vary depending on the story and the paper’s approach to it.

At this point, you can ask your students to think about becoming more aware of how that discovery might affect all of their story and then move on to ask similar questions of other groups. As you come around again, you might find that some of the groups you have worked with have got the beginning sorted out relatively well, but are struggling to organise the rest and may well have fallen into some of several deliberate traps.

You may be surprised to discover that the odd group, particularly of younger students, may have put the fact that 4,000 people were killed at, or near, the end of their story. For an adult used to reading newspapers this might seem startling, but you will inevitably discover that they put it there because there has to be something ‘good’ (dramatic) at the end. This is, of course, because they have successfully grasped the beginning–middle–end form of a fiction story, but not the structure of a *news* story.

Eventually posing the key question

If they are still struggling to discover consciously the concept behind sequencing the importance and interest levels of the facts, it’s time for the key leading question. Ask them again what sort of things need to be at the top of the story and when they say something like ‘the most important and/or the most interesting facts’, nod positively and ask them ‘so what happens as you go down the story?’ Hopefully, mental bells will ring so loudly they will echo off the walls, and some member of the group will say ‘the facts become less important!’ They have just taken a step on the way to better planning and factual writing, but it will require lots of reinforcement for them to automatically use this knowledge in the future.

It is important to be aware of all of the points below before running the exercise, but they are also useful discussion points when pulling together a final recap session.

Deliberate difficulties 1

I mentioned deliberate traps or, perhaps I should say, hurdles, built into this exercise. The first is that participants don’t need to, and shouldn’t, use all of the information on the sheet because some of it is of such insignificance that it is irrelevant to the story. There are four pathetic ‘facts’ to disregard, which you will see have been placed to one side in the photograph of the best outcome of this exercise. It shows a certain amount of writer’s logic and developing independence of thought if an individual or group discards, or asks to discard, these without being given any hints to do so, especially if they work this out relatively early in the process. After all, they will need to be able to sort the wheat from the chaff in all of their factual, report, essay and presentation writing in future. The odd thing is that often a group initially discards only one or two of these dud facts, so leading questions and answers might run:

> ‘What are you doing with that bit of text over there?’
>
> ‘We thought we should maybe just throw it away, is that okay?’
>
> ‘Certainly, I never said you had to use all of the bits. The instructions were just to “make a story from it.”’

If members of that group don't then ask if they can throw the other duds away, you may eventually have to pose another, more direct, leading question, and ask if they think there are any more bits like that.

It is always worth asking each small group or the entire room, in re-cap time, why they have decided these parts should not go into the story. Again, of course, it has to do with levels of importance and interest. Quite obviously, the levels of importance and interest of those four bits of information are far too low for a story of this nature and, indeed, for any newspaper story, probably even one that might appear in a village 'Parish Pump' newsletter!

Deliberate difficulties 2 . . . and pigs might fly!

On this note, an interesting discussion inevitably arises when students are asked whether or not they should keep the section in about the 'flying' pig. I like to have them vote on that in recap time and usually about 90 percent of students think they should keep it in the story. It is useful to ask them why, because this poses quite a subtle journalistic dilemma. Someone usually says that it seems bad taste to include such a silly happening in a serious story in which many people have died in a disaster. On the other hand, the room usually quietly erupts with disagreement and the majority of students think that it is valid to include the pig both because it shows the power of the storm and it also seems to give the story some kind of balance, by having something amusing as a foil to the tragedy caused by the storm.

This brings you into the area of subjective or editorial judgement and you can ask in what circumstances they would they keep it in or take it out if they were the paper's editor.

Deliberate difficulties 3

You may have quickly realised that the president of the country is a woman, but lots of students initially make the assumption that Margarita is a man (even despite the feminine 'a' at the end of her name), because presidents are more commonly men. It is worth asking which students made that assumption at some point in the process, if only just to start with, because you can then explain why this kind of attention to detail is important in journalistic reporting and could sometimes mean the difference between getting sued or not! Some of the groups mix her quotes up with those of the charity aid worker, but it usually becomes obvious to most who said what and why, and you could discuss that too.

Deliberate difficulties 4

Many students also struggle with that section because it hasn't occurred to them that a sentence can begin with the word 'as'. This gives you an opportunity to start a little discussion about varying sentence beginnings, and the group could try making the section begin in a way that is akin to the other sentences and judge whether that seems better or worse in this piece.

More to discuss at the end of the basic sequencing exercise

Many, if not nearly all, of your pupils will have put the word 'yesterday' at the top of their stories at some point in the sequencing process. You can ask them when would the events in most stories that appear in a daily newspaper occur, and they will soon discover that almost every story could start with the word 'yesterday', which would mean a newspaper's stories would all start identically and so not be in the least catchy. The essential 'five Ws and an H[P1]' (*who, what, why, where, when and how*) can be looked at here in relation to the leads of newspaper stories,

and they will discover they are all there at the beginning of this hurricane story. As is mostly the case in a daily newspaper, the *when* is less important than the other elements because it is usually something like 'yesterday' or 'last night' . . . but, if it is breaking news on a 24-hour TV news broadcast or the internet, is more likely to be 'earlier today', 'we have just heard that' or 'now'. This is not to say that the *when* isn't important: as its name suggests, news is something new, and something too old is not news, but history.

A quick challenge game you can include at this point

Keeping the students in their small groups, you can ask them to make up the gist of a news story with a *who* lead and give points to the first two successful teams (two points to the first to come up with a good answer and one point for the second). Then you could ask them all to give you a summary of a *what* story (not a hurricane!), then of a *where* story lead – and so on.

If they are creative, they might even find a *who* story that is not about celebrity or famous people, but usually it will turn into a *what* story by accident. For example, an unusual *who* story might be about a 106-year-old woman who knocked out a bank robber with her handbag, but they will soon realise that some very ordinary person doing something extraordinary is usually also a *what* or *why* story.

The point of this little sub-exercise is that:

- it makes your young reporters think more about the different types of information they will soon have to ferret out in the news scenarios;
- it makes them more likely to employ the incredibly useful 'five Ws and an H' (what I sometimes call 'not the six but the six million possible questions') in their thinking, questioning and writing processes;
- it makes them more sensitive to the choices they will face in finding and choosing different possible leads in their news reports and in future factual writing.

The rhythm of language matters

Your pupils will have found that trying to place the word 'yesterday' in the first sentence of the story but not as its first word is also slightly problematic (again, deliberately so). By now the students realise that the numbers killed and injured are the most important and interesting facts and therefore take up the first two lines (with the stray 'and' in between), so the 'yesterday' doesn't go there.

Suggest that your students listen to what sounds best, and ask them, first, to try out the 'yesterday' here:

> Over four thousand people were killed
> and many thousands were injured
> *yesterday*
> on the Caribbean island of Cuba
> when a massive tropical storm hit the island.

Then ask them to try it out here:

> Over four thousand people were killed
> and many thousands were injured
> on the Caribbean island of Cuba,
> *yesterday,*
> when a massive tropical storm hit the island.

It may seem like a small point, but good writers become naturally aware of the sounds of language. The second option feels rhythmically better, largely because the 'yesterday' separates out the annoying closeness of the two occurrences of the word 'island'. When 'yesterday' lands in that position it might even warrant a comma on either side of it because it is an interjection. This also improves the rhythmic flow of the sentence as the tiny pauses separate the two occurrences of 'island' still further.

When can a news reporter write descriptively?

It is worth asking why the story should include the text about how Margarita Sanchez, 'staggered out of the muddy rubble of the presidential palace, her clothes tattered and her face bleeding . . .'. Some will realise that it is highly descriptive and thus adds 'colour', and that it also shows the enormous power of the storm. A good point for discussion is the inability of journalists to enliven news stories with their own juicy descriptive language because they weren't present themselves at the time of the incident (e.g. a murder, landslide or distant coach crash) and usually, therefore, have to report on it after the initial event has happened. They are writers of fact, not fiction, so the only way they can put description into their news stories in those circumstances is through the use of quotes from involved or interested parties. That's why news reporters are always on the lookout for the richest descriptiveness in any quotes, and try to obtain those from the most interesting, important or relevant people in order to make their effect more powerful, visceral and convincing.

Importance versus interest

Hopefully, this can lead on to a little additional discussion. You can ask further leading questions here to see if your students realise that, if the solidly built presidential palace (probably constructed of massive stone blocks and marble) can be destroyed like that, it probably means that the destructive effect of the hurricane on the ordinary houses and homesteads throughout the country would be enormous. You can then guide them to question whether or not the figures for the dead and injured are final tallies. As a former journalist, hearing that initial report coming from a particularly rural nation would suggest to me that the officially reported numbers of dead and injured are likely to increase dramatically over the next few hours and days, possibly several-fold. You can remind them that, if the initial reports of the hurricane mentioned over 4,000 people killed, the final number might even be 10,000 to 15,000 dead.

You can then lead the discussion into what makes a news story into a big one. For example, you could say that, in a paper produced in London or New York, this hurricane story might get a part of the front page and a bit more on one page inside, but it might be pushed off the front page if some major national political scandal was revealed at the same time.

You could then tell the students about some massively reported disaster such as the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center (or any more recent equivalent) and explain that, all over the Western world, major newspapers were considerably fatter than usual around that time because they ran such a large number of extra pages of photographs and articles about the attack and its aftermath, and they kept running extra pages of coverage for days and weeks afterwards.

If you then ask the students how many people they think died in that incident you will probably have some of them tell you confidently something like 'millions' or 'at least a hundred thousand'. When they learn that the official final death toll for 9/11 was just over 3,000, they are usually quite surprised, which is a good starting point for a discussion over why the 9/11 story was a much bigger story than this fictitious one would be, even though the death toll might have been a

fraction of the toll for the hurricane. The answer that they will hopefully come up with is that one was deliberately caused by humans and the other was a natural disaster. That's true, but the journalist's answer would be that it is determined by the level of people's interest. It's a neat example of why stories don't just lead with the most important facts, but also with the most interesting facts.

Three deaths versus 4,000 deaths – which is more dramatic?

To round that point off, you could explain about, or ask the participants to research on the internet, the scale of press coverage on the death of Princess Diana. When they report that it was massive, global and very long lasting (some newspapers were still running stories about it several years later), you can ask them how many people died there, and were their deaths deliberate or accidental. Once you discount the inevitable conspiracy theories, they will discover that the story was one of the very biggest in the UK and the western world at the end of last century and yet it was not deliberate but, rather, an accident in which *only three people died*. This makes the point that importance of *interest* is even more crucial in the way articles are written than *importance of facts*. You may need to keep reminding your young reporters of this when they are trying to work out how to write the lead sentence or two in their scenario reports!

A photocopiable template for the Basic Sequencing Exercise appears on the next page.

This is followed by a photograph, taken in a journalism workshop, which shows the best order of the final story. The photo can be used for teacher reference only or can also be shown to students once they have completed the process of sequencing the article themselves.

staggered out of the muddy rubble of the presidential palace

in one incident,

a weather department spokesman reported that the worst of the storm was now past

a pig was sucked hundreds of feet into the air by a tornado during the storm

huge waves burst through sea defences, flooding wide areas of countryside and several towns

a gardener in the town of Rapanda was upset that his favourite flowering bush in his garden had been damaged

a large number of houses and farms were completely destroyed

'I plead to the world community to help us in every way they can'

many thousands were injured

her clothes tattered and her face bleeding,

yesterday as she

on the Caribbean Island of Cuba

and survived because it landed in the swimming pool of a five star hotel

Christina Marcos is 28-years-old

when a massive tropical storm hit the island and

a stray dog that had hung around a farm recently has not been seen since

'It was absolutely terrifying', said charity aid worker Christina Marcos. 'Bits of houses and trees were flying around everywhere . . . we just hid in the basement until the dreadful roaring noises subsided'.

over 4,000 people were killed

President Margarita Sanchez said: 'If this is what can happen to us in the comparative safety of the President's official residence, just imagine what it must have been like for the rest of the population'.

Pedro Rodriquez, 52, had an argument with his wife because she had left the window open and rain had damaged the polished floorboards.

4 The shape of a news story

Suggestions for a recap following the Basic Sequencing Exercise

By now you will probably have discussed with the whole group the issues which came out of the Basic Sequencing Exercise and were covered in the previous chapter, so it's a good moment to draw the pictogram as it helps everyone remember this fundamental concept and is especially useful for visual learners.

After they have finished the Sequencing Exercise I have often asked students what geometric shape they think a news story has, and they have nearly always come up with a triangle or a pyramid. The reason for this shape is that the top part of the story is concentrated and is a sort of summary of the most important and interesting facts. Although key facts are squeezed into the narrow part at the top of the pyramid, as the reader moves down the story the remaining bulk of it is filled out with more detail, such as expanding people's names; giving greater precision in places, times, etc.; relaying direct or indirect quotes from people associated with the story; attributing these quotes to their sources, etc.

It has always seemed to me, my colleagues and students alike that a triangle or pyramid feels like the obvious explanatory form because the lead facts are crammed into one or two tight and catchy first sentences, and the rest of the writing below generally expands the story. There is even sometimes a 'rounding off' line or two at the end which acts as a foundation for the pyramid (as in the weather department spokesman's remarks in the exercise or – as a further example – 'a police department spokesman said that a 26-year-old man will appear in court on Tuesday, following the incident').

Another viewpoint

Curiously, some traditional journalism courses teach the whole thing the other way around, what they call 'the inverted pyramid'. Some of my former students who have moved on into industry training have complained that this form doesn't make as much sense, and I agree with them for the reasons above.

Another little point that may be worth mentioning to older groups is that most large daily papers print several different editions of that day's paper as the night progresses. A small number of the first editions go to relatively local street stalls, shops and stations for very early commuters, but the great bulk is sent off to places further afield to which distribution takes longer but where readers want to read the same paper at the same time as their capital city counterparts. Later editions are mostly distributed nearer the main production and distribution centres.

Initial news stories are often either expanded in later editions because more up to date and detailed information has come in, or cut down because other, more important, major stories break and take up prime space in the newspaper. Despite this, the normal (non-inverted) pyramid shape of a story still keeps its integrity, because if, for example, it is cut down, it doesn't lose its most important facts but those which are its least important ones. It is therefore generally cut down from the bottom upwards, meaning that variations of the same story still maintain the same triangular shape. This would not apply if the pyramid was inverted, because the story shape would end up as an oddly truncated, upside-down triangle!

You will find an annotated pictogram of the news story pyramid at the end of this chapter. If you wish, you can draw it on a board or flipchart, shade in each section in turn and ask students to describe what each section is and what it contains.

When to write a headline

I never allow students to write the headline until after they have written the story itself. It's a good idea to ask them why, and I always make sure I particularly stress the point given at the end of the list below.

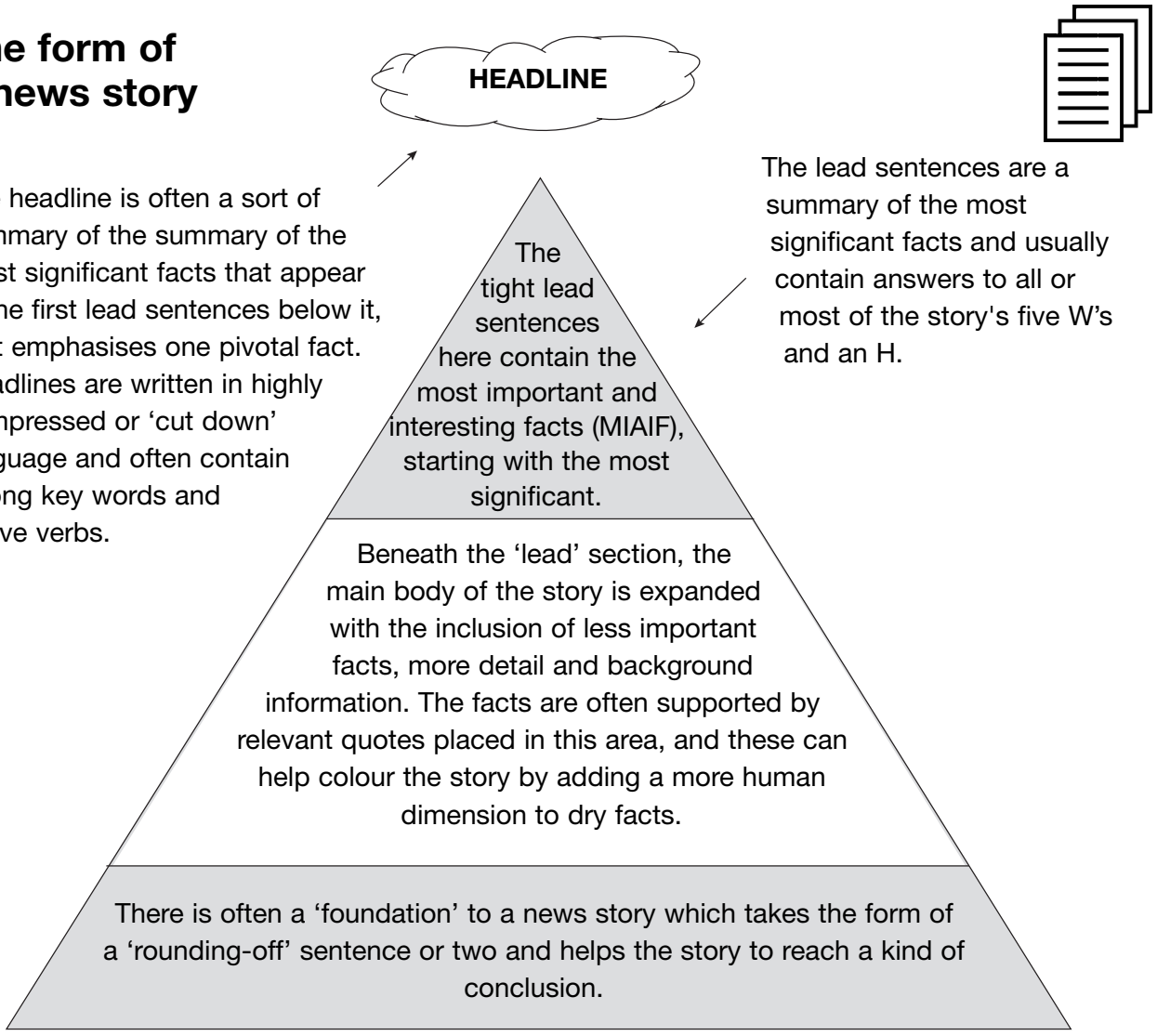
A headline should be written *after* a story is completed because:

- writers often can't tell what their exact headline will be until they have spent a lot of time working out the best lead of the story and have written the first one or two sentences;
- if they write the headline first, and are proud of it, young writers may distort the story to fit with the headline;
- the headline may contain clever word play which is apparent only from the subtleties of the written story;
- more information might come in during writing which may alter the lead and hence the headline;
- when young writers write the headline first, they frequently forget to include the same key facts in the first part of the story. After all, the first lead sentence or two in a story is a summary of the most interesting or important facts. While the headline is thus often a cut-down summary of that summary, all of the facts still have to be in the body of the story – even those already mentioned in the headline.

As a rounding off point, it is worth reminding students of the strong difference in form between a beginning–middle–end fiction story and a pyramid news story, and asking them if either of these forms would apply to, say, writing about some other topic in school, such as what they had learned about the causes of the Second World War, or what they had discovered in primary school about ancient Egyptian pharaohs, etc. Hopefully, they will realise that factual reports and presentations follow the general form of the news story pyramid, so this is a good moment to remind them of the usefulness of consciously applying the basic sequencing concept to help plan, organise and write all of their future reports and presentations, both in and out of school.

The following page shows an annotated pictogram of the news story pyramid. You could choose to draw a version of it on a board or flipchart (asking relevant questions as you go), photocopy the page onto A3 to fix on the wall and/or scan and display it through your digital projector or interactive board.

The form of a news story



The form of a news story can be described as a pyramid because the most significant facts, in summary form, are squashed into the first few sentences in the narrow part at the top. The most interesting or significant fact of all appears right at the beginning to pull the reader into the rest of the story. As the pyramid widens out, these key facts are expanded upon, less important facts and background details are brought in, and colour is added through the inclusion of quotes and reported speech. Facts grow steadily less important as the reader moves down the story.

There is often a 'foundation' to the pyramid in the form of a 'rounding-off' sentence or two which helps the story to reach a kind of conclusion, even if the events reported in the story are still continuing. Examples of this would be: 'A man will appear in court later this week in connection with the incident' or 'A council spokesman said that details of the proposals will be officially released in November', or 'UN officials say that international aid has already begun to reach the area'.

The cloud (or perhaps 'flag' would be more appropriate) floating above the pyramid is, of course, the headline. It is important to remember that any key facts mentioned in the headline must also be repeated in the lead part of the story directly below it, which is why the headline is shown floating above the story as a separate entity. A headline is both eye-catching and 'mind-catching' as it has to pull people into wanting to read the story or, indeed, the whole paper if it's a main headline on the front page. It may also employ tricks such as alliteration, amusing puns or other play with words.

A newspaper story is often either cut down or added to in later editions of the paper, but the pyramid always holds its shape and just gets smaller or taller depending on how short or long the story becomes.

5 Studying the papers together

A few ideas to make it more informal and informative

One of the most effective ways to begin this session is to buy a good selection of recent newspapers. If you buy them all on the same day, a day or two before you want to use them, you can check that there is no obvious content you might judge too shocking or outrageous for your particular group.

Obtaining them ahead of the workshop also means that you have time to look through several papers in depth and make your own physical or mental notes on differences of style, content, tone, language, readership, the use of photographs and graphics, which stories are covered or not covered in particular papers and to what degree, etc. You can also use this period to make detailed notes on a couple of stories which the group can study in more depth. I would highly recommend taking time to do this, comparing all the things mentioned below and looking for other interesting comparisons that appear in those particular issues. Convening a detailed discussion on the comparison of those papers and a couple of chosen stories in advance with your partner, family, colleagues or friends can be an entertaining way of finding and noting a wide variety of striking and less obvious differences and approaches.

Picking a varied selection of papers and websites

You will want to buy at least a couple of quality papers and a couple of tabloid papers, but I also like to show the range of geographical readership from international papers (such as the *International Herald Tribune*, *The European*, etc.) down to national, regional, town or local papers, and even a parish newsletter. I would also suggest you save or print a couple of related sections of various news providers' websites for that day, including some that aren't simply online versions of those actual newspapers.

If you really want to go to town on the exercise, you might bring in, or find on the internet, copies of a few newspaper front and internal pages from, say, twenty, fifty and a hundred years ago to examine changing styles, the appearance and use of colour (or lack of it), layout and style, news subjects, geographical reach, and so on. If possible, you could also look at one of the recent news stories on a mobile phone, palmtop or other mobile platform.

The varied geographical ranges of different modern newspapers and the fact that national newspapers bought abroad used to be a day or two (or even months) out of date because they had to be physically flown or shipped to their destination is something that surprises students. Now, of course, newspapers are available abroad almost as quickly as in their countries of origin by virtue of the internet transfer of the made-up newspapers, and local printing agreements between newspaper publishers in different countries. *The New York Times* or the UK's *Daily Express* that an American or British tourist buys in Greece has probably been printed overnight in the print works of a Greek newspaper and distributed along with that paper.

There is an organic learning quality to seeing, feeling and even smelling a selection of real paper newspapers that adds a dimension to just studying them on computer or interactive board.

Organising the room

The first thing I usually do is to arrange students in a kind of semi-circular amphitheatre in front of me, with some on the floor and some on chairs behind, so they are all near enough to see the newspapers on the floor or on an angled board. I usually begin by asking them a simple question such as 'What kind of newspaper is this?' then lead them into separating the papers first by geographical reach (international, national daily, city evening, regional daily, weekly local, Parish Pump, etc.) and then, within that, by putting quality newspapers to one side of the line and tabloids on the other. I usually explain that some papers, such as the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*, are sometimes called 'bridge' papers in the business because they generally contain more informative news than other tabloids. Sometimes, students sense that and move them around between both sides, trying to make a decision.

To give a background to what they are going to be looking at, I might ask students to say what kind of readership they think each of the newspapers has because, as with any product, tailoring its look and content to those end consumers explains its design, news and opinion content, language and information level, spin, etc. For instance, in the UK, *The Daily Telegraph* has traditionally been read by wealthy people, business people, some professionals, etc., and been relatively right wing in political views, whereas the *Daily Mirror* has been read more by blue collar workers and has traditionally been socialist. *The Independent* and *The Guardian* have a more 'artsy' and liberal readership and a higher percentage of media and creative people buy it. Tabloids, which largely feature celebrities, gossip, the monarchy and fashion, have a relatively high female readership. Newspapers' content reflects all of these things, from the choice and depth of news coverage, to the opinions expressed, to the choice and layout of photos, graphics, adverts and typefaces, etc.

Discovering political and socio-economic bias

Contrary to what some students think, not all quality papers are conservative or all tabloid papers left wing. For example, *The Sun* famously switched from supporting the Labour Party to supporting the Conservative Party many years ago and was credited by most media watchers (and itself) as having won the British election for Margaret Thatcher's Tory party. This is an important issue to discuss with young people, because they need to be aware that, even though newspapers are supposed to inform the public and tell the truth, they all have their own 'spin agenda' to some degree or another, and so a plurality of news sources is essential for a thriving democracy. This was the argument that prevented the media mogul Rupert Murdoch's massive international company News Corporation (owner of the aforementioned *The Sun*) from being allowed to take over all of Sky/BSB satellite television broadcasting, after large numbers of UK citizens wrote, called and emailed their government to protest against too much media power being locked into too few hands.

Although people say they want to know the true facts of a situation, they also seem to prefer to consume news that is biased in its delivery towards their own social, cultural and political beliefs. If you are intending to consider a particular newspaper with your class and you are unsure of its politics and demographics, you can easily research that kind of thing in advance, online.

Once you have helped your students determine this in respect of a few papers, you might take a quality paper, a sensationalist tabloid and perhaps a more independent paper, and look together at what kinds of stories they each cover and how much coverage, if any, they give to a

few selected stories. It is sometimes said that quality papers have smaller headlines and bigger stories compared to tabloids, which can be an entertaining aspect for them to examine at this point.

Spot the differences

Your students will soon discover that tabloid papers often seem more in the business of selling gossip and emotion than selling hard news facts, but this is only the beginning of an interesting detective hunt. All newspapers interest and inform their respective readerships – but how do they vary in doing this? In as much depth as you think your group can deal with, you could concentrate on aspects such as:

- how their layouts and styles vary;
- who they are trying to appeal to by the use of colour, certain fonts, the scale and choice of photographs they use to illustrate stories, etc.;
- how much they use 'teasers' on the front page (and the front pages of sections), and what sort of people will be 'teased' enough by them to look inside;
- what socio-economic group(s) their adverts aimed at, both by products or services featured and by design style in the adverts. UK tabloids in general have been said to be aimed at socio-economic group C and below, quality newspapers at group C and above, but there are differences between papers within those bands too;
- how dramatic or subtle some principal photographs are and how the photo editor may have decided to choose them and to crop them (they might notice that very wide shots and very tightly cropped ones can both be especially dramatic depending on subject matter);
- the size of headlines and the proportion of headline to text;
- the general proportion of photo and illustration to text;
- the proportion of advert to text;
- the placement and position of some stories in different papers which cover the same news event (does a particular story appear in all papers or only in some and, if so, why?);
- the quality and tone of language used and what sort of people might use that kind of language themselves (the use of colloquial language, puns, alliteration, rhyme, word games, complex vocabulary, formal or technical terms, etc.);
- which papers more often shorten words to colloquial terms such as 'boosted', 'tycoon', 'hols', 'top' (as in using the phrase 'top bosses' rather than something like 'leading members of the Institute of Directors');
- the number of significant hard facts in the same basic story covered by different papers (various colours of highlighting can be helpful here);
- whether a news story is really always a story in which you learn new facts or whether it can sometimes be more like news about opinions about the news (you may be able to find a story like that);
- how much business news there is in each paper (the more sensationalist tabloids sometimes have no business sections);
- how much national, international (or relatively local) news appears in each;
- how in-depth the sports coverage is (it often surprises students that some quality papers can have more in-depth sports coverage than tabloids);
- how much opinion there is in the paper and how clearly labelled and separated from 'hard news' it is;
- which papers mostly inform;
- which feature more 'personal' stories.

You might draw two wide columns on the board, one for tabloid and one for quality, then list or scatter all the differences your students can find in each column.

Looking at language

Looking closely at a couple of different newspapers' articles about the same news event, students could try to decide which words are emotive ('show or create feelings'), which are colloquial, which are more formal, and possibly which are relatively 'technical' (partly dependent on the subject of the story and partly by the type of newspaper).

You could provide small breakout groups of students with various colours of highlighters to help them with this – perhaps warm colours like red, pink or yellow for the first two (emotive and/or colloquial) and cooler colours for formal and technical. Otherwise, you could simply work with the entire group on the interactive whiteboard. If you wish, students or sub-groups can tally these different types of words and compare the results for different sorts of paper. It's probably best to pick a fairly highbrow story about serious politics or science and also one that involves a certain amount of celebrity gossip. They could also try to count how many truly significant facts are given in each version.

Experimenting with the journalistic use of photographs

If you have time, you might wish to look a little more at photographs, especially if your students are eventually going to be creating a newspaper and possibly taking some, or all, of the photographs themselves.

As mentioned earlier, tightly cropped and sometimes also very wide photographs often seem to have most impact. You could set up some serious and some silly incidents with the group (or base them on some situations in other English or History coursework), then photograph them from a distance, middle distance and close up, generally keeping a little space around each as you take it. On the interactive whiteboard you can then crop some of these 'pix' down from very wide to very tight, saving any versions that the group think are most effective and encouraging your students to find creative language to describe the different effects.

Remember to cut out dead space and irrelevant clutter as much as possible, particularly in the tighter versions you've taken, and especially above subjects' heads. Try going so close that you even cut off the tops of some people's heads: newspaper photos and television images often do this for impact. You might like to show how this compares with either a typical family holiday photo (often with lots of peripheral space in it) or some traditional painted portraits. With the latter it's curious to compare news photos of groups with what, and how much, some painters have chosen to show around their human subjects, as well as their subject's pose.

Another interesting area is to show how important it can be to include key elements in the picture along with human reaction. For example, a photograph of a young wife, who has just received a letter posted by a soldier who was killed the day he sent it, might show her hand clutching the letter tightly and catch just part of the sad expression on her face, or her head tilted down in grief. In some cases, you might show how an unusual angle or distance or cropping can make a potentially mediocre photograph come alive.

I once asked members of a group to cluster quite tightly and excitedly around someone grinning and holding a giant trophy. I then took a few photographs fairly close in, and intentionally allowed some of them to be partially spoiled by heads and arms in the way. I took one or two between people's heads which deliberately included the subject and the trophy; a couple like that plus a few squashed in heads and arms around the subject; and a couple of the subject and trophy deliberately shot between many of 'the crowd' from a moderate distance away. The

students were noticeably surprised which were the most effective when we cropped them down: those with the sense of crush and excitement told a better and more interesting story than the traditional almost portrait-like ones of a grinning subject holding a trophy.

Finding examples of strong visual imagery

To show how interesting and effective carefully shot and cropped photos can be, you could start collecting a variety of outstanding examples over the weeks ahead – especially of unusual, intriguing and powerful images appearing on the front pages of quality newspapers. If possible, also keep the entire front page to see the impact of the image, how big it is, and where it has been positioned.

The old broadsheet newspapers (which were exactly twice the size of most tabloid papers and were sold folded in half) frequently used to print a large and impactful news photograph on the front page, with the lower portion of the image hidden underneath the folded newspaper so that potential readers might be teased into picking up the paper from the stand to see the whole image and caption. The idea was that, once the paper opened out (and inserts probably dropped onto the ground), potential readers would become so embarrassed, or so involved with that copy, that they would decide to buy it.

As well as tightly cropped news pictures, try to find some that use lots of space in them as would, for example, a photo of a homeless person wrapped in newspaper at the near edge of a scene depicting a vast, run down industrial wasteland. Also look for some where objects tell part of the story, or where the photographer has cut out people's faces and only shows vignettes such as a row of clenched fists, a bloodied hand reaching for a broken bottle, etc. There are plenty of dramatic images available on news and photo agency websites that can be chosen as exciting examples, and by searching online for the newspapers that covered a particularly high profile past news event.

When tense gets them tense!

The different ways tenses are used in notes, newspapers and fiction stories often confuse young writers. One thing you will notice when running the 'live action' scenarios is that many of your enthusiastic trainee reporters will take down their notes in the present tense. We all tend to list notes of things and ideas in the present tense, but younger students often get confused by this, as you will see when they then try to put their notes into a news story on the computer. You will probably notice sections of present tense creeping in and getting muddled up with the past tense of the story itself. It's the same problem when you ask children to brainstorm in-depth ideas for a fiction story. Their notes will be in the present tense but, although they know that most made-up stories are told in the past tense, many will then struggle to keep their use of tense consistent.

In newspapers, an event being recounted happened in the past, almost always before the reporter arrived on the scene or even heard about it. The story about it will appear in a newspaper sometime after that . . . so the past is usually 'yesterday' in the case of a daily newspaper, or something like 'on Wednesday' or 'earlier this week' in the case of a weekly one. It is worth reminding your students that the story itself will always be in the past tense simply because it happened in the past as far as newspaper readers are concerned. The sample papers in front of them will bear this out.

A tense challenge

With relatively able groups you might discuss what tense(s) presenters use when a new story breaks on a 24-hour TV news channel, at what point a part will switch from present to past tense as the story develops, and under what circumstances a presenter might need to move around between present, past and future tenses. You could ask the whole group to make up a news story situation in which this may occur and, perhaps through small group discussion feeding back into the whole group, get them to suggest what the words of a reporter on location and a studio-based presenter might be, utilising all three tenses. You could type this out on the digital board and make changes as necessary with the class. The story they choose would, of course, need to be an ongoing and changing news situation with elements which have already happened, things that are currently happening, and possible future developments or consequences. You may have to show them some 24-hour news on television to make sure they are all familiar with the format. The mining disaster rescue story in the Headlines chapter is an example of this kind of rolling story.

Captions and a 'tense' caption game

Caption-writing, which is normally done in the present tense, tends to be the place at which the rules of tense seem to get broken. Unsurprisingly, this sometimes seems confusing to children because the event depicted actually happened in the past. I like to tell them that, because the photo they are seeing is, in effect, a 'frozen moment', it seems to the viewer almost as if that moment is happening in front of them 'now' – hence the use of the present tense.

Here is a simple game to play based on captions. With the whole group, look at several pre-chosen photos in different newspapers (e.g. national quality, tabloid and local) and read out their captions, then discuss why they have been written they way they are, how short and straight-forward they are and also, occasionally, how funny, pun-laden or alliterative they are.

You can then ask small groups each to think out a different dramatic, sad, funny, cute or curious newsworthy moment. They can then either act out a photo of it as a 'frozen moment' or have someone else take a photo of them in that position, with any handy props as necessary. Groups can make up one or two (present tense) captions for them and read them out while they act the frozen moment, or drop the photo into a Word document with their caption beneath, to be digital projected for everyone in class to discuss and try and improve upon.

It's good to have a variety of different types of 'news moment' as that produces slightly different types of caption. Just as with young people's headline writing, you may have to limit the damage caused by a fixation on alliteration at any cost, no matter how daft the result! You might need to point out that most captions are necessarily short, matter of fact and, like the news reports themselves, should not generally contain any form of opinion, vagueness or dramatic descriptive words created by the writer.

Quick captions

A quick, but less fun and organic, way of playing with captions is to cut out dramatic, sad, funny, cute and curious pictures from newspapers, or display (on an interactive board) similar digital photos from news provider sites on the internet. Then, after having hidden their captions, verbally summarise each news story for your students and ask them to make up their own effective captions for them. It is always interesting to see if they find different or better ideas than the captions that came with the photos. Not all photos are copiable, so you may have to bring up the sites themselves – and many may be subject to copyright restrictions, although limited educational use is often exempt.

Differences between fiction stories and news stories

Finally, it is again worth discussing the differences between a beginning–middle–end fiction story and a news report. Perhaps you could ask the group to call out any they can remember or work out themselves, and write or type them onto the board in two columns.

Here are a few:

- A news story is (meant to be) about fact, not made up ideas (fiction). It is not supposed to exaggerate any of the facts or make any up. If a newspaper is too inaccurate too often, people will stop believing it and stop buying it, and it can also get sued for saying things about people or organisations that are untrue.
- A news story has the special pyramid shape in which all of the most interesting/important stuff is at the beginning, but a fiction story has a beginning–middle–end structure in which much of the dramatic stuff usually appears near the end, often in a climactic section.
- A good fiction story is often highly descriptive, whereas a news story is mostly only as descriptive as the quotes of people associated with the event described in the story.
- Sentences are often shorter, on average, in news stories (especially the first lead sentences), whereas they are often more varied in length in a fiction story.
- Paragraphs in news stories commonly have only one or two sentences in them, whereas in fiction they are generally longer and of more varied length.
- News stories are put into columns, which is not usually the case with stories in books.
- News stories are often broken up and made more catchy and eye-friendly with headlines and sub-headings, photographs, the use of plain and bold type, various sizes of lettering, etc. Fiction stories generally don't do this as much, unless they appear in illustrated picture books or magazines, etc.

6 Story Quest

A journalism game

Please note that this game is based on photocopiable fictitious quotes that can be found at the end of this chapter.

Story Quest is a fizzy, fun and challenging activity for a group or whole class, in which each participant plays a simple role involving giving out a single quote or, in the case of smaller groups, two quotes from two different 'characters'. Each student has to interview all of the other participants to discover who every person is playing and to note down or collect his or her quotes. Through this process, they can then work out and write a news story.

The Quest is a little more devious and complex than that, because the quotes they collect come from several different stories. The hopeful young reporters therefore have to figure out which quote is from which narrative in order to work out and write their chosen news stories. There is usually quite a bit of busy milling around involved!

One thing that makes this activity particularly challenging is that participants are only given information through the form of quotes (with the name and details of the 'quoters'), so they have to figure out the exact story through facts gleaned from these quotes. They then have to bullet point and sequence the information themselves and then write the lead and the rest of the story, including in it as many relevant quotes as necessary to create a tight news story. For the benefit of the teacher running the exercise, the quotes are graded in each list from top to bottom in general level of usefulness, but students aren't initially told that there are excellent quotes, mediocre ones, and even a few which contain no valuable information at all and need to be discarded.

There is useful educational differentiation available in this activity, in that some of the stories are slightly harder to write than others, and also older, more able and confident writers might attempt to write more than one of them while less able students can achieve well through writing one satisfactorily.

Organisers can decide whether or not to allow participants to choose which story to write or to stipulate that they must write the one related to their own quote . . . or any of the stories other than the one of which their own quote is part. The easiest to write is probably the escaped giraffe story and the hardest is possibly the cliff rescue story, but the fallen angel story is almost as difficult and is longer. All of the stories are fairly challenging to write well and the biggest differentiation available to you is probably the level of perfection you expect from the age and ability band of your group.

Becoming a good writer involves setting high aspirations and taking on difficult challenges!

How to run Story Quest

Three photocopiable sets of quotes from fictitious characters can be found at the end of this chapter. These form the basis of separate news stories and are presented in two different challenge levels so you can choose the most appropriate series.

The first series is probably most suitable for older pupils in the Years 8/9/10, or perhaps 7/8/9, or for more able students from Year 6 upwards (i.e. ages 11–16, depending on ability).

The second series of slightly simplified story quotes may be more suitable for Years 5/6/7 (ages 10–12) or possibly less able Years 8/9 (weaker than average 13–14-year-olds).

Please look at the other options set out later in this chapter – such as the quicker ways to run the Quest – before deciding which is best for you and your group.

In advance

- Choose either series 1 quotes (for around ages 12–15) or series 2 quotes (for ages 10–12 approx.) then photocopy the relevant series of Story Quest sheets at the end of this chapter before cutting out all the quotes and information from those pages on the guillotine.
- Scan-read the quotes, then read the 'possible story solutions' to give you a feel for the exercise and the stories.
- Work out how many different stories you will need for your size of group or class (normally three, but perhaps two for a small group).
- If you have a smaller group (say, about 16 or under) you may decide either to hand out two quotes to some people and/or to reduce the number of stories used from three to two. I favour the first option because separating one story out of three is more challenging and fun than one story out of two.
- Choosing the 'key quotes' at the top of the lists first, work out how many you will need from each story in order for every participant to have one slip (or two different ones) with a quote and the name of the character who has given the quote on it. Double check that all the 'key quotes' are included among those to hand out.
- Mix the individual quote slips up ready to hand out to your students. Alternatively, you may decide to give specific slips to particular students. If you decide certain students should work on particular stories, you might sort this out in advance by folding a slip from the story you want them to work on and putting the particular student's name on it. I slightly favour asking pupils to work on a story that their slip does not relate to because a few may gain a tiny head start in understanding their story by having drawn a lucky 'key quote' slip. However, giving relatively helpful starter quotes to less able students and choosing to write the stories to which participants' own slips relate can be a useful way of helping those less confident pupils to get a handle on the story narrative at an early stage.
- No quote is to be used more than once by any one student.
- Find adequate clipboards, plain A4 paper and pencils for each student (geography or art departments are often good sources of clipboards in secondary schools) or, failing that, supply stiff board or books with bulldog clips. Each student will require several sheets of paper.
- If possible, book a large space for this activity, such as on the school field or playground on a sunny day, or the hall or other free space. If you can't find a suitable large space, you may have to use the classroom, but it won't be so practical or so much fun, and the noise level might become a little irritating to all concerned during the interview stage of the activity.
- Book time in the computer suite for writing and editing the stories later, but remember that the bigger the group, the longer the first part of the activity will take. If you need that first part to move quickly, look at the section subtitled 'Quicker, quieter and easier variations', later in this chapter.

At the beginning of the activity

- Explain the project to the participants, telling them that they will shortly be taking part in a fun journalism exercise known as Story Quest, and that little sections of news stories will be distributed to each of them. Be careful not to give them any hints about the subjects or content of the stories.
- Say that each person will be given one (or two) quotes and some minimal details about the character or characters who have given them. Pupils will have to read these out (some quicker variations can be found below) or possibly memorise perfectly their allotted quote(s), the full name and other details of the fictitious character(s) and the spelling of the character name(s), etc. It's a good idea to remind participants to speak clearly, slowly and not too quietly, yet not to read their quotes too loudly lest the room become impractically noisy.
- Tell your students that they will have to write a news story individually (or in pairs if you deem this more suitable for all or some participants) based on those quotes and the information they contain. Depending on what you have decided, explain that they can write whichever story they wish, or remind them they have to write either the story to which their quote relates or a story to which their quote does not relate.
- Ask students to take their clipboards, several sheets of A4 paper and pencils, and spread out as far as possible within the space.
- Hand out one (or two) slip(s) to each person. Tell them to try and memorise the quotes and details on these, but explain that they can read from the slips if necessary if they aren't confident that they will get every detail correct.
- After giving them a couple of minutes to memorise, or at least familiarise themselves with their slip(s), you can inform them that they are nearly ready to interview each other but that they need to be patient in both asking for quotes and in saying them to others at a speed at which the others can write (unless they simply collect each quote on a slip).
- Explain to your students that they will need to interview everyone in the group (or read slips pinned on clothing, or collect all slips depending on the variation you've chosen) to be sure they have found all the necessary information for their stories. Suggest that they also note down beside the quote the name of each student that they have interviewed, so they know who they've been to and who they still have to visit. Once they definitely start to understand the story they are writing they won't have to write down unrelated quotes, as long as they are completely sure they are unrelated (or unless you want them to write more than one story).
- There is nothing to stop several people at a time writing down a quote as someone reads it out. This can speed the process up.
- Point out that they don't necessarily need to write absolutely every quote down word for word as long as they note down the key facts in them and who said them. However, do stress that they will need to collect several important and colourful quotes for their article so – because they will not remember them accurately if they find they do require them in the article – like real life journalists, to be on the safe side, they should write down in full several more good quotes than they might need (if they collect them on slips they will have them all anyway).
- Tell the students that, for all of those stories, they are reporters on a national daily, or large, regional newspaper and see if they remember to write that everything happened 'yesterday' in them!

Quicker, quieter and easier variations of the first part of the activity

1) Instead of students reading out their quotes to those who interview them, you can arrange for them to 'wear' the slips. The easiest way to do this is probably to use sticky tape (bits of

masking tape are an effective and cheap option) to attach slips to their own shoulders or to get a partner to affix the slip(s) to their backs for them.

This part of the activity can move more quickly this way but is still fun because, for example, if slips are on people's backs, they will keep inadvertently walking off to read other's slips before their own slips have been completely copied, so there will be people shuffling after other people all over the room. It can get a little noisy like this, though!

You can pre-cut little pieces of masking tape and attach one end of each lightly to the edges of tables, plastic rulers, etc., ready for them to use.

2) A simpler and faster version, which still retains some of the fun of everyone hunting for quotes from everyone else, is to give each person a bunch of identical ones, each showing that person's one particular quote, so your intrepid young reporters simply have to exchange the slips they have. You will have to photocopy the same number of sheets as the number of students before cutting them up and sorting them into piles of the same quote. Remember, before copying, that you can possibly chop some of the last few weak quotes off each set, depending on the number of students doing the Quest.

   This 'slip swapping' option should be chosen for younger groups such as 10-year-olds, or for those who find scribing a slow or tedious process.

3) Perhaps the easiest, quickest and quietest version of this part of the activity is to stick down each of the slips around the space in advance, onto walls, floors, desks, tables, furniture, etc., so your student reporters just have to find their way around them all and copy those that are relevant, or pick up a quote slip from each little pile of identical ones if you also want to cut out their scribing time. In a large space such as a gym or hall, you could stick them, or leave little piles of the same quote on different parts of the floor, on tables, wall bars, along corridors, etc.

   This version of the news gathering element of the activity loses some of the chaotic, noisy fun of trying to acquire quotes from everybody else while giving them out oneself, but it will run much more quickly. Collecting printed slips in some way is also the simpler option if you decide to challenge older, more able students by asking them to write more than one of the news stories, otherwise there would be too much scribing involved for most groups. Of course worrying about scribing time is irrelevant if you choose the option of leaving a pile of the same quote slips at each deposit point around the space. It's a good idea to weight each little pile down to prevent the slips from being blown around by over-enthusiastic participants!

Although teachers will often want to choose one of the quicker options above because of time restraints, I feel that, as a journalistic activity, there can be a certain bonus to beginning the process through all those mini interviews of the other characters. It is fun, builds confidence in socially reticent pupils, and can be an effective ice-breaker activity if the students aren't used to working with each other, such as in an AG&T residential course, cluster group enrichment activity, etc.

It is also worth remembering that students don't need to write all the quotes down, but only those pertaining to the particular story on which they are to work. They also don't necessarily have to write down absolutely all of the quotes in their own story precisely because a few are fairly useless, and some parts duplicate what they get from others. After all, much of the article they write won't be in the form of quotes anyway so, if they are organised, they can just note the facts of some, but accurately write down several particularly juicy and important key quotes, word for word. It has more of the feel of a real journalism activity with this combination of interviewing, selective note-taking, the paraphrasing of information and the recording of accurate quotes.

The second stage: writing the story

Once everyone in the group feels they have written down all the facts and all of the good quotes they require (or have collected slips with all the quotes related to their story), it is time to write up the articles, and you have to decide whether you want them to do this individually or in pairs. You will probably find, especially if you followed the interview route, that one member of a pair has completely missed one or two key quotes, or that someone has noted down some quotes that obviously don't fit with the story on which they are working!

As in all journalistic writing, it is immensely more effective and efficient to work on computers at the writing stage because students can work, rework and edit as they go in a much more fluent way than by handwriting, and this is exactly what we want them to do because it achieves the best learning outcome. If they have to handwrite an article, continuously changing words and sequences of text with pen or pencil is fiddly, time-consuming and dispiriting.

Before they start to write the articles it is important to remind pupils, briefly, of the Basic Sequencing Exercise so that they can organise the information on their clipboards (or their collected slips) accordingly. If they are older or relatively able, they might just scan their notes and quotes then sequence them in their heads, which is ultimately a good thing to become accustomed to doing because they are going to have to do that in much future writing, so the mental practice is important.

On the other hand, if they are younger, not especially able, or seem confused about how to deal with the sense and flow of the story, you could suggest that they can number or place each quote on their note sheets to indicate its level of interest and importance and even mark which ones they will want to use as (direct speech) quotes, reported speech or just as facts in their article.

Some may want to type up all the quotes and facts they think they will use, sequence them on the computer, and then use the cut and paste option to lift them into the body of the evolving story. This is always a sensible option and can introduce them to the journalistic technique of 'holding editing options' at the bottom of the page, that is, dropping items there before and during editing, or lifting chunks from there up into the story itself. Thus, this is not only an effective aid for getting sequencing right in advance and, in effect, planning the story, but it is also helpful during the actual writing process.

Another advantage of holding editing options at the bottom of the page is that it helps a young writer remember to use information that he or she might otherwise forget to put in the article, and it sometimes triggers mental connections between pieces of data which could come together in a sentence in a way that might not otherwise have been noticed.

Due to these advantages, I suggest making sure that all those in the group are familiar with how to highlight, cut and paste portions of text, and then move onto demonstrating how to deposit, hold and lift sections of text, quotes and facts into and out of a handy 'reservoir' below the main body of text.

Some finer details to look at

As well as separating out the best information from the quotes to make sense of a story, one of the particular challenges at the writing stage of this activity is that many of the quotes need to be used wholly or partly in the form of either facts or as reported speech, or both, with some quotes backing up some reported facts. Of course, if your young journalists simply attempted to use only the raw quotes they have collected their writing wouldn't flow like a story and would simply be a disjointed list of quotes. Some parts of some quotes may be used, as long as what is left is truly what the person said and is representative of their intended meaning.

The beginning of each of these stories is unlikely to be in the form of a quote, so your young writers will have to work out how to paraphrase the MIAIF (most important and interesting facts). Perhaps it's worth mentioning that news stories *do* sometimes begin with a quote, but that is

usually because the article is based on something interesting or contentious that a politician or someone else famous has said.

Remember to remind your student writers early on that opinion and comment are supposed to be kept to the opinion part of a newspaper but that a news story is meant (!) to be free of opinion, or opinion words inserted by its writer(s) but not gleaned from relevant quotes. Unlike in a creative story, it is generally not up to the writers to make it more interesting by adding in their own dramatic descriptive words or phrases, such as 'stallholders were shaking in their shoes', or their own opinion, such as 'police giving chase should not have been using their sirens'.

On the other hand, it might be acceptable in the giraffe story, for example, to use a phrase such as 'The drama unfolded after . . .' because it is obvious that an event such as a terrified giraffe rampaging through the centre of a city could be described as a 'drama' without exaggerating the situation, as might 'shocked shoppers ran for their lives . . .'. However, as no-one was killed or seriously injured in the incident, the word 'disaster' would be too strong to be true. Children find this sense of balance hard to master, but some sensationalist tabloid newspapers can, at times, seem nearly as bad at it!

Although a news writer shouldn't creatively invent them, colourful descriptions from witnesses become news 'facts' because witnesses tell them to the reporter and the reporter records them. The judicious use of descriptive quotes is how reporters can add detail and colour to a story, and the information in them counts as 'facts' (in a way) because the relevant witnesses or commentators have told them to a working journalist. As mentioned above, the journalist can then choose whether to use the 'facts' in the quotes in the form of facts, as whole or partial quotes, or as reported speech.

In a real newspaper, many of the 'facts' gleaned from quotes will be attributed to the person who said them, for three main reasons. First, so that the paper won't be blamed, or at least not as much, if the facts given to it are not perfectly true or accurate (although a good journalist will always attempt to obtain corroborating information from another source). Second, because it adds believability to the story if the identity of the quoter is made clear and, third, it can add even more colour to the scene to know which people were involved in, or witnessed, an incident, especially if there is emotive content in their remarks.

Breaking up quotes

It is challenging for younger students to work out how to build a quote or a partial quote into a sentence, and it's a good exercise for them to experiment with breaking the quote into two parts, especially if it is a long one. Breaking some quotes up like this can help add texture to the writing and often improves its rhythmic flow. Take the following quote, for example:

> 'It wasn't our keepers' fault, but we might have to take a fresh look at some of our transfer procedures. We can't have this kind of thing happening again', said Sir Brian Martyn, Deputy Director of Ixeter Conservation Zoo.

You could try breaking this the following way for a change:

> 'It wasn't our keepers' fault, but we might have to take a fresh look at some of our transfer procedures', said Sir Brian Martyn, Deputy Director of Ixeter Conservation Zoo. 'We can't have this kind of thing happening again'.

It is also perfectly possible (and perhaps more rhythmically pleasant) to break the first sentence in the middle like this:

> 'It wasn't our keepers' fault', said Sir Brian Martyn, Deputy Director of Ixeter Conservation Zoo. 'We might have to take a fresh look at some of our transfer procedures. We can't have this kind of thing happening again.'

Or part of it could be put into reported speech such as:

> 'It wasn't our keepers' fault', said Sir Brian Martyn, Deputy Director of Ixeter Conservation Zoo, but added that the zoo might have to take a fresh look at its transfer procedures to prevent the same kind of incident happening again.

Another variation of that might be:

> Sir Brian Martyn, Deputy Director of Ixeter Conservation Zoo claimed that the incident wasn't the fault of their zoo-keepers, but told reporters: 'We might have to take a fresh look at some of our transfer procedures. We can't have this kind of thing happening again.'

The latter option might be chosen if the person mentioned is famous or has some particularly significant role in the events described in the story, such as:

> Senior Government Veterinary Advisor Keith Yawnsit said the six whales found dying in the Thames near Waterloo Bridge may have been confused by sonar. 'We know that naval sonar can . . .'

Another inevitable essential is to remind your young reporters to start a fresh paragraph each time a new person speaks, but explain that, as in the case of the two paragraphs immediately above, the quote doesn't necessarily have to start at the beginning of the paragraph. It would also be timely to remind them that newspaper paragraphs are short and usually contain only one, or sometimes two, sentences.

Using titles and names

It is helpful to explain to your young journalists that, in a near-paraphrased lead sentence or two (the narrow, top part of the pyramid in the sequencing pictogram) often only the more general 'relevancy title' of a person might appear, such as: 'A zoo-keeper said . . .', '. . . claimed the Head of Ixeter Zoo yesterday' or 'The Prime Minister announced he would not resign despite . . .' or 'A cyclist was hit by a car during yesterday's . . .' etc.

As you can see from the examples above, this 'relevancy title' is often, but not always, a person's job title. When the person's name next appears in the article (normally a sentence or two later), it is usually in the form of their full name, along with a reminder of their 'relevancy title', as in: 'The keeper, Ken Cummings, said he was leading the . . .', or 'Mary Rosemount, the injured cyclist, said that she would return to racing once . . .'

So both first and second names are often used the first time a person's actual name is mentioned (as in 'It was the worst day ever!' said zoo-keeper Ken Cummings), but title and surname are usually written after that (as in 'Mr Cummings also told reporters that he was worried a similar incident might happen in future', 'Inspector Smidgen said that the search would continue . . .' or 'Sir Isaac said he had insisted that . . .'). First names are almost never used on their own in news stories, but young writers in school predictably try to use first names on their own in articles, probably because they are themselves always called by their first names in real life.

An obvious exception to the unspoken rule of using both names on a name's first appearance in a story is in the case of very famous people who, when their name appears after the first time, are often referred to by their surname only (as in 'Cameron told the Commons that his party . . .') where the title Prime Minister hasn't been added to the name, partly because it was already used in the first sentence of the story, and partly because everyone knows that person is Prime Minister/President, etc. On other occasions, a famous person's title might be used instead of the name, anywhere in a story (as in 'Congress accused the President of having secretly decided to . . .').

Interestingly, in the case of a convicted criminal, after the name has appeared once, the surname is also often written without the person's normal title, somehow apparently making that

person seem less human and deserving of social acceptability (as in 'The judge told Crooke that he would serve a minimum of four years in prison').

'Summarise to start then expand in part'

Due to the paraphrased nature of the first couple of sentences in a news story, a similar thing happens to other sorts of names used in the story, in that they appear in a more general form to begin with and sometimes are defined more precisely later on in the body of the story. This applies to things such as street, factory, product or other place names. An example in the giraffe story below would be that, in the second sentence, it might say something like '. . . was eventually recaptured in a local park' whereas, later in the article, it might be more specific and say '. . . in the town's Parson's Park'.

You'll notice that, in the given example of a possible version of that story, the name of the fountain (Memorial Fountain) isn't mentioned, nor is the name of one of the streets the Giraffe ran down (Snod Park Avenue) because the writer (for a national newspaper) judged that the specific facts of these place names weren't significant enough to make it into the story. In reality, perhaps even the mention of the names Parson's Park or Ixeter Conservation Zoo would be dropped but, given enough allocation of story space, a journalist might include the name of one or two significant local places to 'ground' the story for those who live in or have visited the locality.

If the event had taken place in a small town and the article had been written for its local weekly paper, these kinds of naming details could well be sufficiently locally significant for inclusion in the story.

Inclusion based on interest over importance

Similarly, many points, facts, parts of quotes or other information will not make it into a final text due to their relative unimportance. For instance, the quote about the giraffe stealing the potted plant from a first floor room might not make it into a national newspaper article and might not even make it into an article in a local paper, except in a very paraphrased and shortened form. It is, however, an amusing and descriptive anecdote, especially as it illustrates the height of the creature in a funny way, so many journalists would include it if possible to add colour and emotion to the story. Few, however, would include that long quote in its entirety but would instead both cut parts and turn other parts into reported speech. As an example, a section like this '. . . bedroom watching TV at about 11.30 am when there was a scraping noise and I realised . . .' might be cut completely, whereas the mention of the giraffe having taken the plant through an open first floor window might well appear in the article for the aforementioned reasons, even if in reported form rather than as part of the quote itself. Some part of the graphic description of the creature munching the plant with the plant container swinging underneath might also make it in because of the descriptive colour and amusement it adds to the story.

The subtitle of this section – 'summarise to start then expand in part' – can be a useful phrase to bring up and discuss with a relatively able group because it makes young writers think about the necessary tightness of the opening sentences of a news story or presentation and it also helps them remember that, even though following information needs to be more detailed and colourful, facts and quotes still have to be pared down to those relevant for that particular use. It's another aspect of 'writing for an audience' or 'writing for a specific market' that appears in all English curricula. Gaining the ability to write and edit clearly, cogently and appropriately is an essential part of developing more sophisticated control over language and language-associated thought processes.

I believe strongly that the sorts of seemingly minor points discussed above are important points for discussion with groups capable of understanding them, because they help students to become aware of, and develop, the very subtle and complex thinking processes behind good writing.

More about the Story Quest game

In the early stages of the Quest, referring out loud to the stories or parts of them in ways that help students understand which quotes relate to which stories and what the plots are about will diminish the fun and challenge. Even telling the students how many stories there are, or talking in front of the group about 'Story 1, 'Story 2' or 'the Giraffe story', etc., can inadvertently make the exercise a little easier.

If you are working with younger or less confident individuals or groups who find it hard to write things down quickly, it might be worth making more photocopies of the quotes so you can give slips of each quote to every person for them to hand out to those students with the relevant needs. Of course, they will still have to type up the ones they need when it comes to writing the story.

Looking at the following example versions of the stories together

The possible final versions of the three news stories (whose quotes are printed at the end of this chapter) can be looked at by teachers or group leaders for guidance before their students start to write the stories themselves. They can also be shared with participants as a useful session-closing and recapping tool once they have completed their own attempts at writing them. Please note that they are based on the more detailed quotes given in the first series. There is, of course, more than one way of writing these stories but most of them would inevitably be fairly similar to the versions printed here.

A newspaper with a particular political axe to grind might alter the sequencing of the story slightly in order to change the spin of the lead or another part, but it couldn't include information that wasn't true or put obvious comment in the news story itself. It might pick up on the possible blame factor in some of the stories, such as the question of responsibility for the Angel of Sport statue not having been safely secured to the roof of the building, or – due to a newspaper's antipathy to all things 'Euro' – it might paint the European Sports Centre in an unflattering light by adding more negative quotes, mentioning any other recent 'Euro' disasters, etc. It might also angle the zoo story differently if there had been several animal escapes or other problems at that institution in the recent past, but that would, in effect, just be using the significant lead facts of the story, and be good journalism rather than spin.

Sharing the example stories with your group or class

With the examples of completed stories displayed on the interactive board, you might look together at both the general form and parts of these and compare them with the versions your young writers have produced themselves, discussing which facts and quotes might or might not be retained in the story, which parts of these quotes may be used instead as 'facts' and which as reported speech, which parts of which quotes might be best kept as they are, etc.

An effective way of doing this might be to look at one of the example stories while displaying all the quotes for it on a side screen. The group could then help you locate all the quotes or parts of them that have been used. As each is pointed out, you could highlight and cut that part (using keyboard buttons [ctrl] and [x]) until all of them have been eliminated from the list. What is then left over will reveal which parts the writer of that story felt had either fallen below the significance threshold for the story, or constituted duplicated information already included in it.

Depending on the ability of the group, this closing session can also provide a good opportunity to bring in and discuss (or recap) some of the subtler points outlined earlier.

Recapping

A recap could look at:

- paraphrasing (after looking at the beginnings, can your students find paraphrasing in other places?);
- sequencing;
- breaking up and selecting parts of quotes while retaining the integrity of their meaning and word sequence;
- selection and rejection of data (i.e. 'expand in part');
- which parts to cut and which to summarise if a shorter version is required (as often happens in later editions of newspapers);
- trying out variations of sentences and paragraphs to sense which have the more pleasing rhythmic flow;
- supplying a concluding sentence or two (do any or all of these example versions do this?);
- the choice of particularly descriptive quotes;
- usage of names and titles;
- whether or not there is anything in the stories which is irrelevant, waffle, etc.;
- you could also discuss which type of newspaper these stories might have been written for (quality, tabloid or 'bridge') and see if some of your students' versions of the stories fit best into one of those categories.

These example versions of the stories have been written nearly as fully as possible, including the key MIAIF and best quotes, but your young reporters might only write as much as you have time for, relative to their ability, as long as they cover all the key points in the story and include any little concluding sentence(s) that there may be.

To be quite honest, in a national daily newspaper, stories like these may have been abridged from their present form by internal sub-editors. They can generally be cut down from the bottom upwards (though perhaps retaining parts of the concluding sentences) and would still stand as accurate news stories and records of the events, albeit slightly less detailed or colourful. The reason they would still be competent news stories is that the MIAIF are mostly contained in the first few sentences and so editors would only be cutting out the least interesting and important information if they amputated most of the later parts and cut down some of the quotes into reported speech or reported fact.

Photocopiable sheets of fictitious quotes for the Story Quest follow, accompanied by photocopiable pages showing possible final versions of the stories. The latter should not be shown to students until after they have written their own versions!

series 1, story A ONCE SHEET HAS BEEN PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE

‘It wrecked about half the stalls in the High Street market, smashed two shop windows, sent shoppers diving for safety, cut through some back gardens and went galloping away down Snod Park Avenue with a clothes line full of underwear draped around its neck. It’s a miracle no-one was killed and there were only minor injuries.’
PC David David (he had been patrolling the High Street on foot at the time of the incident)

‘We were unloading Gerald from the delivery lorry when he slipped on the ramp, panicked and took off like the wind!’
Bob Booter, zoo-keeper

‘It wasn’t our keepers’ fault, but we might have to take a fresh look at some of our transfer procedures. We can’t have this kind of thing happening again.’
Sir Brian Martyn, Deputy Director of Ixeter Conservation Zoo

‘I was in my first floor bedroom watching TV at about 11.30 am when there was a scraping noise and I realised the pot plant on my desk had suddenly disappeared. I looked out the open window to see the giraffe’s head with a leaf of my cheese plant in its mouth and the planter swinging beneath. It was much more exciting than the old film I was watching on telly!’
Lucy Attins, 20-year-old animal welfare student

‘I suppose the situation wasn’t helped by our lads turning on their sirens as they went in pursuit, because it only got more panicked and veered off down the pedestrian part of the High Street, causing total chaos in its wake!’
Duty Sergeant DS Partridge

‘The animal was later captured by some of our keepers in Parson’s Park, when it had stopped to drink from the Memorial Fountain.’
A spokesman for Ixeter Conservation Zoo

‘Just as we’d finished planting up the Jubilee Floral Roundabout, it came lolloping wildly out of the ICZ entrance and dashed across the newly-planted soil, kicking bedding plants all over the road!’
Steve Snopes, Ixeter Council gardener

series 1, story A ONCE SHEET HAS BEEN PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE

‘I bent down to pick up a coin I’d dropped at the bus stop in Plym Street when it suddenly thudded across a front garden, flew over the hedge above my head and clattered off down the road. I could’ve been killed if I’d straightened up a moment earlier!’
Janis Tyler, bus passenger on her way to work in the offices of a local accountancy firm

‘We bought him from Animal Acres, a zoo in Kent that’s closing down.’
Sir Brian Martyn, Deputy Director of Ixeter Conservation Zoo

‘It had a long neck and legs and a sort of brown and yellow mottled pattern over most of its body. I only saw it from a distance but it looked like they look like on wildlife programmes.’
Ivan Aym, 10, pupil at Saint Hooper’s Junior School

‘I heard about it from my friend who works in a bank in the High Street, but he didn’t see anything of the incident himself.’
Rebecca Wright, 35, shop assistant

series 1, story B ONCE SHEET HAS BEEN PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE

‘Someone pointed and we all glanced up to see an angel flying in the sky. For a moment it looked like a real angel until bits started falling off her. When she crashed through the roof it was horrifying, and a huge plume of water erupted when it hit the pool. The children were terrified!’
Theresa Mulligan, leader of a group of young Irish athletes who were visiting Citizen’s Gym across Games Square from the Sports Centre

‘I’m so glad no-one was badly hurt, but it’s a tragedy such a unique and beautiful statue has been wrecked, and the swimming pool is almost beyond repair. The glass roof is destroyed and the bottom of the pool looks like a bomb has hit it!’
Joyce Parkes, Head of the European Sports Centre, Geed, Birkshire

‘The wind was awful at the time. I looked out my window as a gust caught the statue’s fifty-foot wings and wrenched it from its base on the new Sports Centre’s roof. It literally flew for a few seconds before plunging ten stories to smash through the glass roof of the pool.

I expect someone’s going to get into big trouble because of this!’
Barney Bailey, Sports Coach working in a neighbouring building at the Centre

‘I am horrified at this occurrence and will be asking the Health and Safety Executive to investigate this. An eighty-foot high, fifty-tonne structure should be adequately anchored, especially if it’s so high up. I can’t comment on whose fault it might be, but this incident is not acceptable. It’s bad for Britain and bad for sport.’
Julia Smuthers, Minister for Sports

‘It’s too early to speculate on what might have happened. We have no comment to make at this time.’
Sir Bryan Knotty, CEO of Knotty Constructors, the company who built the Centre and fitted the statue on top of the main building

‘My training session had just finished so the athletes were leaving for the changing rooms when the roof seemed to explode. Shards of glass flew everywhere, people had blood streaming down their skin and everyone was thrown across the floor by the surge of water. It looked like a war scene.

Thank goodness no-one was seriously injured. If it had happened a few seconds earlier, all of the country’s top swimmers would have been killed.’
Jon Peets, UK Head Swimming Coach

series 1, story B ONCE SHEET HAS BEEN PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE

‘The huge thing is stuck head first through the bottom. Its wings are all buckled and broken, and there’s smashed glass, tile and brick everywhere. Most of us are still suffering from shock and several are in hospital with glass wounds!’
Yanin Meeps, UK team member and Olympic silver medallist in the 500 metres breast stroke

‘Most of the injured had minor wounds and have been discharged from hospital. Eight are still being treated for shock and flesh wounds but we expect them all to be allowed home tonight.’
Bob Smatz, Spokesman for the Buckshire and Birkshire Hospital Trust

‘Twelve ambulances attended the scene and the injured were taken to three local hospitals.’
Spokesman for the Birkshire and Buckshire Ambulance Service

‘I didn’t see any of it because I was in the equipment store at the time, but apparently the huge Angel of Sport statue broke off in the wind. They say it made a real mess of the pool!’
Pete Porter, Head Gardener at the ESC

‘I heard this enormous crash, followed by the tinkle of broken glass, but I didn’t realise what had happened at the time.’
Joan Sudlant, Assistant Chef in the Centre’s Yum Yummelz health food restaurant

‘Why on earth didn’t they screw it down properly? If it had wings that big it would obviously have to be anchored to the roof incredibly well!

No, I didn’t see it happen, I was taking a couple of weightlifters to the station at the time. I wish they’d tipped me as many pounds as they weighed!’
Knobby Noatall, taxi driver

series 1, story C ONCE SHEET HAS BEEN PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE

‘Barney chased a bird, rolled down the slope and got his collar stuck on a branch. Mum tried to reach him, slipped down the steep grass and over the edge.’
Joe Barkes, 10

‘When I heard her screaming I knew there wasn’t time to get anyone, so I pulled the whole stretchy lead out, tied one end to a tree and the other around my middle then slid down to her.’
Joe Barkes, 10

‘The boy is a total hero. He went over the edge of a 200 foot cliff to save his mum, tied only with a thin dog lead. He even saved their dog at the same time. He should have an award!’
Paul Koogan, Head of Brampiton Area Coastal Rescue

‘I started heaving the lead when I got there and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the lady and the little lad struggle into sight. I thought they wouldn’t be able to hold on because the extendable lead must have cut into their hands. I had to pull my sleeves down to be able to pull with their weight on it.’
Bryn Bonaz, from Plymouth, who had been walking the coast path at the time

‘I was hanging onto a protruding rock but knew I couldn’t hold on much longer. I was sure I was going to die!’
Flora Barkes, 39, mother of Joe

‘I heard Joe shouting: “Don’t worry Mum, I’m coming to help you!” I screamed not to come but he slithered over the edge and stopped beside me, swinging on the lead. We both held on as the man pulled from above and somehow we struggled up over the lip and scrambled to the path again.’
Flora Barkes

‘I was on deck lifting a crab pot from the water when I heard a scream and looked up to see a lady hanging from a rock at the top of the cliff. As I radioed the coastguard, the little lad slipped over the edge too and I thought he was a goner until I realised he was tied to something.’
Sully Johnson, crab fisherman

series 1, story C ONCE SHEET HAS BEEN PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE

‘As I kept hauling, they both slipped and scrambled up the steep slope above the edge. The boy managed to grab the dog by the collar and sort of fling the creature up beside me. He was amazing!’
Bryn Bonaz, who had been walking the coast path at the time

‘That remarkable young boy should be given a special award for bravery. I’m going to put this to the next meeting of the Town Council. There are many cliffs in Devon, but those at Brampiton are the most dangerous.’
Doug Diffle, Leader of Brampiton Town Council

‘I heard a woman screaming from somewhere in front. I asked my wife to ring the police while I ran on but, by the time I got there, the pair were already sitting on the path, sort of sobbing and laughing at the same time.’
Gerald Peasly, local resident and dog-walker

‘I tried to reach out to rescue Barney, but slipped.’
Flora Barkes

‘All I heard was that terrible screaming and so I rang the police on my mobile as Gerald ran ahead to try and help.’
Sally Peasly, local resident and dog-walker

series 2, story A ONCE SHEET HAS BEEN PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE

‘It wrecked half the stalls in the High Street market, sending shoppers diving for safety, smashed two shop windows and went galloping away down Snod Park Avenue with a clothes line of underwear draped around its neck. It’s a miracle no-one was killed and there were only minor injuries.’
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‘I was in my first floor bedroom watching TV at about 11.30 am when I realised the pot plant on my desk had suddenly disappeared. I looked out the open window to see the giraffe’s head with a leaf of my cheese plant in its mouth and the planter swinging beneath!’
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Steve Snopes, Ixeter Council gardener

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Janis Tyler, bus passenger on her way to work in the offices of a local accountancy firm

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‘It had a long neck and legs and a sort of brown and yellow mottled pattern on its body, but I only saw it from a distance.’
Ivan Aym, 10, pupil at Saint Hooper’s Junior School

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‘The wind was awful at the time. I looked out my window as a gust caught the statue’s fifty-foot wings and wrenched it from its base on the new Sports Centre’s roof. It plunged ten stories to smash through the glass roof of the pool.

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Escaped Giraffe Terrorises Shoppers

A giraffe caused chaos in Ixeter town centre yesterday following its escape from a local zoo.

The animal ran amok in the town's high street, demolishing market stalls and smashing shop windows after it panicked while being unloaded from a lorry at Ixeter Conservation Zoo. No-one was seriously hurt in the incident and the creature was eventually recaptured in a local park.

'It wrecked about half the stalls in the market, smashed two shop windows, sent shoppers diving for safety, cut through some gardens and went galloping away with a clothes line full of underwear draped around its neck!' said Police Constable David David, who was on patrol in the High Street at the time. 'It's a miracle no-one was killed and there were only minor injuries.'

A zoo spokesman claimed that the incident had not been caused by the negligence of their staff.

'It wasn't our keepers' fault but we might have to take a fresh look at some of our transfer procedures', Sir Brian Martyn, Deputy Director of the Zoo told reporters. 'We can't have this kind of thing happening again.'

Sirens of pursing police cars were thought to have worsened the situation by frightening the giraffe even more.

'The situation wasn't helped by our lads turning on their sirens as they went in pursuit,' said Duty Sergeant DS Partridge. 'It only got more panicked and veered off down the pedestrian part of the High Street, causing total chaos in its wake!'

The giraffe trampled flowerbeds and leapt hedges as it made its bid for freedom.

'I bent down to pick up a coin I'd dropped at the bus stop,' said office worker Janis Tyler. 'It flew over the hedge above my head and clattered off down the road. I could've been killed if I'd straightened up a moment earlier!'

At one point the creature reached inside a first floor window and removed a potted plant.

'I looked out the open window to see the giraffe's head with a leaf of my cheese plant in its mouth and the planter swinging beneath,' said animal welfare student Lucy Atkins. 'It was much more exciting than the old film I was watching on telly!'

The giraffe, known as Gerald, had been purchased from a zoo in Kent that is closing down. It was finally captured when it stopped to drink from a fountain in the town's Parson's Park.

Angel of Death!

Giant statue smashes Euro pool

Britain's top swimmers narrowly escaped death yesterday when the massive 'Angel of Sport' statute plunged ten stories and crashed through the roof of their training pool.

Many of the UK's international swimming team were injured when the fifty tonne structure plummeted from the top of the European Sports Centre during high winds and crashed through the roof of the pool only seconds after the entire team had left the water. Witnesses described the scene as resembling a war zone, but none of the athletes was badly hurt.

UK head swimming coach, John Peets, said that athletes were leaving the pool for the changing rooms after his training session when the incident occurred.

'The roof seemed to explode,' he said. 'Shards of glass flew everywhere, people had blood streaming down their skin and everyone was thrown across the floor by the surge of water. It looked like a war scene.'

'If the incident had happened seconds earlier, all of the country's top swimmers would have been killed.'

The Minister of Sport, Julia Smuthers, said that she would press for an investigation into the incident.

'I am horrified at this occurrence and will be asking the Health and Safety Executive to investigate this,' she told reporters. 'An eighty-foot high, fifty-tonne structure should be adequately anchored, especially if it's so high up. I can't comment on whose fault it might be, but this incident is not acceptable. It's bad for Britain and bad for sport.'

'The huge thing is stuck head first through the bottom,' UK team member and Olympic medallist Yanin Meeps told this paper. 'Its wings are all buckled and broken, and there's smashed glass, tile and brick everywhere.' Ms Meeps said that all the athletes involved were suffering from shock and several were still in hospital with glass wounds.

Joyce Parkes, Head of the Sports Centre which is based in Geed, Birkshire, said that she was glad there had been no serious injuries in the incident.

'I'm so glad no-one was badly hurt,' she said, 'but it's a tragedy such a unique and beautiful statue has been wrecked, and the swimming pool is almost beyond repair. The glass roof is destroyed and the bottom of the pool looks like a bomb has hit it!'

The statue broke free from the Sports Centre's roof during high winds, causing witnesses to question how firmly the massive structure had been anchored to the building.

continued on next sheet

'Angel of Death' (continued from previous sheet)

'The wind was awful at the time' said one of the sports coaches at the centre who witnessed the incident. Barney Bailey, who had been working in in a neighbouring building at the time, said he looked out his window as a gust caught the statue's fifty-foot wings and wrenched it from its base.

'It literally flew for a few seconds before plunging ten stories to smash through the glass roof of the pool,' he told reporters. 'I expect someone's going to get into big trouble because of this!'

A spokesman for the company that built the Centre and fitted the huge statue on the roof refused to say if his company might be to blame in any way for the incident. Sir Bryan Knotty, CEO of Knotty Constructers, told reporters that it was too early to speculate on what might have happened and refused to comment further.

A group of young Irish athletes who had been visiting the Centre also witnessed the incident.

'When she [the statue] crashed through the roof it was horrifying,' said their group leader, Theresa Mulligan. 'A huge plume of water erupted when it hit the pool. The children were terrified!'

Twelve ambulances attended the scene and the injured were taken to three local hospitals. A hospital trust spokesman said later that most had been discharged and those still being treated would be allowed home last night.

Ten-year-old hero saves mum from cliff fall

A ten-year-old boy rescued his mother from the top of a 200-foot cliff yesterday, held only by a thin dog lead.

His mother had slipped over the edge of the cliff at Brampiton in Devon while trying to rescue their dog, but managed to cling to a rock. Hearing her screams, the boy tied himself to a tree with the lead and went over the edge to save her. The two were pulled to safety by a walker who arrived at the scene.

'When I heard her screaming I knew there wasn't time to get anyone,' said Joe Barkes, 'I pulled the whole stretchy lead out, tied one end to a tree and the other around my middle then slid down to her.'

His mother, Flora Barkes, said that she had pleaded with Joe not to attempt to rescue her.

'I knew I couldn't hold on much longer. I was sure I was going to die!' she said. 'I screamed not to come but he slithered over the edge and stopped beside me, swinging on the lead. We both held on as the man pulled from above and somehow we struggled up over the lip and scrambled to the path again.'

Locals have called for the boy to be given a special bravery award.

'The boy is a total hero,' said Paul Koogan, head of the area coastal rescue service. 'He went over the edge of a 200 foot cliff to save his mum, tied only with a thin dog lead. He even saved their dog at the same time. He should have an award!'

The man who pulled the couple to safety also said he was surprised by the boy's actions.

'As I kept hauling, they both slipped and scrambled up the steep slope above the edge,' Bryn Bonaz from Plymouth said. 'The boy managed to grab the dog by the collar and sort of fling the creature up beside me. He was amazing!' Mr Bonaz had been walking the coast path at the time and reached the scene just after the boy had gone to the rescue.

A spokesman for the local council echoed the call for an award to be given to the young rescuer.

'That remarkable young boy should be given a special award for bravery. I'm going to put this to the next meeting of the Town Council,' said Doug Diffle, leader of Brampiton Town Council. 'There are many cliffs in Devon, but those at Brampiton are the most dangerous.'

7 Live action!

Scenarios that teach effectively because they are so absorbing

Journalism is especially suited to the effective use of 'live action' scenarios. Students can play roles as reporters, editors and presenters; can create the settings, plots and characters for 'news story' scenarios to perform to other groups; and can get into role to act out those parts as key figures, witnesses, members of the emergency services, passers-by and professionals alike. The 'important' world of adults is full of news, constantly streaming from our media and apparently full of urgency, so young people find these kinds of scenarios 'grown-up', exciting and fun.

There are two main types of news story scenario that I use: those that some of the students think up collectively for other groups, and those which are created for them. Of course, the process of playing the roles of journalists working out of a 'news desk' is another scenario in its own right.

Depending on age, scenarios they think up themselves will mostly not be about dry political issues but will look a lot like the things they expect will fire their imaginations. These are often particularly linked to their exposure to the entertainment media of television and films, celebrity, computer games and books, so most of the same subject areas they know there will arise.

Young children can be expected to want to create scenarios about the arrival in the school grounds of amusing green aliens, fairies having a party on the picnic tables, dinosaurs hatching out of large shells dug up in the school garden and suchlike. Older students may choose scenarios based on well-known celebrities, a terrorist attack, or a gang of drug dealers caught red-handed. However, our media-infused world means that even relatively young children may decide to think up celebrity scandal stories which are remarkably similar to those made up by older students.

Introduce a dramatic scenario about secret tunnels discovered under the school, a shoal of piranhas dumped in the park lake, an astounding young juggler with four arms who had been hidden from the public, an incredibly localised earthquake which flattened only one farm, the mysterious disappearance of several visiting foreign exchange students, or a new disease which causes bizarre or funny symptoms, and students of any age will be equally excited and enthusiastic – possibly even more so than they would have been over the limited types of scenarios they would have thought of themselves.

Making it 'real' helps them learn!

The point is that whatever truly grabs their enthusiasm is a powerful vehicle to carry them joyously on a journey of organic learning. Not only are they trying to discover more about the stories they are researching and reporting on, but they are, almost inadvertently, learning many things in many areas during the journey:

- how reporters work and other aspects of journalism;
- how to create and plan believable and logical stories;

- how to write more persuasively, accurately, effectively and concisely;
- how to interpret and refine subtleties of English and language;
- about all sorts of diverse subject areas and issues that arise in the scenarios such as social issues, how organisations and systems work, the law, forensics, palaeontology, tectonic plate movement, building regulations, medicine, immunology, epidemiology, etc.!

If scenarios are made truly exciting, surprising and convincing, your students will so absorbed in them that they should learn faster and even more effectively. Generally, I try to make them seem as 'real' as possible within the constraints of time and budget, and to allow young reporters to feel that they are taking part, as much as possible, in an adult type of activity, doing 'real' grown-up jobs in a 'real' adult environment. Obviously, the older they are the easier this is because they have more general knowledge and greater basic skills.

My experience in running a large number of successful scenarios is backed up by the standard use of scenarios as a learning tool in organisations such as the armed forces, emergency services and NASA, as well as in the hard world of successful business, where senior managers are not renowned for their love of wasting company money. Most companies running top international business management courses use scenarios as major parts of their training processes and find them to be highly effective. Again, the secret is to make them feel as real as possible. One company recently ran a scenario that lasted for ten consecutive days where the participants played all sorts of roles based in and around a fictitious failing company. At one point, a group of executive trainees acting as 'protestors' from the company and locality spontaneously stormed a key meeting of 'bankers', surprising even the training company and proving how immersed participants in a scenario can become!

The power of suggestion

This process of 'making it real' starts with a bit of imagination and some forward planning on your own part, and can be made more effective by judicious use of various types of smoke and mirrors, such as costumes, props, players, 'witnesses', telephone 'voices', faked photographs and emails, and even sound effects and pyrotechnics. Perhaps the most effective tool of all is the convincing power of suggestion.

I could illustrate this on every course that we have run using live news scenarios, but here is one that I remember that makes the point quite well. I was working for a day with a group of about twenty fairly able 14-year-old students as I had been invited into their secondary school to prepare them for involvement in the annual *Times Educational Supplement* 'Journalism Day'. Realising that I was going to have to work with them for the entire day in a spacious but sterile IT suite and that, although the teachers were wonderfully enthusiastic, I had none of my experienced assistants with me to help run either new or well-tried scenarios, I prearranged that a couple of people I knew well would provide live 'voices' over the phone to add some depth to the suggestions I was going to build.

A major Foot and Mouth cattle disease outbreak was in full swing in the UK at the time and was dominating the media, with video of huge heaps of dead cattle being burned in the fields shown nightly on television. Some of the students had also come across restrictions of movement in the countryside, so a scenario based on that topic seemed a good candidate.

The participants had already completed the Basic Sequencing Exercise, had looked very briefly with me at the day's papers and had run and reported on group scenarios, helped by me and several of those enthusiastic English teachers. To make my story more interesting and add a fresh twist, I had decided that I would allow them to 'discover' that, in their very own town, the

cattle disease had just dramatically jumped species to humans, with all the frightening implications that has.

As part of these scenarios, one or two of the young reporters were allowed to pop next door to use the phone in the school library and, after working out who to call and what to ask, one of the pupils was nominated from each group to make particular calls. The power of suggestion came into play in various ways. The groundwork was laid by building a relatively realistic scenario where the intrepid reporters discovered, through questioning live and telephone 'professionals' and 'witnesses', that there was an outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease on a farm in a remnant of countryside nearly surrounded by their expanding town.

Others separately began following up reports of increasing numbers of ambulances racing around the place and weren't getting very far due to particularly 'difficult' hospital spokesmen and similar professionals. They were led for a while, by deliberately confusing and limited information, into thinking that there might have been a particularly bad motorway accident (which later turned out to be only relatively minor) and that this was the cause of the ongoing spate of ambulances.

After a little while, with the use of phone interviews, maps, etc., the first small group tracked the Foot and Mouth outbreak to a particular farm (a genuine location researched in advance) and managed to 'find out' the name and number of the (fictitious) farmer, so one boy from that group was sent off to the library phone with his clipboard and pencil to check it out. What he didn't know was that, lurking at the end of the phone line he dialled was my daughter who was well-experienced in these sorts of workshops and likes nothing more than a chance to perform an over-the-top dramatic role. Instead of getting the 'farmer', the unsuspecting lad found that he was talking to the extremely distraught (and spectacularly over-acting) 'widow' of the farmer who, through her hysterical tears, blurted out that the latter had just been carted off to the local morgue thanks to a suspected, fast-acting and virulent new human form of the disease.

Despite having already been involved in the made-up world of group scenarios and having had to race back from the everyday library phone into the unconvincing 'newsroom' of the school's new compute suite, the lad burst in the door and blurted out to everyone in the room:

'My God, you won't believe what just happened! I called the farmer, Mr White, but his wife came on the phone in a terrible state, screaming and crying, and it turns out that he is DEAD! It looks like he might have caught some new human form of Foot and Mouth Disease!'

The student was so absorbed in the scenario that he was somehow more than just playing a role at that moment, and the effect on the rest of the room was electric. Even those few with a natural tendency towards standing aloof from involvement in matters theatrical were buzzing with ideas and suggestions about how the ambulance story might be related to that, what approaches they might make to professionals, non-professionals, neighbours and family, etc., in order to try and round up as many facts as possible and get on with writing the story.

Tailoring a story to fit a group

Obviously you need to pick a story scenario to which your particular group can relate, depending on their age, ability, experience, skill and knowledge, but I would stress that, generally, the more convincing and 'grown up' it can seem for that particular group, the more effective it can be, both from the point of view of how absorbing it is, and from what new things the participants can learn out of it. I have been in primary schools at least a couple of times when, around the beginning of Book Week, a giant egg has been 'discovered' in the grounds. This object, unconvincingly created from a cardboard Easter egg and some crumpled kitchen foil, might grab the attention of Years 1–3 pupils, but it will possibly be treated rather cynically by 'worldly' 11-year-old pupils and would probably be sneered at by more streetwise secondary students.

I have to admit that, in one case, the surprise arrival of the local police – leading to lots of very professional poking and muttering, and the ceremonious fencing off of the scene with real yellow and black 'Police Line: DO NOT CROSS' incident tape – certainly did make it more believable!

Making it richer

If I had worked in that school and run that scenario, I would probably have made a more realistic 'egg' (there are wonderful textured spray paints available in craft shops) and would perhaps also have either scorched the grass and/or sprayed a strange mixture of flour, glitter and powder paint around it. Depending on the age of the students, I might have arranged for some friends or relatives to arrive in a van wearing white coats or paper coveralls and carrying various strange instruments and 'detectors'. I might also have pre-arranged a plethora of descriptive quotes with members of staff, the janitor and possibly even helpful neighbours or involved parents.

Alternatively I could have made a huge 'broken egg' then have created some very unusual tracks in the mud at the edge of the school pond and/or made a few gooey, curiously-shaped footprints across a far corner of the playground with a stencil, a little water, wallpaper paste, flour and a touch of dull powder paint.

Older pupils would have been allowed to interview the police, school staff, local witnesses and these white-clad 'experts' who would, of course, have been pre-armed with convincing quotes that would fit the same story. The story-so-far would have been one which left plenty to the imagination (if it was designed to inspire creative writing), or would have thrown up a much more detailed set of 'facts', quotes, observations, information and leads that the children could follow up as journalists if they were writing a 'news story' about the incident.

Some older students might have been allowed to create a 'news special' mini-newspaper on folded A3 during that first day. It would contain news reports and photographs of the object, 'experts' and police, reactions of pupils and staff, related 'news' stories, etc., and might have been distributed within school for younger classes to use as a basis for their imaginative creative writing during the rest of the week.

For those staff members wishing to continue core school work in science and maths, the children could have made useful scientific reports, graphs and spreadsheets based on observations including tests and measurements on the egg, the footprints, and their environment (such as working out the likely weight and size of a creature that had apparently snapped a certain thickness of twigs in its path or sunk a particular footprint size a centimetre into mud). This would help their writer colleagues fill out their newspaper stories and help artists to create 'artist's impressions' of the bizarre visitors. This 'technical data' might also have been helpfully emailed off to the white-clad experts' so-called laboratory, and some interesting quotes or other 'unusual scientific data' might have come back in return.

Creating more intelligent observers

So what else do the participants get out of these live action scenarios that they wouldn't get from a more paper-based, approach? One of the factors I find most significant is improving skills in what I call 'intelligent observation'. Improving these is essential for the development of individual thinking and, in particular, creative thinking. Authors and poets, for instance, need to be thoughtful, accurate and detailed observers of environments, characters, circumstances, language, conversations and emotional situations if they are to be capable of portraying convincing and interesting settings, action, characters, interactions and sets of emotions. Artists, film-makers and animators all have to be thoughtful observers who see, feel, think about and note the world around them.

But it isn't just the purely creative professionals who require reasonable skills in thoughtful observation, because it's an important ingredient in mature individual thinking. Scientists and engineers need to observe the world intelligently – it's in the nature of their jobs – and even a bank manager deciding on whether or not to give a businessman a loan needs to observe and assess data put in front of her as well as, possibly, the character and experience of the potential borrower.

For a growing child who has so far relied to a great extent on information, thinking patterns and conclusions largely supplied and pre-processed by adults, becoming an increasingly thoughtful observer is a key part of the journey towards thinking, assessing and learning successfully for themselves – surely one of the ultimate goals of education.

Although thoughtful observation is obviously an essential part of being a news reporter, journalism scenarios can be set up in ways which maximise the use of intelligent observation skills by participants. Small clues or leads can be scattered around scenes of incidents, accidents, crimes, discoveries and mysteries, or hidden in the words of a 'professional' they interview, the replies of a witness, props carried and clothes worn or the apparent disparity between one witness's story and that of another. As an obvious example of basic observation, if someone is wearing running shorts and trainers in a restaurant scenario, that character is probably not a waiter, but more liable to be a jogger who just ran inside for some reason or another.

If someone is 'unconscious' on the ground in an apparent argument over money, then it may be useful for the reporter to have noticed the fat wad of notes protruding slightly from the back pocket of one of those involved. All of these clues can be easily supplied. Whether or not some of the young reporters will notice them in the excitement is another matter!

The assumption trap

After running these sorts of scenarios many times, something that becomes clear is that children are often surprisingly unobservant except for noticing what they think they should be seeing. This could be because they don't really know how to look or perhaps because adults have so far done much of the thoughtful observing for them. What is perhaps even more interesting is that, even when they are being relatively observant, children tend to jump to the most obvious conclusions and make assumptions based on these. They frequently find it hard to drop these assumptions even if other evidence is pointing in different ways, and they then often fail to ask the right questions because these assumptions have thrown them off track.

Humanity has always made assumptions which have held back our understanding of the 'real story'; the true facts. We originally assumed the Earth was flat and when that was eventually disproved, we assumed that the sun went around our world until an exceptionally brave observer proved us all wrong. The natural process of development of an individual human child's ability to observe accurately, assess and learn the 'real story' seems curiously to mirror the developmental process of human thinking and observation.

Theoretically, good reporters, like good detectives, don't jump to conclusions without adequate solid proof, and so this is an area where there is plenty of scope for crafty scenario organisers to create false possibilities so that young reporters are forced to use all of their observation skills, learn to ask good questions and, most importantly, learn to listen very carefully to the answers they are given so that they can then frame even better questions and find new routes for investigation in their quest for the true facts of a situation. This is a useful process for building curious, flexible minds that won't simply accept things at face value but can assess, think and develop themselves.

We will look at more concrete examples of how to set up these sorts of scenario situations in the next chapter.

8 Group scenarios

A dramatic way to learn

Planning the scenario session

The secret for creating effective group scenarios is the same as for anything involving a number of people – creative planning and good organisation.

You will need to divide the students into smaller groups who will each create and perform their own scenario and also report on a scenario performed by another group. How many groups you create depends largely on how many children need to be involved at the same time and how many competent and literate adults you can muster to help. However, it is counter-productive to attempt to deal with large numbers on this kind of exercise if the environment is liable to turn into noisy chaos and if the small groups would be competing for performance space, clothes, props and adult help.

It is much easier to have even numbers of small groups rather than odd. If you have odd numbers of groups you will need to 'carousel' so that A performs for B, B performs for C, C performs for A. This generally takes quite a bit more time than A performs for B and C performs for D, before they swap roles so that B performs for A, and D performs for C, etc.

In intensive residential courses for able, gifted and talented children my assistant and I usually worked with a total number of between ten and sixteen students, but in schools (with teacher assistants or my own helper) I would deal with anything from about twelve pupils up to a full class size.

Numbers in each scenario group

First you have to break the total number of participants down into these small scenario-creating groups ('actors' who will also soon be 'reporters'). I have always found that *these tend to function best with about five to eight students in each group*, so that you could break a class of 32 students down into four groups of eight. However, you would need one other competent assistant at the very least and preferably two more than that. Other helpful colleagues, English teachers, enthusiastic student teachers, classroom assistants, keen and literate parents or governors or even your secondary school's top final year students can all be indispensible here!

Having five to eight in each group can make it easier to put more complexity into the plot of the news stories and will also mean that some of the 'characters' can be virtually irrelevant to the main story plot so that those reporting on the scenario will have to work harder to figure out the core story and which characters and which quotes are especially relevant to their story.

Equipment

For the group scenarios you will need the following:

- Clipboards, pencils and loads of A4 paper (the blank backs of out-of-date forms and letters will do, because you don't want them to write on both sides). At a minimum, you will need clipboards for half the participants at one time (the reporters).
- Separate preparation rooms for each group, out of earshot and sight of each other (I have used everything from classrooms to old kitchens, halls, corridors, dormitories, staffrooms, stairs, hallways, box rooms, playgrounds, gardens, fields, beaches, offices and even well-equipped drama rooms). You will also benefit from permission/agreement to use as many other areas of the building and/or site as possible for the scenarios themselves, including outside if the weather is reasonable.
- Props and dressing-up materials (access to a drama department's store can be very handy!). Many relatively everyday items are useful and inspirational, such as uniforms, jackets, tops, dresses, shawls, fluorescent high visibility clothing, aprons, white coats, character outfits, etc., and odd props such as trays with glasses or plates, spades, a toy gun, a mobile phone, a parachute or even a fishing rod. These are more inspiring and flexible than zany, brightly-coloured wigs or hats from a joke shop. Having a hidden supply of dressing-up materials and props will prove useful!
- Large sticky labels and thick marker pens will be practical, not only to help you know the students' names but also possibly to label people in order to give hints, such as 'Doctor on Call', 'Prof. D Hutchinson', 'WPC Jeffries', 'Project Director', etc., or to label objects and places if required, e.g. 'POISON', 'Control Room', 'Take two at bedtime. Do not exceed the stated dose', 'self-inflating life jacket', 'Operating Theatre', 'Diary', 'Projection Room', etc. For particularly weak younger groups who struggle with scribing, you might think about giving some or all of the participants name labels for their characters so that the reporters can simply copy them, but for all other groups getting the names exactly right in their stories is part of the interviewing and accuracy challenge.

Hopefully you will previously have taken participants through the basic sequencing exercise and have looked at newspapers and perhaps a little internet news together, so your students will have already become reasonably familiar with the look, form and feel of journalistic news stories.

Preamble to students

You will need to begin by explaining the activity, but it might also be helpful to say a few words to your students about what they may get out of it. Making them aware that it will be fun is important because it will raise their enthusiasm and, if they get the feeling they are having a bit of a special treat in doing this, it might help them keep excitement levels under control.

You could explain that doing these activities well is not only great fun but can help participants learn how to think like writers and so write better. As well as developing ability in penning better news stories, the processes can help make them more competent at creating logical sets of ideas and more original story plots, to become more intelligent observers, and to improve in all types of factual writing, reports, presentations, etc.

You can clarify that they are going to be split into smaller groups (the make-up of which you will decide), and that everyone will have the chance to be involved in the creation of a complex news story which they will act out in a special kind of 'moving tableau' or 'semi freeze-frame'. Everyone will also get the chance to be an intrepid newspaper reporter, reporting on a scenario created by the other/another group.

Briefing groups before creating their 'moving tableaux' scenarios

Explaining the rules of the group tableaux the first time may seem quite complicated, and you will inevitably have to repeat them more than once, but they go like this:

- Participants will make up an interesting collective 'news story' that will involve everyone in their small group.
- They will be performing the end part of their news story in a 'moving tableau', a scenario which is similar to a slightly moving freeze-frame. They will be allowed to move a little and talk (unless they are 'dead' of course) but usually they will stay in whichever general positions are decided upon when the scenario is actually set up in the location. They can and should enliven the scene as much as possible with some acting. For example, they could act as a frightened or injured person screaming or sobbing in a corner, a character answering in an accent, a busy 'army major' speaking in a clipped shorthand kind of way, or even a 'toddler' sucking his thumb and rambling off into irrelevant talk about toys and cartoons and asking the reporters questions themselves, etc.
- Each group must keep its story ideas completely secret from the other group(s) during the planning and preparation stages and not talk about them at all during any breaks so as to avoid giving the other groups an unfair advantage and thus defeating the point of the activity.
- The other/another group will initially be comprised of news reporters who will have to find out the true facts of the story through interviewing the actors well.
- Groups will then swap over so that the actors become reporters and vice versa.
- In their scenarios, if there are any deaths they are not allowed to 'kill' more than one character (or there won't be enough people to interview), but it's important they realise that they don't necessarily need to kill anyone at all, depending on the story they create! Even if they do want 'bodies', dummies made from tops and trousers stuffed with fabric or old clothes can always do if more are required.
- Participants in the role play (actors) *always have to tell the 'truth'* as agreed in their story plan *but they should avoid answering more than fairly minimally to start with*, although they can also ad lib totally irrelevant stuff which has nothing whatsoever to do with the story but would fit their characters or the situation. Their job is to force the reporters to work hard at finding the best questions to ask and also to compel them to ask increasingly subtle or accurate questions based on the answers they obtain (more on this key point later).
- Actors must never be over-helpful by answering things about the plot or characters that they haven't been asked or by elaborating unnecessarily. They must also only give answers containing information that his or her character would know in their role and situation (so if the character was an unrelated 'passer-by' who saw someone fall from a building, they wouldn't know the victim's name and address or what had led up to the person falling, etc.
- To make a scenario effective, the plot should be moderately complex and be constructed so that the most immediately apparent cause of something having happened is not the real cause. This is very important, especially with more able or older groups. *Please simplify or ignore this if working with weaker groups or those at or below the lower end of the specified age range.*
- During their limited exposure to the other group's information, reporters will be working on their own (or in pairs if they are lower than, or near the bottom of the age or ability range, or time is very limited). At this stage, they have to consider all the other reporters on the scene as competitors from other newspapers.
- After the scenarios, everyone will be put into small writing teams (of about three students) at a computer in the 'newsroom', and each team will attempt to write its report of the story as well and as accurately as possible. Other teams who reported on the same scenario will then be competitors. *It may be additionally motivational to suggest that there's an element of*

competition to see which team has written the story best, which has found the most facts and which has been the most accurate in its reporting (remember to make mental or physical notes at all stages to help you decide).

Organise computers for later

Don't forget to book a computer area (the 'newsroom') for your planned news story writing session. It is best if this session can immediately follow the group scenarios because information will still be fresh in everybody's minds. If there's not enough time available then, try to hold the writing session(s) on the following day, if possible. You will probably need between 1½ and 2, or even 3, hours at the computers, depending on how complex the stories are and how much time you can allot for the writing, editing and re-editing. Remember that the best long-term benefits come from doing a lot of work on the latter, so trying to allocate plenty of time for this is usually worth it.

The estimate of time required varies with the complexity of each scenario reported upon, how many points writers have to squeeze into the leading couple of sentences (multi-lead stories take much longer to figure out), your aspirations (how much you expect to get out of a particular group) and, of course, age, ability and focus. Oddly enough, although older and more able groups can write much faster than younger groups, the complexity of their stories, their ability to focus deeply and their drive to perfect their work means that they will often take longer than younger, less able groups.

Getting started with the story

The value of the collective story-making process

The process of how each group of students finds inspiration for, changes, develops and improves the story that will lie behind its original news scenario can theoretically be as complex as the process worked through in the head of a professional writer, but there are ways of helping your students which we'll look at shortly. To initiate and build original, coherent but relatively unpredictable news story plots that are 'fit for purpose' requires the use of complex and challenging thinking skills. Improving these mental processes helps develop questioning, flexible, creative and logical young minds. The great thing is that tackling this kind of challenge together in a group can be so much fun that participants hardly realise how hard their brains are working!

Taking part in this collective process is a particularly useful way of learning how to function better as part of a team, because everyone has to listen to and evaluate each other's creative ideas while learning when to push his or her own or to sacrifice them if better ones come along. This group process is a metaphor for what needs to happen, in a microcosm, inside any individual, creative and clear-thinking mind, and participating well in this collective route can help students become more confident at plot creation in their own work. This is especially the case if everyone feels involved in the procedure, and if you and your helpers can supply effective guidance and support without taking away the students' sense of ownership of the story. As you'll know, that's always a fine line to walk!

Story requirements

You will need to explain to your students that the news story they develop has to:

- be interesting and newsworthy;
- be relatively unpredictable so it's not easily guessable;

- be possible to stage by their group as a dramatic scenario in the form of a 'moving tableau' (see the 'briefing groups . . .' bullet points earlier in this chapter);
- have key roles in it for several members of their group, but not for all of them to begin with (because some scenario roles created once the basic plot is formed may be deliberately misleading or irrelevant to the reporters' discovery of the key story, forcing the young sleuths to work harder to identify key witnesses and winkle out relevant facts);
- possess good internal 'story logic', that is, it has to make sense within itself even if it involves a pretty zany plot.

Initial inspiration

Preliminary inspiration for the story can come from many different sources: costumes and props, locations, individual and group ideas, adaptations of current news or celebrity gossip, projects and texts being covered in school, particular skills or talents of group members and teachers, unusual or dramatic local or school happenings, the weather, etc.

One plan is to start by asking everyone to think up one or two general ideas in silence for a news scenario and to jot down a couple of the briefest possible notes about them – really just small reminders of the idea. The notes don't really matter but it keeps the fast thinkers quiet while the others are still winding up some ideas, so everyone – rather than just the loudest or cleverest students – is involved in the creation process at this stage. You don't want them to write down much because it's better if they don't get too fixed on any one idea at this stage.

I would not use this method for more than a relatively short time because a 'group fizz' breeds both creative ideas and social enthusiasm and, as a leader, you can still keep the flow of the group going while trying to allow a fair balance of answers.

Keeping the plot sensible

News story ideas that come mostly from looking at interesting costumes and props can be a good way of starting the creative process but these should not be allowed to muddle a story into a senseless plot. With that in mind, here's a typical example.

Thanks to someone having found a parachute or two (those used for parachute games are often available in schools and other centres), part of a slightly zany story idea might involve three-toed aliens having arrived in the school field by parachute with the intention of abducting a teacher so that they can take him or her back to their home planet/mother ship to teach their own people (or alien children) about the ways of humans and our world. So far so good, but in the next part of the story it's probably not wise to have the aliens chased away by gun-toting cowboys just because a couple of students or course organisers have brought along cowboy hats and people love them so much that they want to wear them in the scenario!

There was some good 'story logic' here to start with, in that it has been decided the aliens want to abduct a teacher to teach about the ways of humans and our planet (that certainly makes a kind of sense), but there is also obviously weak story logic through the irrational introduction of cowboys into the plot. Even without the crazy involvement of cowboys, however, the aliens' arrival by parachute seems to throw up at least one potential illogicality, that is, how do/did they escape again along with the abducted teacher? However, don't panic – it can be useful to have plot problems to solve because finding 'story excuses' for them can actually help create a more developed, original and logical story.

For instance, some of the group's solutions might be the following. Perhaps the aliens can't or aren't ever going to leave Earth again, so they urgently need to know about the planet and its peoples. Maybe they arrived by parachute in the night so that their spaceships wouldn't show

up on earthly radar, perhaps they landed by parachute because their entry vehicle was damaged in our atmosphere, or perhaps they had picked up television pictures of humans using parachutes so they thought that arriving that way would be more discreet . . . and so on.

Creating an anomalous situation then asking questions of what might have happened before to make the later situation possible or plausible (i.e. introducing viable 'story excuses') is actually a key to better story-making. Working like this builds a convincing back story and makes happenings after that point more logical, unpredictable and interesting. It is also an excellent way of developing and strengthening what I call the 'story-making muscle' – the ability and flexibility required to think up a variety of original but logical plots for a story.

Thinking backwards breeds original and logical plots

In the example mentioned, this process must have already been partially undertaken because, when a student had had the idea that the aliens might have landed in order to abduct a teacher (probably because someone initially thought the concept was amusing), someone had obviously then asked the question 'why?' The answer that it was because the aliens wanted to abduct someone who could teach then lead directly to asking other questions such as 'who?' or 'what?' The group, in answer to the first of these new questions , came up with 'children' or 'other aliens' or 'alien children'. The answer to the second question ('teach what?') was clearly 'all about humans and their world' (although it might equally have been about how to use and cook Earth materials, human technology, recent human history, etc.). The next answer the students would have asked would inevitably be 'why?' and answers to that that might well bring 'how?' or 'where?' questions, and so on.

If you look at what is going on here, you'll realise that the story-makers needed to have a sensible story so, when they came up with the slightly zany idea of a teacher being abducted by parachuting aliens, they had to make 'story excuses' for this. In effect, they were suddenly *thinking backwards*, that is, asking questions about what might have happened before a given chronological point in a plot in order to make that point more logical, believable or, as I like to put it in workshops, more possible and plausible.

Thinking backwards to find story excuses is an essential element of original plot creation. All good story writers have learned to do it automatically and I have taught developed forms of it on hundreds of story courses, yet most young people and many non-writers don't think like that to begin with because real life moves forwards in time ('I've finished such and such, so now I do . . .'), so they think forwards sequentially, with the words 'and then' repeating in the backs of their heads. This leads to clichéd and much less logical plots.

To help kick-start this 'thinking backwards' process, you can tell your students to ask the 'five Ws and an H' questions (who, what, where, when, why and how) about a story event or, as my students know, I sometimes call it the 'six million Ws and an H' questions because the possibilities are truly endless.

Inspiration and location

Finding inspiration from clothes and props

Bringing along a large treasure trove of dressing-up clothes and props and dumping them on a heap on the floor in front of a group can be an effective way of inspiring everyone or, perhaps I should say, over-inspiring everyone and creating total chaos! Mix a massive heap of interesting and varied dressing-up clothes and props with a group of children of any age and you have a

recipe for a lot of noisy fun, chaos and mega distraction. To be quite honest, some groups of adults aren't much better at keeping their focus in this situation!

I discovered long ago that it was more useful to hide my eclectic wardrobe collection in giant tote bags at the beginning of the process and only take out suitable items once the stories had been worked out. I had usually arranged in advance (by leaflet or letter) for course participants to bring along one or two interesting items of dressing-up clothing and props, and sometimes I would ask them to bring those to the room at the beginning of the process. However, probably most effective of all was when I would ask them to leave their props in bags outside the room and simply tell their group what items they had brought. This is generally enough to start ideas flowing freely without causing too much distraction.

If particular groups need a little more of an inspirational boost, you could choose two to four disparate items to show them at the beginning of the process and ask the students what kinds of curious or dramatic news stories they could make up involving all or most of those pieces of clothing and props. Showing too many items at once tends to make students start stringing together a sequential story because they can't 'idea web' together more than a few unrelated things at a time, so they think of a connection between two or maybe three things and then attempt to add another one then another one, etc., rather than find true cross-connections.

Remember that it's important that a group does not see the other group's props before being invited in to report on their scenario, because you don't want them to guess parts of their stories in advance and it takes away the dramatic impact and fun when students see the items used for the first time in the actual scenario setting. For this reason, of course, if you decide to show an inspirational set of three or four items to groups, it needs to be a different set for each group.

New locations as inspiration

Using fresh locations to trigger story inspiration can be very effective, especially if an environment is unusual or interesting. On a school camp or during a stay at a residential centre in an evocative setting, the environment can be a huge trigger for ideas and enthusiasm, and I have exploited interesting environments in this way on many thousands of occasions for journalism courses, story and plot creation, drama, and poetry workshops. There are always exciting and varied things about a new location that can kick-start the engine of creativity.

If the location is beside the sea, a lake or a large river, for instance, the group might work up a news story involving things like a drowning, boats or individuals fishing up something unusual or scary, a modern day pirate attack, terrorists or smugglers doing various nefarious deeds on the shore in the depth of the night, swimmers having vanished due to a suspected shark attack, weird occurrences blamed on a giant octopus, or a story initiated by the discovery of a soggy message fragment in a washed-up bottle, etc.

If there's a nuclear power station nearby, your groups might create complex scenarios based on terrorist attacks, meltdowns, leakages, the appearance of odd wildlife, attempted incursions by environmental campaigners or terrorists, etc.

Similarly, if there is building work nearby or onsite, students might create scenarios involving a building accident and/or corruption leading to corners having been cut safety-wise, the discovery of some bizarre object in a hole excavated for the foundations, the remains of buildings of an ancient and unknown civilization, a couple of recent bodies dressed in odd outfits, tunnels created by giant moles, etc.

Perhaps your school is planning a stay at a centre where there may be local transport such as a coach, minibuses or cars available. If so, it may well be worth checking out nearby historical sites or other interesting or evocative locations in advance as these could add spice and depth to the journalism, and vice versa. Some may well be in walking distance.

It is worth remembering, however, that *any* location can become somewhere else in the world of fantasy, so a group could turn the front steps of a large building into the steps of Buckingham Palace, a lawn into the garden of the White House, a boring corridor into one in the cellars of the Pentagon, a small wooded area or shrubbery into a foreign jungle, and so on. If a group seems a bit lacklustre, feel free to enjoy triggering the multiple possibilities of different locations for your students and being creatively helpful yourself . . . your enthusiasm and modelling of how to think will rub off on everybody involved. This is great as long as the students eventually take up the mantle and start coming up with and developing their own ideas so that they can claim ownership of their plot.

Locations with current project or curriculum connections

If you need to be more curriculum-linked and, for instance, want to relate the story to a text you are using in class or a historical event or period, you might manage to find a location that could feel like part of that event or period, then ask the group to create a story using the actual facts or, perhaps more interestingly, to create an alternative story or one with an alternative outcome so that the other group has to work it out from interviewing appropriate witnesses, professionals, participants, etc., who might have been there at the time, as if in a new version of the book.

The 'alternative to the original' concept is subtly clever because all the students will have to learn the original details perfectly so they can make up very different stories or story variations. Again, this can be 'learning without being taught at', which is always the best sort, and some students thrive on it. You might be able to take them to the actual site of the original event, teach them about what happened there in detail (perhaps by asking them to perform parts of it as you explain), then split them into groups who will secretly 'rework history' and act out their version for the other group, the clipboard-toting reporters (before they swap roles, of course).

I have led a great many of these kinds of hybrid courses by combining journalism or other writing challenges with historical or modern settings, having led workshops in places as diverse as ancient battle sites, ruined castles and abbeys, wild coasts, gardens and outbuildings, medieval underground tunnels and even in and around busy district council offices . . . all with permission of course! It can sometimes be even better if you can persuade some locals to get involved, albeit briefly, either through playing 'themselves' or relevant roles.

Perhaps you could use carefully chosen and vetted industrial or post-industrial sites and, after you or local experts tell them all about working life in these locations, you could then ask the groups to create news scenarios either on that exact site, nearby or back at base later, which would incorporate many of the things they had learned on the visit, but with clever new human interest stories or plot twists.

From an organiser's viewpoint, the possibilities of using interesting locations are endless, and you can gain great 'joined-up learning' by combining journalism, history, science, English, modern or technical knowledge, story creation, performance, etc. When well organised and led, the outcomes can certainly be worth any small hassles involved in gaining agreements or permissions, finding helpers and transport, and completing the ubiquitous risk assessments.

Using school locations

The 'shock of the new' is particularly effective at exciting and enthusing groups of youngsters, so it's always helpful to use new locations. Even in a familiar place such as school, though, you can either take the group to an area or room with which they are less familiar, dress up an area (physically or imaginatively) as somewhere else, or lead participants to use their imaginations to place interesting characters or an unusual event into an everyday location. Props and dressing-

up clothes can help hugely, of course, and much of the story they produce will always involve something that has allegedly happened earlier or is currently 'frozen' in the final stages of happening in a particular place.

The story about the three-toed aliens mentioned earlier would be especially effective if you had a parachute or two to drape from tree branches at the edge of the school field. You could trail green or purple slime on the ground (coloured jelly or Jell-O is handy); press a stick into soft mud or sand in the area to create the 'three-toed footprints'; have a terrified 'neighbour' witness jabbering excitedly at them from across the hedge; scatter strange bits of smashed up electronic equipment on the ground, and so on, but – failing the time, props or help to set that up – your performer group might just make themselves look shocked and dishevelled, agree the finer details of the story between themselves, then work out what each of them apparently saw, did or know, and precisely what they are going to say about it. They might, for instance, hide the noisiest and/or tallest of their number so that it will eventually transpire that the aliens had mistakenly abducted that student on the assumption that he or she must be the human 'learned one'! Of course, the students will be playing the roles, so only a small number of them can be students in the scenario. Some could be playing teachers, gardeners, neighbours, school visitors, UFO watchers, police, school inspectors, caretakers, cooks, minibus drivers, etc.

If the story is complicated enough and each of the 'actors' have learned exactly what they should know of the story and what their various main replies will be, the 'scenario of the imagination' can still be successful, although you'll find a few dressing-up clothes and props will always make the whole experience more enthusiastic, enjoyable, real and memorable.

Outdoor and mixed locations

I like to use outdoor locations in and around schools and centres for some scenarios, particularly in summer, because, as these are often free from disturbance or potential annoyance factor, your actors can make as much acting din as necessary to enliven their performances at the beginning of, and during, the reporters' visit to them. Apart from possible cold temperatures and unplanned bad weather, the main drawback is timing it so that you can get the groups through both their acting and performing stages without the chaos of a playground invasion from all or part of the school population during breaks, lunch times, PE or sports training. Trees, lawns, pond areas, steps, doorways, and outdoor features such as adventure playground equipment, gazebos and gardens can all become dramatic locations.

Large halls or hallway areas are handy because they can generally offer enough space to separate out the actors, thus preventing lazy (or crafty) reporters overhearing key facts being told to another intrepid reporter interviewing a different actor nearby! Largely for this reason I favour using more than one room, a room and a corridor, or a room and a nearby outdoor space. I also like to make the reporters feel they are really working hard to get their facts.

Making reporters work harder

Hiding players

When helping groups where space isn't an issue, I usually suggest that a group places one or some of its actors in a different area from the rest of the group as a part of the story plot. They often 'hide' at least one of their number nearby, perhaps under a table, in another room with the door ajar, in a large cupboard, along a corridor, under stairs, around a corner outside, or inside thick shrubbery, etc.

Good reporters should be able to count so, if they don't realise or simply ignore the fact that some of the other group are apparently missing, they need to concentrate better! One of the hidden, apparently lesser characters usually has pivotal information for making sense of the story the reporters are trying to work out, so the latter have to work harder if they can't stumble simply onto that key character, or those key characters, by chance.

Hiding a crucial witness or making one initially appear to be a fairly irrelevant character generally means that the reporters can't piece together too much of the story too quickly, and so they have to work harder at interviewing those actors they have found so far. Over the years, some of the best scenarios like this have involved the reporters first interviewing the visually obvious people, discovering clues through that as to where others could be hidden, interviewing the second set of actors, then finding out through their answers that they need to go back to the first group and ask certain very specific questions in order to piece together some key parts of the story. A scenario like this is entertaining and satisfying both to the performers who made it up and to those reporters who finally work it all out.

There can always be good 'story excuses' to explain why a character is apparently hidden outside, or positioned away from, the main action. Perhaps it's the actual murderer or hitman who is hiding for obvious reasons, but someone else initially appears to the arriving reporters to have done the deed. Perhaps the more obvious 'red herring' character turns out to be just a bodyguard or policeman with his gun out, an innocent bystander who has rushed to help and is unknowingly nearly standing on top of the dropped weapon, a soldier on duty, an arms dealer doing a demonstration, and so on.

On at least one occasion, the person hidden was the character who had died, either by accident or by design, and so the lack of a body in the first instance meant that the reporters couldn't even know that the story involved a death, and might easily be misled into thinking that some 'true' but more trivial part of the story was all there was to report on! This can be effective when, for example, the more trivial part of the news story scenario involves a romance or scandal based on 'celebrities' (do remember to alter their names sufficiently to avoid being sued!). Young reporters can become so fixated with the celebrity story they don't ask about, or simply ignore, the fact that one of the performance group's members is missing, and fail to take in any little hints supplied to them during answering or by props strategically left in certain places around the scene.

Usually my helpers or I eventually step in and whisper more helpful answers into actors' ears or hint at more precise questions for reporters who are stuck on the basic level to ask, but I don't believe in making it too easy for the reporters because (1) the exercises are meant to be challenging and force them to think harder, (2) they need to listen carefully to the actors' answers and then frame new questions based on what they have learned or suspect from those answers and, (3) both sides ultimately enjoy the scenarios much more if the reporters have to struggle a bit and work harder at their jobs. After all, they will soon swap roles and see what it's like to be on the other side!

Devious tricks

One particularly effective news scenario, organised by a group of Years 13–15 students with my assistant's help during a course at a residential centre, involved two crafty devices that forced the reporting group to work especially hard to get the story right and also struggle to find all the key people to interview. The first trick was that much of what appeared to have happened in the scenario in the main assembly hall/common room area was actually a play within a play, and the reporters had to work this out solely by clever interviewing, despite equally clever answering from the acting group who managed to avoid mentioning key words such as 'play', 'acting', etc. until some quick-witted reporters guessed and started asking more targeted questions.

The second device was that nearly a third of the group were hidden some considerable distance away in the basement of the building and the reason for them being there at the same time was cunningly woven into their scenario plot through the use of clever story excuses. It took most of the reporting group an amazingly long time even to work out that so many were 'missing' from the main action scene! They all had to figure out individually exactly what they had to ask, and of whom among the acting group, in order to be able to locate the hidden actors and so ultimately complete their understanding of the complex story and collect relevant quotes with which to illustrate it. It was amusing to watch the more 'switched on' reporters finally get the idea from their questioning then discreetly slip away from the main hall one by one to question the hidden sub-group ahead of their rivals.

Advancing the story

Getting a scenario story line agreed and deepened

Once a performance group has worked out their basic story, you may need to help them make it more complicated and clever. A single clipboard with paper for the group is useful at this stage so that they can, in due course, start writing down characters names and some simple ideas about the story . . . but not the whole evolving plot. It's important not to let ideas go down on paper too early or in too complete a form or they become set in concrete in their creators' minds so that, due to what psychologists call the 'availability effect' and the 'primary effect', they tend to stop taking new ideas on board. However, there is obviously a point at which you see that your students have several good plot ideas and some of these are starting to connect together interestingly, and that is usually the moment to test if the group is in general agreement with the use of those plot fragments, so that you can guide them to develop it further along those lines and not be distracted by other possible routes.

However, if their ideas are flagging, introduce a random, unrelated object, ask them for some story ideas about it and, in no time at all you will find they will start webbing this/these ideas with those they have already. Alternatively, ask them to ask some of the 'six million Ws and an H' questions about things they have already agreed, and their creative juices will flow again.

With all groups except the least able, as their news story begins to gel it's a good idea to remind group members to keep thinking about how to build tricks into the plot or into the names of some of the characters, places and organisations, and perhaps even into the use of confusing props or placements so the reporters have to work harder at interviewing, comprehension and accuracy.

Even once several good ideas have emerged for the scenario it's still useful to keep reminding the young story creators of the 'six million questions' and asking them to try out new What? Where? When? Who? Why? How? ideas for each new situation or solution they come up with, so that the plot deepens and grows in logic. I generally refuse to let them write down an actual plot line, although I might if it was very clever, complex and final, or if I felt that some of the actors were struggling to take the full plot on board accurately. If students, you or helpers do write story details down, don't forget to hide them before the other group is called in to see the scenario as sharp-eyed student reporters have been known to work out complex plots in record time due to notes having been carelessly left lying around the performance area!

Building deliberate confusions into plots

I've mentioned how effective it is to insert 'red herrings' into plots and this is often best done *in situ*, that is, the actual place where the scenario will be played out, because the actors can think

about how to use the environment for the plot and for any deception ideas, relevant sight lines, where to place or hide characters, what each character might have been doing or appear to be doing in the plot at the 'frozen moment', where to leave or position props, etc. As mentioned earlier, it can be particularly easy to confuse the reporters initially when scenarios involve murders or apparent murders, because the murderer might be hidden and another character might be holding or be near to a weapon which was not the actual cause of death.

Turning this thinking around, some groups have created apparent murder scenes which turned out to be simple accidents or situations where a character had actually been injured by accident even though someone else had been trying unsuccessfully to murder either that person or another character. A couple of groups have even cleverly created apparent murder scenes where no character had actually died! Either the assumed victim had been quite well hidden for some time, or the 'body' in the lake turned out to be just a tailor's dummy or shop mannequin thrown in by vandals or thieves at a top fashion designer's workshop, or 'the Dead One' referred to by some of the actors eventually turned out to be some guru they followed who had died, or been murdered or executed three hundred years ago. That's clever plot creation!

Modelling the use of 'red herrings' and added complexity

Before any of the groups even split off to begin making their scenario plots, I usually ask my assistant(s) and one or two of the students to get into positions which can demonstrate how confusing visual information can be. For instance, I might place myself half out of an exterior door in a fake running position, staring back inside with a terrified expression. I may arrange for one of the students to be lying like a corpse crumpled on the floor with my assistant kneeling with her hands half around that person's neck as if strangling them, in conjunction with another character stretching towards a fallen 'bloodied knife' near the person's neck. There could be an overturned table and perhaps also an overturned chair.

I then ask everyone what they think might have happened. Some say that the character I am playing is a murderer who has stabbed the person on the floor, dropped his knife and is making his escape. Some insist that the person whose hand is near the knife has stabbed the victim and that my character is running away in fear, while others think the character played by my assistant is strangling the 'dead' person, etc.

I then tell them that the person fell over due to a trip, faint or an epileptic fit, hit the table as they fell and dropped the knife they were using to spread tomato ketchup onto a frankfurter roll. My character is running to get help or phone for an ambulance, the character played by my assistant is reaching to the victim's neck to check for a pulse, and the other person is trying to take the sharp kitchen knife out of harm's way.

This gets them thinking about how, as scenario creators, they can use all sorts of tricks and illusions to confuse the reporters, and it also makes them realise that, as reporters, they should not make assumptions or take anything for granted until they have interviewed everyone effectively and are sure of what actually happened and what all the characters did previously – or may appear to be doing at the 'frozen moment'.

Reducing a scenario group's inevitable obsession with 'death'

I'm worried I may have been beginning to sound as death obsessed as many of my students at this point, but characters don't need to 'die' in scenarios, or even appear to, and endless red herrings can be created in other areas. Robberies can appear to have happened due to misunderstandings, or the person who appeared to have been robbed had accidentally left his wallet at home. Perhaps the briefcase/rucksack/money belt snatched by the professional robbers

didn't have the valuables/secrets/plans/embarrassing information in it because someone else (possibly a trusted assistant, colleague or family member) had already pinched the item for their own purposes, or had anticipated the robbery attempt just beforehand and had hidden them under his or her coat (hence causing more confusion among reporters who don't ask the right questions).

If, for example, there is an area of storm/logging/builder damage in the grounds that students decide to use for a scenario, you may imagine that a Lord of the Manor character thinks a zoo-keeper's runaway elephant (not present on the scene!) had caused the damage to his wall and shrubbery, but only one character in the scenario knows that someone else had actually stolen the elephant to sell to a rich private collector of animals.Not only can it confuse unwary reporters because the zoo-keeper, the lord and some others present can all genuinely and truthfully think the damage was cause by the zoo-keeper's negligence (and the characters *have* to answer truthfully to what they 'know' in their roles), but many reporters will be so proud at having discovered that area of the 'truth' that they might not discover that another party caused the damage by accident with a runaway bulldozer but hadn't owned up to the lord, or a devious rich character who had paid the other character to steal the elephant had caused the damage by some means to make it look like it was the elephant's trail of chaos in order that the annoying, smelly zoo next door might lose its planning permission or zoo licence and so enhance the value of his own property.

Complications such as these can be added if individual characters in the scenario don't 'know' the whole story and what some other characters have done or planned. Of course, the complexity of the plot should be tailored to age and ability. Some general scenario plots could theoretically be used at almost any age, from middle primary school groups to adult, as long as any added complications and subtleties are proportionate. The aim is to challenge strongly, but not to go beyond the comprehension of those taking part. That doesn't mean that scenarios shouldn't involve aspects of subjects and useful 'world knowledge' that some of the participants won't yet know, but there is, of course, a critical difference in educational result between learning through the challenge of the job and not being capable of doing the job.

What's in a name?

As mentioned earlier, the names chosen for scenario characters, places, etc., can create an additional test of the accuracy and ferreting capability of your reporters, and also of their ability not to tumble headlong into unsubstantiated assumptions.

All characters should be given first and second names because, initially, first name and surname then, later, title and surname are generally used by reporters in their articles. However, a large percentage of primary, and plenty of early secondary pupils, will try to write only first names, perhaps because they are used to being referred to by first names at home or in school.

One way of seeing how accurate, thoughtful and focused they are is to have several members of the same family in a story with some female members of the family who are married. Students often make assumptions that they will have the same name as their parents or siblings because they forget that, if married, they may well have lost their maiden names. Reporters will also be forced to work out how to differentiate mother from daughter, father from son, or siblings from each other in their stories and this will involve them using both surnames and first names for the characters, as well, sometimes, as titles. It is all challenging practice in manipulating complex data and language.

Useful tricks with spellings

Using odd spellings is another useful trick to help test how on the ball your reporters are. Most names are spelt in diverse ways nowadays and modern society is filled with names of varied ethnic origin, so unfamiliar and unusually spelled names are common. A crafty idea to see if your more able reporters are questioning well and working hard enough is to make names sounds like names they know, but agree with the actors to spell them in different ways, so John might appear as Jon or even Jawn, and McIntyre can appear as Macintire or even as first name and surname: Mac Entire. Young newshounds who don't ask clearly won't get them right!

If it is decided a scenario character is to be called, say, Dr. Death, his name might instead be spelled Dr. Deth, and, of course, with such a dramatic surname, young reporters might be so excited they spell it the predictable way and also forget to ask what his first name is, especially as he already has an interesting and alliterate title! They may also assume he is a medical doctor when he may be an academic one.

If the scenario story involves famous characters or celebrities, or any real people you know of, it is a sensible idea to alter their names or at least spell them very differently, partly because of the journalistic challenge and partly so you don't get sued if some of your young reporters put their fictitious and possibly libellous stories on the internet or you include the stories in a group newspaper. You can all have fun making these names up, and some of them can be quite amusing.

Another way of leading the reporters into making false assumptions can be to call the real 'baddie' in a scenario by a fairly normal name while giving a 'red herring' character an evil-sounding name. If there is a butcher in the plot the actors might give another character the surname 'Butcher' to see if any reporters get mixed up. Young people begin to learn more clearly in every area in life and make better decisions when they stop making automatic assumptions in their thinking patterns, and begin to think for themselves by searching out and evaluating the truest and most accurate information. Learning to think like this habitually is one of the reasons why making news scenarios challenging can be so worthwhile.

Rehearsing each 'acting' group

Once a group's story plot is created then refined *in situ*, it's important to whizz around to each person and ask them what their character knows or doesn't know. By this point I will have asked the actors to have worked out at least four or five things they can say and suggested they add a few colourful verbs, adjectives, adverbs, metaphors, similes and perhaps idioms to some of those lines. If all, or some, of the group are weak, young or have difficulty with recall, I might suggest they write down and embellish several possible answers on a scrap of paper to help their confidence and their memories.

Most effective is to go to each actor and grill them as if you are one of the young reporters who are soon to do the same thing. Let the rest of the group see and hear these exchanges, even if they have to move temporarily from their agreed positions in order to hear. Ask them general questions and make sure they don't give more than the minimum away each time. Many will do that to start with. I usually give some examples of how, to begin with, they can answer very minimally and quite confusingly while still telling the 'truth'. If they are asked 'What happened here?' or 'Why are all these chairs burned?', I would not want the young actor (playing a visiting teacher) to reply helpfully that the school/centre's gardener had just left a heap of old chairs to be loaded onto a lorry when a couple of escaping terrorists (who had just attacked the local nuclear power station) ran across the yard shooting back at policemen and one of the plain clothes officers fired back and hit one of the builders working on a low retaining wall nearby, who dropped his gas blowtorch which set fire to the stack of chairs . . .

Hopefully, the actor might just pick one aspect to answer and say, truthfully and colourfully, but not very helpfully 'There was a fire. It was really dramatic! The flames went at least twenty feet into the air!' When the reporter gets around to asking something a little more refined like 'What caused the fire?', the actor might say 'It was a blowtorch!', and so on, so that each reporter has to work out which questions will elicit more useful information, and reassess this with every answer he or she gets.

This way, I try to show the actors how, if a reporter listens to the nuggets of fact or hints hidden in their answers and then asks more refined and accurate questions, each actor then has to tailor answers to those new questions . . . and eventually allow the reporter to work out that part of the story if their questions deserve it. It's also good to help them add possibly 'true' but irrelevant material to their responses to fill them out and confuse reporters who don't ask sufficiently accurate questions, but this information must fit perfectly with the agreed story.

As you move around them, you can check they know the 'facts' that they should know, that they know their titles, names, and how to spell them, which other characters their character knows or has seen, what they know of what has happened in the plot, etc. Remind them that they do have to tell the truth but only good questions deserve good answers!

The reporters

Before the reporters start reporting

I, or my assistant, always gives each group of reporters a briefing while the scenario group they are about to visit is making their final *in situ* preparations. I find that they perform to their brief better if it is presented just before they see the scenario than, for instance, if I tell it to all the groups before they start making their plots.

To make this easier, I have listed guidelines for being a scenario reporter on a photocopiable page at the end of this chapter.

Organising and briefing your reporters

Give each reporter a clipboard with a good heap of blank A4 paper on it, or the plain backs of old letters/forms/worksheets . . . This is especially effective because they should only use one side of each sheet or they will get information muddled. I always use clipboards for the reporters because they can move the sheets around to keep related information together, take sheets of used or useless information out or add in other people's sheets.

Clipboards are solid to write on quickly in a moving situation. If it starts raining or you decide to work outside despite the weather, you can obtain large, clear food bags beforehand which are quite a bit bigger than A4 so the reporters can fit their hands and pencils inside them and keep their work dry. Pull each bag down over the top of the board to allow hand access from the bottom, and use stubby pencils. If working outside it's best to give them two pencils each, in case one breaks or gets lost. Pencils still work on damp paper where biros either don't work or smear, and gel pens dissolve.

Before the scenario starts, ask your reporters to write the following memos at the top of the first sheet and memorise it:

Full name?
Relationship to others (family or other sort e.g. professional)
DoB if relevant?
Get good and accurate quotes!
Ask: Who? Why? What? Where? When? and How?

Suggest that they each use a separate sheet for notes relating to, and quotes from, each witness and to put that character's full name at the top of that sheet (or sheets). That saves them having to keep writing the person's name beside each quote and prevents them from getting muddled later about who said what.

Time required for reporting group scenarios

I usually allow about 25 minutes of interviewing for most groups, but that will vary depending on average age and ability. I never let a session run over 30 minutes or they can lose fizz and focus, but I find that 20 minutes is not enough.

Younger groups take ages to think and scribe. Although older and more able groups go faster, they tend to write down much more . . . at least they should do! I believe in giving deadlines because the pressure makes them concentrate and feels exciting and like real life. In fact, I build up the pressure with most groups by telling them they have only ten minutes/five minutes left and mention out loud if I am aware that some people still don't have the full story right. I always count down parts of the last couple of minutes loudly, in between dropping necessary hints to any who are running behind about who to talk to, etc.

You may well have to figure out in advance if you will need to split sessions around a break or lunch, but you will have to allow extra time for scenarios because they always start late – it's some kind of a natural law!

Taking photos during scenarios

Once the scenario is underway, you and your assistant(s) can move around the scene, photographing the colourful characters being interviewed and the actors at their most dramatic. These pictures can later be edited for your newspaper or simple single-sheet 'newspaper pages' and/or used later in an audio-visual presentation, using the smart board, to class, year group, parents or the school as a whole.

You may allow some reporters to take turns at being 'photo-journalists' as well, but it's better they aren't given more than a minute or two each with the camera or they won't have enough reporting time in which to work out the full story. It's important to mention that they should mostly move the camera in close to the dramatic part of a scene to illustrate it powerfully to readers, even if this involves cutting other interesting people out of it. This can also be done later in a short 'photo-cropping session' that everyone can see on the smart board, so it's worth taking a few medium-long shots that you can crop very tightly later as examples.

Helping during group scenarios

Before, or at the beginning of a scenario, whoever has aided that actor's group in creating and rehearsing that news story should discreetly explain the details of it to the other leader(s)/assistant(s) so that you can all listen in on the question and answer exchanges as you move around, and help as necessary. This help may take the form of reminding an actor not to give away too much (especially in the early stages of the scenario) which you can do by whispering possible ways of answering a question that give a true but not overly detailed answer, and by loudly praising a good actor for his or her performance and subtlety in answering the reporters' questions. Most importantly, try to check that, even if actors are embellishing their lines with colourful or irrelevant details, everyone is keeping to the agreed news story and not confusing the issue!

Helping will also involve reminding reporters to write down *all* good facts and quotes; hinting at better ways of questioning; suggesting some students interview other characters more;

preventing more than about two reporters from interviewing the same witness at the same time so others don't overhear and gain key facts without having to do the groundwork themselves; and, as time progresses, asking reporters to repeat certain answers they have obtained and to think about those again, so that they can move on to finding better questions. There is a great potential learning process here relating to language logic, faster thinking under pressure, the identification of key facts within language streams and the increased subtlety of two-way communication skills.

I try not to help too directly or give anything away, especially in the first part of the session, because the value is in the challenge and also in the ownership and satisfaction that the students get from learning and improving as they go. However, from about fifteen minutes into the session onwards my assistant(s) and I go around, drawing individual reporters aside so that they can tell us discreetly what they know of the story so far and show us how copious their notes are. From about this point on we often begin to ask more leading questions of individual reporters, or sometimes of the group, especially if they are still completely at sea or diverted by the red herrings. The aim is not ultimately to fool reporters, but to make them work hard, eventually learn the correct story, and write down as many key details and colourful quotes as possible.

I usually count down the final twenty seconds or so dramatically then call out 'Stop writing and don't discuss it anymore as you don't know who will be on your newspaper yet or who will be a competitor!'

Organising groups into writing teams

Once the group scenarios have been completed and everything tidied up, it is time to sort the groups into writing teams. This is a good moment to decide to which fictitious newspapers each of the teams belongs. Either they can choose or you can tell them, and names can be entirely made up or link to the school, town or locality (such as *Saint Martin's Monitor*, *The Egglestone Express*, etc.), while making sure it isn't the name of an actual newspaper for legal reasons!

As students settle down to write in teams of two to four at each computer, leaders and assistants need to swap over and work with those reporters who have reported on the scenario that the adults helped create. That way, the adult now helping that group of writing teams already knows every detail of the news story and can assist much more confidently and effectively.

Detailed suggestions about organising and assisting with these team writing sessions follow in the next chapter.

Before planning to lead these writing sessions you will also find it very helpful to take part in the Challenging Changes exercise in Chapter 11 yourself and to then read the editing suggestions in that chapter.

Advice for reporters in group scenarios

- Don't panic due to excitement! First observe the scene and think!
- Note positions of people and things and body language, and try not to make strong assumptions about what has happened.
- Decide who to interview first and what to ask them.
- Always introduce yourself politely, e.g. 'Hello, I'm John Jones from . . .' (say the name of your chosen newspaper).
- Ask the best questions you can think of.
- Listen carefully each time and, as you write down answers, think about what they mean and what other possible questions come out of their answers.
- Don't forget to ask each character's full name and, if relevant, their job and reason for being at the scene of, or to do with, the news event.
- Write down ALL relevant answers. Keep a separate sheet (or sheets) for each individual character's answers with their name at the top.
- You need to note down all relevant facts quickly and you will have to write down any relevant quotes EXACTLY as they are told to you, although you only need to record the key parts, and any especially colourful and relevant 'juicy' quotes which contain describing words.
- If witnesses don't give you good descriptions, you can try to tease those out of them by asking things like 'Were you very frightened when you saw the man in the apron holding a huge knife in the air?' This type of approach should hopefully elicit more colourful answers such as 'Yes, I was utterly terrified! He looked so dangerous!' However, if that approach keeps failing and a witness still just replies 'Yes', you can at least say the person agreed it was very frightening in reported speech. Or ask them if they were 'utterly terrified' and you can report that if they agree or their alternative words if they don't.
- Make sure you have written down each interviewee's correctly spelled full name, title, and job or activity if relevant, what they saw/heard/felt, etc., and how, if at all, they are related to anyone else on the scene.
- Keep moving around the witnesses and still try not to make assumptions until you are sure you have the whole story.
- If you are stuck for questions, run through the 'five Ws and an H' questions related to the character, event or situation. New questions will come to you.
- Don't stand back and be a 'wallflower'. Those who ask questions boldly, pleasantly and not too quietly are the ones who get the answers. Quiet, super-polite people who hold back don't get answers – but impolite questioners annoy witnesses and might not get them either.
- When you think you have all the story right, go back to key characters and get more details and better quotes from them.

9 Writing and editing the group scenario stories

Organising the writing area

It is essential to use computers for this task as your students are hopefully going to be making a great number of changes, edits and re-edits, and we want them to be comfortable doing that because it shows they are thinking hard about the facts, the form and the language.

While putting together writing teams of two to four students at each computer it is important to ensure that members of the team have all reported on the same scenario. It wouldn't be the first time that teams have initially been made up of members who had been in different groups during the group scenarios and it's impossible to write the same story from different sets of facts!

It is much easier to work the space as a tutor/helper if you have all the teams who reported on the same scenario seated in an area near to each other, but not so near that they can easily overhear, see or copy the progress of their competitor teams because you'll want to get a feel for how well teams and individuals are functioning through their own efforts.

By organising the room like this, you and your assistants can work with those teams who reported on the scenarios each of you helped set up because, that way, you will know exactly what happened in their news events. If you are short-staffed and have to help on two different stories, still keep the writing teams working on the same stories positioned near to one other so that you can ask leading questions of, or make helpful pronouncements to, that entire section of teams.

Creating a 'newsroom' atmosphere

I like to tell the young journalists that the computer suite, or section of computer suite we are working in, is our newspaper's newsroom and sometimes even put up a huge sign saying something like '*Cranton Chronicle* newsroom'. We always make up a name for the newspaper but sometimes each small writing team makes up their own newspaper title, at least in the initial stages, and these usually contain alliteration or assonance. For instance, if your school is called Saint Filberts, you might have the *The Filbert Flyer*. If you live in Doncaster, it might be the *Doncaster Chronicle* (the 'on' parts providing the satisfying sound 'echo'). In the town of Taunton it might be called the *Taunton Times*, *Taunton Chronicle*, *Taunton Telegraph* or similar, as long as there isn't an actual newspaper already with the same name because you don't want to get sued!

Making the newsroom scene as realistic as possible contributes to the grown-up feel of the exercise and makes the learning more fun, valuable and memorable. With that in mind, it's a good idea to set deadlines and keep the pressure up by talking about impatient editors, etc! If time and bravery permit, you might position big blow-ups of newspaper pages or pages with editing marks on the walls, make 'editorial department' signs and even wear a cap or badge with 'Editor' emblazoned on it!

Know your story!

Being sure of every detail of the agreed story or stories you help on is vital if you're to assist the writers effectively, because you can work out yourself what the best possible leads are, which facts need to be at or near the top of the story (as per the pyramid), which facts or quote(s) might round it off (the possible 'foundation') and which facts or quotes need to be included (or excluded) in the middle, and in what sequence. Most of all, you will also know when the writers have got their information wrong! Sometimes, this will involve missing crucial facts and mean that they will never be able to write the true story . . . a journalistic disaster! Hopefully, however, you or your other assistants will have headed off that situation during the latter stages of the group scenarios by asking the most muddled reporters some strong leading questions so that they could finally frame the right questions for the correct interviewees.

If that hasn't occurred, you will now have to choose whether to allow them to struggle on and write the best possible version of the wrong story, or ask them more leading questions until they work out who or what they should have asked previously, then give them an extra couple of moments re-interviewing the relevant (previous) actors in the corner of the room so that they can get the general story right and have some applicable quotes to back it up. If all else fails or you don't want to disturb the others, you can simply stand in for any scenario part yourself, give the reporters some hints about what types of things to ask, let them ask you a couple of crucial late questions, and enjoy making up some particularly apt and juicy quotes. I strongly favour steering the writers towards the correct story because then you know exactly what it should be in the final version and can help them more effectively through all the writing and editing stages.

Taking the 'lead'

If you haven't already done so, the time when the teams are in the initial stages of thinking, note-taking and discussion about the starts of their stories is a handy moment for you to work out, in your head or on a bit of paper, the best possible lead for each story on which you are about to assist. If you are not used to doing this kind of writing, you may need to think about best possible leads for some time (such as in any break that might fall between the group scenarios and writing sessions) and you may want to discuss your own and your helpers' ideas for the first one or two lead sentences. This is because most non-journalists often find that identifying the very best and tightest possible news story beginnings isn't easy!

It always comes down to that odd balance between the most important and interesting facts (MIAIF), and it's worth noting that occasionally a quote is sufficiently significant to count as an interesting or important fact itself. Thus, a story lead could be based on a significant quote, such as 'The headteacher of Saint Bartle's School threatened to resign yesterday over what he said was "too much bad behaviour by unruly teachers"'. A quote becomes a journalistic 'fact', a piece of information, because someone has officially said it, even if what they said turns out not to be true. However, a full discussion about this can get into complex legal territory which we won't go into here.

Even once your writers have identified a list of those crucial key facts, whizzing out the lead sentences is still not necessarily straightforward because, just as for an editor in a newspaper, the story may have lead options in it which leave the writers with a choice of approaches, and choosing one will give that version of the story its particular spin. Obviously, how much you go into the subtleties of this depends on the age and ability of the group and the time available, but this is an important area to look at and, at the very least, you could bring the issue up for discussion within the wider group once the writing teams feel they have managed to get their first key sentence or two sorted out.

Beginning the writing session

A suggested checklist for beginning the writing session is as follows:

- Place students who reported on the same scenario into writing teams of 2–4 individuals and tell them they are shortly going to start writing the news story with the facts and quotes the reporters in that team have obtained.
- In the computer area, seat writing teams who have reported on the same story near each other for ease of assistance, but not so near that they can overhear or see each other's work.
- Remind each team they are competing with the other teams and that you will be looking for the best-written and most accurate story, so they shouldn't give anything away to other teams without your permission.
- Tell the students to do all the typing in point size 14 (it's easier for you to read from behind them) and decide on a clear font for everybody such as Times New Roman, Verdana or Arial. If the students are young or less able, have your helpers help create a Word document in that size and font for each team and pre-save it in a folder under their names.
- Remind all the students that they should not write the headline until the story is finished, then ask if they remember what they should do first.
- Once they have answered sufficiently (about looking for the MIAIF, etc.) you may well want to remind them of the pyramid pictogram and perhaps fix large copies of it on the walls.
- Depending on their answers, point out that they should not start writing the story for some time, say at least 10–15 minutes, but should type notes of what they think are the most important and interesting facts at the top of the page.
- Ask the students not to experiment with Word Art or put their story into columns at this stage. You, or someone else, may want to do all that later in a desk top publishing package, such as Microsoft Publisher or QuarkXPress, and you don't want to have to take it all apart to rebuild it. Anyway, columns can make it harder to take in what they are writing at this stage and less clear for editing.
- Decide on a deadline for finishing the stories, or the first draft of their stories, and tell them that there are working for a newspaper and they will need to stick to the deadline. You will probably have to give them much longer that you expect, but if you give them an initial deadline of, say, an hour and a half, you can extend it when it is nearly up by saying that they have an extra half hour (or whatever seems necessary) but that their editor is getting grumpy and may sack them all if they don't make the next deadline on time!

Are writing deadlines helpful?

Giving the young reporters a deadline isn't, of course, an essential requirement of better writing, but I have found that, although students often make mock protest about it, they actually seem to like the exciting sense of pressure and the parallel of that situation to real life. The older ones will know that real journalists have real deadlines and, after all, your students will have to cope with progressively more and tighter deadlines in future coursework, exams, real life employment and presentations.

How long you need to give them to write the story depends on several factors including your own operational restrictions, such as school timings, etc. The primary factor that makes stories require more time to write is their complexity. To begin with, if the story is complicated, finding the best lead(s) can take a surprisingly long time and getting all the most important and interesting facts into the tightest possible couple of first sentences can even take literate adults an amazingly long time.

Age and ability will also inevitably affect how long it takes to write any particular news story but, although more able groups/teams can generally finish writing the same story more quickly, they are also able to create and report on more complex and subtle stories, and they can have much more staying power on the important reworking and editing side of things than younger or less able groups. This means that their sessions can end up lasting longer.

When to write a headline

It is important to prevent your trainee reporters from writing a headline for their story before they have written the story itself. The problem that often arises is that whatever information they put into the headline they tend to leave out of the story – simply because they've already used it. It can be helpful to remind them that a newspaper story has to be a self-contained pyramid constructed with all of the relevant information. The top part of the story is a sort of summary of the MIAIF, and the headline is a reduced summary of the summary, one that sometimes has to feature only the most important and interesting parts of the most important and interesting facts! It's not part of the building itself, just a cloud above it, or perhaps it could be even better described as a flag or banner flying above the pyramid, advertising the story.

You could also explain that, in most newspapers, reporters don't write the final headlines for their stories themselves because there are specialist headline writers for that and, for very important stories, the main editors might make the decisions. There is sometimes a trade-off between the space available and how long a headline can be (too many letters results in too small a font size), and the headline size can relate to the perceived relative importance of each story. This is especially true in tabloid newspapers and on key pages such as the front page, back page, centre pages, etc.

How to help, and by how much, while students are writing

This is a complicated question and most of my answers to it are to be found in Chapter 11, so *even if you are not intending to teach the Challenging Changes exercise, reading Chapter 11 and participating in the three-part exercise yourself is an effective way of gaining confidence in proactively leading and assisting students as they write and edit demanding news stories.* As touched on above, much will depend on the age and ability of your students and what you can expect from them in terms of writing ability and general knowledge about the greater world around them.

A few pointers for helping newsroom groups:

- In the case of younger groups, pre-save blank documents on their computers with the correct formatting, font, 'save title', etc., to avoid accidental losses or overwriting of work. Otherwise, give similar instructions to older students.
- Set a deadline. For secondary groups you might, say, specify 1 or 1½ hours to start with but be secretly prepared to add another 30+ minutes as the session progresses because the writing will inevitably overrun if the stories contain sufficient challenging complexity.
- Make it feel real by talking to them as if they are actual reporters on a professional newspaper, or behind the scenes of a television, internet or radio newsroom.
- Insist that writing teams spend at least 10–15 minutes thinking, making mental notes or typed sequencing notes before they even begin to write the story itself.
- If the scenario stories have any levels of complexity in them try to get teams thinking laterally on how they approach their lead sentences. Perhaps ask each team to suggest two or three possible angles for their stories before writing and then to decide with which angle or

combination of angles it would be best to lead. You or they should also bear in mind for what standard of news provider they are writing: quality, tabloid or 'bridge' (in between the first two). Make sure the first one or two lead sentences are accurate, cogent and include all the top MIAIF before they move on with their writing because those lead sentences affect the angle of the story and the choice, use and placement of subsequent facts and quotes.

- Don't let students write the headline until their story is finished and checked.
- Teach mostly through posing well thought-out leading questions, the majority directed at individual writing teams but also to the entire group for more general points.
- Help progressively, that is, mostly allow teams to work on their own to start with until they either ask for help or have a first sentence or two to look at. This does not mean that you should avoid asking a few leading questions initially, but that you should try not to take away students' ownership of their work by answering them yourself. As writing difficulties arise and as their news stories lengthen, you can pose more questions and make them even more specific.
- Further into a writing session you may find it quicker and more useful for you and your assistant(s) to move around the teams and sit at their keyboards to lead more 'from the front', discussing and typing sections for them without taking away too much of their ownership.
- Insist on perfection! Multiple rewriting and editing of all or parts of what they have so far written will push students to undergo valuable learning processes.
- Once stories have been satisfactorily completed you can allow teams to write their headlines as a treat, perhaps offering a prize for the one that is the tightest, most relevant, accurate and gripping.
- Share work at the end, or in their next session, looking at difficulties encountered, differences of angle and approach, fact sequencing and connections, sentence construction, use of full and partial quotes, how teams have managed to bring 'colour' into their stories without inserting their own opinions, and what makes a good headline (see Chapter 17 for more on this).

Facing challenge and learning from it is a key to development in this kind of educational environment. Improvement in writing of any sort is rather like building a strong body through exercise. Just as in the case of exercise, you get a little more gain from a little more effort, but the way both of these are approached can make the experiences enjoyable and beneficial at the same time. In the way that running, climbing, cycling or rowing in an interesting environment can bring the greatest pleasures, so can developing students' 'writing muscles' in the equally entertaining and challenging environments of scenario and newsroom.

10 A sub-editing challenge

Here is an editing activity to challenge your students. It involves tightening up a deliberately 'waffly' story and, if also desired, re-writing all or part of it suitably for two different types of newspaper.

You can tell your students that they are sub-editors in a large London evening newspaper. As sub-editors, they work in the editorial department which is responsible for editing down or re-writing stories supplied to them by reporters, correspondents, 'stringers', 'wire services' or features writers. In this case, it looks like the story has been filed by a very amateurish cub reporter who really needs to learn his trade better!

He has somehow managed to get the story facts into a fairly good sequence in the article, but this achievement is masked by the inclusion of a large amount of insignificant information, boring parts of quotes, comments, redundancy, repetition and other general waffle. You can choose to give your fearless sub-editors either just Task 1 or add more of the following tasks:

Task 1

Cut the story down from its present 680 words to between 350 and 370 words without losing any of the most significant and relevant facts and quotes (they can click 'tools' and then 'word count' to find the total if working in MS Word).

Task 2

Copy the edited story file and rewrite one version in the form of a fairly sensational tabloid newspaper and the other in the form of a 'quality' paper. Hopefully the edit they have just made will be a 'quality' version anyway and require little or no improvement, but they may have ended up somewhere between tabloid and quality styles. Your students will already have some understanding of these differences – for more ideas on this see the chapter on 'Studying the Papers Together'.

Task 3

Make suitable headlines for each new version, but only after the stories are completed. First see the later chapter entitled 'Headlines and headline games' for suggestions.

The original text of each story that follows is deliberately wordier, unnecessarily detailed, looser and vaguer than it should be, so your students will need to identify which parts are essential to keep . . . that is, the key, most interesting and most curious facts. They will also need to consider which quotes to cut down or cut out without changing the words, meaning and intent of the person who quoted them. Your student 'subs' will then have to go through it with a 'fine tooth comb' and tighten up the language itself.

Text 1 is for able Year 6 to Year 10 (ages 11–15). It contains 680 words and the target is for your young editors to end up with a tight news story that totals between 345 and 370 words, which of course involves cutting the story down by nearly half. My example version of it that follows has 345 words.

Text 2 is designed for younger or less able students, say 10-year-olds or less able 11 and 12-year-olds. The waffly version of that contains 370 words and the example version of it has 190 words. Again, your young editors have to cut it down by nearly a half, so their target is to end up with a tight news story that totals between approximately 190 and 200 words.

Choose which text you think is appropriate for your group to work on, keeping in mind that the exercise is designed to be demanding in order to make the students work and rework intensively to improve and tighten the story and the English.

Computers are essential

Because of the amount of continuous and detailed language manipulation involved, this useful exercise must be performed on computer. You can either decide to give the challenge to pairs of students or to work on it on an interactive board with a group or class. Depending on time constraints, you may choose only to ask your students to attempt Task 1, the straight-forward (yet taxing) editing job. You may even decide that your students only need to work on the first few paragraphs. The activity may take longer than you expect if they are doing it well!

As long as your students are reasonably able, you might want to have pairs work on the editing job then put the best final version on the interactive board and collectively turn it into a tabloid article.

There are plenty of appalling problems in both texts such as repeating words, and unimportant and unnecessary facts to get rid of. You might be surprised at how hard your students find it to mentally sequence the importance of facts and quotes like these. No matter whether they are working in pairs of collectively, they will inevitably require some help in the form of leading questions and the odd suggestion, but don't allow them to be daunted by the task. They first need to read it through well to understand the story then work on each part bit by bit. After that they should go back through it all at least once or twice, refining smaller details as they go. It's important that they always work on a copy onscreen so that they can refer back to the original version in case they accidentally delete too much or change their minds and need to start a section again.

Two 'waffly' texts requiring heavy editing appear on the following photocopiable pages, along with examples of their editing solutions. These possible solutions should only be revealed to student 'sub-editors' for comparison once they have completed the exercise. It is recommended that teachers read thoughtfully through both the original text chosen, and its solution, before running the exercise.

Waffly text 1

An eight-year-old boy drifted slowly across all of London, travelling slowly from Essex to Surrey in a home-made helium balloon today, while dangling precariously beneath it in a broken fishing net.

The little boy's flight caused a great many major problems for emergency services such as police, air-sea rescue and ambulance services, and air travellers were seriously disrupted as flights were delayed or cancelled. Lots of people were also stuck in traffic jams. The boy was finally rescued by the crew of an air-sea rescue helicopter which had been following his flight for some time until the balloon eventually crash-landed in a reservoir near Heathrow Airport.

The Mayor of London, Doris Bonson, said at a crowded press conference in City Hall after his rescue that she thought it was a miracle that the little boy had survived the ordeal. Shaking her long, golden hair, she stared down at reporters and said:

'Thank goodness the little fellow is okay! I wonder what he was thinking of. His flight caused traffic chaos all across the city and at London airports, but the main thing is that he was miraculously still in one piece when he came down to earth! I expect that his mother is very happy now'.

Tim Guntor (the eight-year-old boy who took the flight) and his older brother Glen, who is eleven years old, had used a large number of party helium balloons to construct the unusual aircraft. They had been filling them for so long that there were several hundred of them and these were held together by an old trawler fishing net draped over the top of them all. Tim made the journey tangled inside a section of the net that was hanging loose beneath this enormous bunch of balloons.

Their father, John, 48, has a part-time party supply business and the pair had helped him inflate helium balloons on several previous occasions, such as parties, weddings, reunions, etc. The two boys found the key to his garage storeroom in Essex which he had accidentally left on his desk along with the garage keys and, knowing how to do it, inflated possibly hundreds of balloons which they trapped in the old trawler net they had found in the garage at the same time. Like many trawler nets, it was a fine meshed one and very light, even though it was large.

'They'd apparently tied the net to the bumper of my car to stop it taking off to start with,' their mother, Jo-Ann, told reporters. 'When little Tim crawled into a loose part of it, Glen then untied the rope to see what would happen, but it slipped out of reach before he could stop it. It went right up into the air.'

She also said: 'How on earth the pair of them managed to blow up quite so many balloons in the garage without me hearing them, I have no idea.'

Air traffic to and from Gatwick and Heathrow airports was seriously disrupted for very nearly two hours as no-one was really sure where the balloon was heading and how high it was going to go. Traffic came to a standstill across London as people stopped their cars, buses and lorries to stare up at the little boy and his balloon drifting over, high above the rooftops, pursued by a police helicopter, a helicopter with some journalists from the press in it, and a bright orange air-sea rescue service helicopter.

A trained police marksman in the helicopter, who must have been very nervous, carefully shot out some of the individual balloons one at a time to stop the thing rising any further into the sky, because they didn't know if it would stop, and eventually the odd-looking homemade craft descended slowly over Heathrow Airport and landed in the middle of a nearby lake which is on the edge of Surrey and is really a water reservoir. An experienced crew member from the chasing air-sea rescue helicopter was winched down towards the water, put a harness on the boy and lifted the boy to safety.

Waffly text 1

Example solution

An eight-year-old boy crossed London in a homemade helium balloon today, dangling beneath it in a broken fishing net.

His flight caused major problems for emergency services and air travellers until he was rescued by the crew of an air-sea rescue helicopter when the balloon landed in a reservoir near Heathrow Airport.

London Mayor, Doris Bonson, said it was a miracle the boy had survived the ordeal.

'Thank goodness the little fellow is okay!' she told the press after the rescue. 'His flight caused traffic chaos all across the city and at London airports, but the main thing is that he was miraculously still in one piece when he came down to earth!'

Tim Guntor and his eleven-year-old brother Glen had used several hundred party balloons to construct the aircraft. These were held together by an old fishing net and Tim made the journey tangled inside a section of the net hanging beneath the balloons.

Their father has a party supply business and the pair had helped him fill balloons on previous occasions. They found the key to his garage storeroom in Essex and inflated the balloons which they trapped in an old trawler net they found in the garage.

'They'd apparently tied the net to the bumper of my car,' their mother Jo-Ann told reporters. 'When little Tim crawled into a loose part of it, Glen untied the rope to see what would happen, but it slipped out of reach before he could stop it.'

Air traffic to and from Gatwick and Heathrow airports was seriously disrupted for nearly two hours and traffic came to a standstill across London as people stopped to stare at the boy and his balloon drifting high above the rooftops, pursued by helicopters from the police, the press and the air-sea rescue service.

A police marksman in a helicopter shot out several of the balloons one at a time to stop it rising, and the flimsy craft descended over Heathrow Airport to land in a reservoir from which crew from the air-sea rescue helicopter snatched the boy to safety.

Waffly text 2

A London primary school headmaster who had climbed up a big tree to rescue a neighbour's fluffy ginger cat was rescued from the tree by the fire brigade at morning break this morning in front of all his shocked pupils and all his staff.

John Books (49), who is Head of Olfox Primary School in the Catford area of South London, had climbed carefully from a rather long metal ladder into the branches of the tall tree to rescue a neighbour's cat when the ladder fell and became bent and damaged so that he was trapped 10 metres above the playground.

'It was very embarrassing,' said Mr Books later, as he tucked his stained white shirt back into the waistband of his trousers. 'I had chased the neighbour's cat from the infants' sandpit, but it ran up our big oak tree and was crying so pathetically the children were very worried about it. I just went up the ladder and onto the tree.' Some of the children thought that the cat had possibly been trying to do its business in the sandpit when the cover was off, but others said that wasn't really true.

With the help of the friendly school caretaker, 56-year-old George Plumpsted, Mr Books extended a long, metal, workman's ladder and climbed to the top of the ladder and up into the tree, but he accidentally kicked the ladder over when the cat scratched his back. The ladder fell with a loud clang on the playground and the bit in the middle got quite badly bent. At that exact moment, the animal ran down the trunk to safety, but staff couldn't get the ladder to re-extend and so the emergency services were called by Lucy Pritchards who works in the school office.

'It was a routine tree rescue,' a fire department spokesman said later. 'We swung out our turntable ladder and Mr Books simply stepped onto it. We did 36 tree rescues last year and 32 the year before. It's fun going up on the ladder.'

The fluffy cat belongs to neighbour Mrs Jayne Bizzie who is Chair of Governors at the school. It is called Muzzlekins but the children all call it Muzzy for short.

Waffly text 2

Example solution

A London headmaster was rescued from a tree by the fire brigade today in front of his shocked pupils and staff.

John Books, head of Olfox Primary School in Catford, had climbed from a ladder into the tree to rescue a neighbour's cat when the ladder fell and became damaged, leaving him trapped 10 metres above the playground.

'It was very embarrassing,' said Mr Books later. 'I had chased the neighbour's cat from the infants' sandpit but it ran up our big oak tree and was crying so pathetically the children were very worried about it.'

With the help of the caretaker, Mr Books extended a long workman's ladder and climbed into the tree, but he accidentally kicked the ladder over when the cat scratched his back. The animal ran down the trunk to safety, but staff couldn't get the ladder to re-extend and so the emergency services were called.

'It was a routine tree rescue,' a fire department spokesman said later. 'We swung out our turntable ladder and Mr Books simply stepped onto it.'

The cat belongs to neighbour Mrs Jayne Bizzie who is Chair of Governors at the school.

11 Challenging Changes

N.B. It is highly recommended that anyone preparing to run a journalism workshop should first attempt this challenge themselves (including those who are not planning to run this particular exercise for their students) because it may help develop journalistic writing and editing proficiency and give leaders confidence to assist students more effectively.

To take part in the exercise yourself, first read only the initial part of this chapter, up to the heading 'Helping with writing and editing'. Please don't be tempted to read any subsequent part yet, as you will learn more effectively if you bring your own skills level to the exercise. As you write, edit and improve each piece you will hopefully go through some of the same thinking processes and discovery stages as your students will, which will give you more understanding of how to assist them through the use of subtle leading questions.

When you feel you have written and edited the initial news story to the best of your ability you can compare your version with the editing suggestions for that sheet. Once you have adapted your article as necessary, make a copy of it on the computer to work from then read Sheet 2 and adapt your story accordingly. Again, when you think it is perfect, check your finished piece with the suggested version for that sheet and follow the same process for Sheet 3.

The Challenging Changes exercise

A challenging three-part activity for more able groups from ages 13 or 14 to adult (including teachers!).

Given adequate time with older and more able groups, this is an engrossing and challenging exercise which is best used after basic sequencing and looking at the papers, but before group scenarios.

The reasons for doing things that way round are first, because, while you have the group captive in the computer room during this activity, you can get them thinking so deeply and working so hard on their news story's form and manipulation of language and ideas that they are likely to function better as individual reporters and writers when let loose in the scenarios than would otherwise be the case.

The other reason is that putting group scenarios after this exercise means that the activities in this sequence then become more physically active and constitute a sort of treat. The students would otherwise have been writing up their group scenario stories on the computers just before starting this exercise at the same computers, so they would have two substantial, non-physical computer sessions back to back. Having two sets of computer-based writing together might also seem a bit of an anti-climax following the physical and social fun of acting roles and being reporters.

How the Challenging Changes exercise works

The basis of this exercise is that the story the students are going to work on is going to change radically through three versions. This is because more up-to-date information is twice provided immediately after they have completed the previous version (as often happens in real-life

journalism). *Participants should not be told in advance that these changes will occur* or of the fact that both the incoming information and the story leads they must write will grow increasingly confusing and complicated as the activity progresses.

This exercise is fun, tricky and deliberately pressured, as it obliges young journalists to:

- develop flexible and complex thinking as well as organisational and writing skills in order to work out and clearly present the changing significance and sequencing of dynamic information;
- improve their ability to write punchy and cogent story leads;
- become aware of the need for the use of accurate qualifiers in language;
- keep their heads while they dismantle and rewrite the tight lead sentences they have painstakingly worked out for earlier versions; and
- cope with overload of data and language manipulation.

The leads become progressively more complex in each version so that students struggle to fit all the significant facts into them without making the first one or two sentences impractically long. They will also have to bear in mind what the paper's readership might consider the most important and interesting facts because, to write the best final version of the story, they will need to spin the story quite differently from the two previous drafts.

The entire activity will probably require somewhere between 1 hour 40 minutes and 3 hours and should take place in a computer suite or with laptops spaced around a classroom or quiet area.

Students should be told that they are journalists working in the main office of a major *daily, regional newspaper*, or of a *large daily paper based in a regional city but also serving extensive outlying areas*. You may want to explain/remind them that this type of publication has a distribution area which is usually separate from national capital cities but might contain a smaller city, several towns and rural areas. In the UK, for instance, it might be something like the *Western Daily Press* or the *Western Morning News*, both daily papers which cover large regions of western England.

This type of newspaper often features a mix of selected international, national, regional and local news. Although it may cover important international and national news, its other main emphasis is on regional news or stories with links to the region. It might also have local editions which have pages and articles specific to parts of the region.

It is not really necessary, but workshop leaders in the US or other countries might choose to adapt the story slightly by changing the name of the motorway in the text to that of their nearest large freeway, and altering place names and the name of the local town hospital to those local to their school.

Breaking news

Your writers should be informed that the story they have to deal with is breaking news which has just arrived in their newspaper office. In this activity I usually increase the pressure straight away by telling them that their newspaper is quite near to being 'put to bed' (finished ready for printing) and so the editor expects them to work quickly because he wants this story included. Your young 'journos' should be given no hint that, as soon as they are more or less finished getting the first version of their story right, some updated and more accurate information is going to come in which will necessitate major rewriting, or that eventually they are going to have to write *three* versions of the story as their grumpy imaginary editor gets progressively more impatient in the background!

Activity briefing

With teams of around 2–3 students per computer (all teams spaced a little apart if possible) you can give them the following activity briefing:

- You are journalists working in a regional newspaper (see above for fuller explanation).
- It is a daily newspaper, produced overnight and distributed each morning.
- The style of the paper lies between that of a quality and a tabloid, but nearer to a quality newspaper.
- The information is coming in from local sources and the incident described is in the centre of your readership area.
- The newspaper is soon about to be 'put to bed' (see above) but your editor feels this story is very important for the area so you journalists need to work on it quickly but accurately because he insists it makes it into the paper. He is not a man to mess with!
- You have about 40 minutes maximum to achieve this (*don't tell them that you will probably end up extending this deadline or that there are more stages to go after that*).
- You are not allowed to collaborate with other teams because they are competitors from different newspapers.
- Any questions?

At this point you can distribute a copy of Sheet 1 (don't mark it or call it 'Sheet 1' or they will guess there are more to come) to each team. Tell them that, even though the deadline is tight, they should spend some time thinking and making notes before they start writing, then ask them why they should do that. You will expect them to talk initially about identifying the most important and interesting facts (MIAIF), then sequencing them, thinking about all best choices of lead, etc.

I believe strongly in not assisting much to begin with, but helping more as their story beginnings have developed sufficiently for you to have something on which to work. This way, students can feel they are learning through their own thinking, discussion, trial and error. Learning progressively like this is more powerful than just being told what to do and it gives the students ownership of, and pride in, their achievement.

Most groups, even the very able, will need quite a lot of help eventually, but the intention is to assist by posing leading questions so that the process of learning comes from the students as much as possible. This more organic way of gathering skills and knowledge leads to more permanent retention, builds confidence and helps set more effective individual learning patterns, making students more 'self-programming' and less reliant in future. It is challenging learners while giving support rather than spoon-feeding.

Writing the story

I would suggest that students begin by being allowed a good 10–15 minutes of their precious time to discuss what the most important and interesting facts (MIAIF) are, and to type all of these out at the top of the document as 'working notes'. They could also do this by highlighting and numbering bits of text on the current sheet, but this is possibly less flexible. After a while, if some are struggling to sequence the facts in their heads, it might even be worth suggesting that they vertically list the key parts or use the bullet point icon on the computer taskbar so they can swap them around to share and see the evolving sequence visually. Quite a few participants will be visual processors and this kind of spatial arrangement may help them.

If they are having difficulty deciding which parts might go together in sentences (and most will), they might first try clustering bits of the information into little groups of facts that seem to go together, or even place them within the same 'bullet point'. Some students find that it is hard to

hold so much information and so many possibilities in their heads at once and, although they will need to be able to achieve this eventually if they are to become strong writers, it is better if they find interim coping methods like this so they don't lose confidence. This is, of course, especially true for younger, less able or less experienced writers.

N.B. Teachers taking part in this challenge themselves should stop reading at this point until they have written the story based on Sheet 1.

Helping with writing and editing

Sheet 1: Getting the lead right

The information supplied in Sheet 1 is designed to be a little confusing as the facts are not listed by significance, some are a bit vague, some are mentioned more than once but not always in the same way, and there is quite a bit of irrelevant material. This means that your journalists have to sort the wheat from the chaff. After all, this is the slightly chaotic way that fragmented early information can arrive in a news media office.

Don't tell your young sub-editors this, but the first key MIAIF from the data on this sheet is deliberately confused by the fact that they can't yet be sure of the exact numbers of dead and injured in the incident. What makes it difficult for them is not really the fact that they can't be definite, it's that they need to work out how to get this dilemma down in writing in the most professional way.

At this stage, as in the basic sequencing exercise, the first part of the lead is largely to do with the number of dead and injured but, although students may try the following approaches, there will be problems. For instance, they can't actually know for certain things such as: 'Four people were killed . . .' or even, with this initial qualifier, 'Over four people were killed . . .' because the information isn't sufficiently accurate and they don't know whether or not the first lorry driver has died.

'Possibly five people have been killed . . .' doesn't inform readers that the paper is already sure that four of them have died. One amusing attempt at solving this, I remember, was when a team temporarily put 'nearly five people died . . .' and then enjoyed some merriment on realising that their phrase could mean that perhaps four and a half people had been killed!

'Four or more people have been killed . . .' is possible but ungainly. Ultimately, your journalists will need to realise that they must use one particular qualifier at the beginning of the lead sentence, therefore the beginning should read like this: 'At least four people were killed and several injured . . .' .This discovery of the need for the specific qualifier ('at least') should be made by each writing team by themselves but it is quite possible that it may ultimately be thanks to a nudge or two from your subtle leading questions. Making them struggle a little at first on this kind of detail helps students realise that every word choice can affect the accuracy of what they write – an essential lesson for developing journalists, writers and communicators in general.

This accident story involves a relatively complex sequence of events which are not described in the incoming notes in exact chronological order. If your writers are struggling to fix the sequence in their heads they will probably need to think out the true *chronological sequence* of events first in order to make sense of it all, before attempting to arrange the information into *writing sequence*. As your students will have worked through the Basic Sequencing Exercise by now, they should have learned not to put the word 'yesterday' at the start of this story's initial sentence!

Preventing lead sentences from growing too long

Overwhelmed by important facts vying for inclusion, some students' first two sentences might read something like this:

> At least four people were killed and several injured yesterday when a lorry, thought to be a milk tanker, jack-knifed on the northbound carriageway of the M717 motorway at Harpston, near Bendwater, during the evening rush hour. Another lorry crashed into a queue of cars behind the tanker causing the deaths of three people in cars and also that of the driver of the second lorry, then a third lorry, a coal lorry, crashed off a motorway bridge and almost completely destroyed a house below.

Although these young writers are beginning to get the story and the sequencing roughly right here, you can see that these sentences are, at this stage, too wordy for the lead. They are neither tight nor especially catchy, and are a little confusing, so there is still plenty of work to do on them. Also, the first sentence is not factually accurate because the deaths and injuries weren't caused by the jack-knifed tanker, but by the second lorry ploughing into the line of cars behind the tanker. Hopefully their writing means they have worked out that there were at least three lorries involved, the third one being the coal lorry.

To advance, your sub-editors need to cut out anything that is not lead material and to add back any facts removed from the lead further down the story. Let's see what we can cut:

- 'milk' because it's a detail and also a fact that isn't definite yet (the white liquid might even turn out to be some lethal chemical);
- 'northbound carriageway' (it's important but it could move down the story a bit);
- 'motorway' (using the motorway name 'M717' already identifies it as a motorway and is more specific);
- 'at Harpston' (over-specific for the lead);
- 'near Bendwater' (they probably need to know the area at or near the beginning because it's a regional newspaper, though it might not be required right at the top in a national newspaper's version);
- 'during the evening rush hour' is more detailed than 'yesterday' and adds colour to the drama of the chaos but is quite wordy. Perhaps this might only go in if the first sentence is very short, or more likely it would be best placed in a second lead sentence.

The devil is in the detail

It is not advisable to work on the second sentence until the students have edited the first, because what would go into the second would largely depend on what had appeared in the first. However, for the sake of illustration:

- 'Another lorry crashed into a queue of cars . . .' (seems to be getting too detailed for a lead);
- 'behind the tanker' (that's even more specific);
- 'causing the deaths of three people in cars and also that of the second lorry driver' (very wordy and repeats information supplied in the first sentence, so is possibly unnecessary).

Also, although it could possibly be important, the whole section about the third lorry might also be too detailed for this high up the story. In fact the lead has become too wordy primarily because the writers have forced too much detailed information into it and also repeated language (i.e. 'crashed' appears twice and 'lorry' five times!).

Problems with 'over-stuffed leads' occur, especially with young writers, because:

- they can't handle the data overload and find it hard to hold it all in their heads (the answer to that is strict sequencing and making notes of it before writing);

- on attempting to pack all the MIAIF into the lead the writers don't sense that there are sub-values in the sequencing list (usually aspects of the more significant facts) that can be moved further down the story;
- they don't see ways of compressing language or facts (this develops with practice as well as with an enlarging vocabulary);
- young people are impatient for instant gratification, so they want to use all the 'goodies' in the lead at once.

As well as simply cutting material, there are often ways of compressing concepts in language so, for instance, all that writing about an accident involving this lorry, that lorry, a line of cars, another lorry, and what happened to them all, could be summed up in the phrase 'multiple pile up'.

News-wise, there certainly is an argument for mentioning the lorry crashing through a bridge and destroying a house below: it is fairly dramatic and, of course, motorway crash barriers are supposed to prevent that kind of incident. Still, the main news remains the *who* (the dead and injured), the *what* (the pile up), the *where* (on the M717 or on the M717 near Bendwater), the *when* (yesterday) and the *why* or *how* (escaped sheep, mist and jack-knifed tanker, etc.). We don't want the first sentence to grow again, so perhaps the part about the third lorry should not appear in the first sentence, and possibly not even in the second.

Let's try putting all those editing ideas into effect and write the lead again, attempting to make it as tight and catchy as possible without losing accuracy. We might eventually tighten the first sentence to:

> At least four people were killed and several injured in a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater yesterday.'

That's certainly very tight and mentions the key facts. It could be varied minutely, as in:

> At least four people were killed and several injured in a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater during yesterday evening's rush hour.

but I slightly prefer the first of those because the other sub-values can be moved into the next sentence or two. An improved lead might now look something like this:

> At least four people were killed and several injured in a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater yesterday.
>
> Three car drivers and a lorry driver were killed when the latter's vehicle collided with a queue of vehicles that had built up behind a jack-knifed tanker during the evening rush hour.
>
> It is not known if the driver of a coal lorry survived when his vehicle skidded on approaching the incident, crashed through a bridge and partially destroyed a house below.

This lead now has three tight sentences, contains the most important facts and, by mentioning the coal lorry and its driver, makes some sense of possible confusions about which lorry is which and why there may be more than four deaths. It also doesn't repeat the word 'crashed' and only mentions 'lorry' twice instead of five times!

Helping at the computer through asking leading questions is a form of 'progressive editing' which can be incredibly valuable for your students but, as leader, you do need to be on the ball and be able to give well-judged and fairly fast responses. To achieve this confidence and fluency you may feel that you need to hone your own journalistic skills by writing each article yourself before the workshop and then editing each stage until it is as tight and accurate as that of a good journalist.

Even if you feel you are confident in this genre, it would be sensible to read through each sheet in depth before teaching it, in order to try to get an exact grip on all of the facts. As an active workshop leader, the worst thing would be to guide teams in directions which are wrong because you haven't picked up all the nuances of the information, story or journalistic challenges!

Sheet 1: a possible solution

Unlike the Basic Sequencing Exercise, there isn't one perfect way of writing this article, but that doesn't mean that the lead facts (MIAIF) can be arranged in ways that differ much from the following version. Your young sub-editors will also have to work out which of the facts on the incoming notes can be left out and how to choose information in its most precise form when it appears more than once in different ways. Here is a possible version of the completed article:

Several dead in M717 pile-up

At least four people were killed and several injured when sheep caused a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater yesterday.

Three car drivers and a lorry driver were killed when the latter's vehicle collided with a queue of cars that had built up behind a jack-knifed tanker.

It is not known if the driver of a coal lorry survived after his vehicle skidded on approaching the scene of the incident, crashed through a motorway bridge and partially destroyed a cottage below. The house was thought to be unoccupied at the time.

According to a witness, the accident occurred in thick mist when a flock of sheep escaped onto the northbound carriageway at Harpston during the evening rush hour.

Twenty-mile tailbacks on that carriageway caused further minor accidents and a police spokesman urged drivers to find alternative routes. He told our correspondent that people were 'driving too fast considering the dreadful conditions', and that visibility was 'almost non-existent'.

The carriageway was awash with a white liquid, thought to be milk spilled from the jack-knifed tanker.

Local farmer Ben Turklees said: 'The sheep seem to have found their way back into the field.' He told reporters he had blocked the hole in the hedge with an old piece of corrugated iron to stop them getting out again.

The names of casualties have not yet been released.

Reasons for writing the story this way

The first three sentences have remained nearly the same as my earlier version although the word 'house' has been changed to the more precise 'cottage' so that 'house' needn't be repeated now that the short sentence about it being thought to be unoccupied has been added to the third paragraph. The more precise word can come before the generic word here, but not so easily the other way around.

Another obvious change is that the sheep have been introduced into the first sentence because they were, after all, the original cause of the incident. They also add 'colour' to the story and there must surely be a question about whether or not the farmer may face charges for his carelessness in not ensuring that his fencing was adequate. That is why his apparently minor remarks have been reported later. A 'sub' might not choose to mention the old bit of corrugated iron and just write that he said he had blocked the hole – or he might leave that bit out altogether. I feel that, after all the awful carnage and chaos, the fact the farmer said he had only blocked the hole in the hedge with an old piece of corrugated iron seems to suggest a possibly careless and cavalier attitude of which readers should be made aware.

On the other hand, the motorway builders or maintenance organisation probably have a responsibility to fence the roadsides, so there may be proceedings to come on that front as well as, or instead of, against the farmer. These might seem like small points but, to a journalist, mentioning them could mean that they have done their job of informing their readers of issues that are in the public interest and inclusion of such points may also foreshadow possible future developments in the story.

I decided to include the sentence about the house being thought to be unoccupied because readers will inevitably question what had happened to any of its possible occupants during such a dramatic incident.

A different angle

I have also included information about the thick mist reasonably early in the story because it was a key contributing factor, although the sheep running onto the road actually caused the incident. Another editor might introduce a different angle into the lead by linking the police statement and the mist, such as:

> At least four people were killed and several injured when escaped sheep caused a multiple pile-up in thick mist on the M717 yesterday.
>
> Police claimed drivers were driving too fast for the conditions at the time.

I've dropped the 'near Bendwater' part in this version because the sentence was becoming uncomfortably long. Of course, I would now need to mention the place within the next sentence or so. (You will also notice that, in my full version, I mentioned the location as 'near Bendwater' at the top of the story, but only added the location sub-value of 'at Harpston' further into the story. As this is a regional paper, the extra precise location matters more than for a national paper.)

A similar thing often occurs with people's names in a news story. The first time the mention of an involved person or witness appears it might not even include his or her name. So, for instance, one of the lead sentences might refer to the person or people like this: 'residents of the area claimed . . .', 'top bosses warn that . . .', 'a local hotelier said', '. . . according to a local fisherman', 'members of the soldier's unit said . . .', or something similar. When the story comes back to that person or those people later, it will normally introduce his, her or their names, especially if that person's words are quoted in the article. So, for their second appearance in the story a character may be described as: 'Local builder, George Hardbrick, said . . .' or 'The hotel's owner, Brenda Bedroom, told reporters . . .', etc. After that, the person will be referred to as 'Mr. Hardbrick' or 'Mrs Bedroom' . . . and not as 'George' or 'Brenda' as your younger students may well write.

Quotes, partial quotes and reported speech

In my full version, you will notice that I have used a combination of reported speech and partial quotes, rather than full quotes for both the police spokesman and the farmer. Using a full quote

is fine as long as it is all relevant or appropriately colourful, but I feel the sentences flow better here with a mix and it can help break up the irritating 'listing' effect that can be caused by putting several quotes below each other. Although full quotes can add colour to a passage, sometimes the use of them can seem a bit 'clunky'. The ability to turn all, or parts of, quotes into reported speech, or to extract passages from quotes without corrupting their language, meaning or intention is an indicator of mature control of language in young writers and is worth looking out for.

This is certainly also something to suggest to individual writing teams or to discuss later with the whole group around an interactive board. It is especially helpful if you can give relevant examples that have arisen during the exercise and perhaps ask the group to change quotes by breaking them in different places, using different amounts of each quote and (most challenging of all) extracting parts from more than one quote then building them into the same sentence by using the pliable mortar of summary and reported speech.

Every fact has to be weighed

There are many more facts in my version of the article than I have discussed here, and they are all placed in what I feel is the best sequence. There are also lots of minor or repeated facts which have been left out. The use or placement of some facts may be subjective, such as the mention of the old bit of corrugated iron discussed earlier. For example, it may be argued by some that the mention of the 'white liquid' is unnecessary but, as a journalist, I would prefer to include it because the sentence about the white liquid is strongly visual and so adds colour to the story. There is also a possibility that the substance might have been a critical part of the accident and it might even turn out to be a dangerous chemical which could make the ongoing story more dramatic. However, if the article had to be cut down for some reason, that sentence would certainly be one of the most expendable.

It is always worth reminding students that most newspapers' paragraphs contain only one to two sentences and, in the story example I have given, the majority of paragraphs have only one sentence in them partly because this is a dramatic news story and also because the style of the paper is somewhere between quality and tabloid. Even quality newspapers rarely have more than two sentences to a paragraph in their news articles.

When to introduce the second and third sheets

It is difficult to give precise timings about when to tell a group to finish writing each story variation and introduce the next sheet, but here are a few suggestions.

Most groups should have finished, or have more or less finished writing, editing and perfecting the whole story-so-far before they are given the next sheet. This means that you may need to have been asking the weakest groups quite a lot of leading questions before this point and even leading any or all of the groups 'from the front' by suggesting some direct sentence constructions, especially if particular groups have been struggling or getting a bit behind.

What matters most at all stages is that students are eventually getting the first two to three lead sentences exactly right. However, in this exercise it is also important for them to have worked all relevant facts and quotes into their stories and to have done so in the best possible sequence because, when new information comes in, we also want them to learn through the effort and manipulation required to change all the parts that necessitate change and alter the placement of information as other significant facts take precedence. Some information that was included in first versions may even be discarded by the end of the third version.

Increasing the pressure

In this activity, especially with more able groups, I periodically like to remind them of the time and build up the deadline pressure in a cheery way. Although this may result in good-natured groans and moans, I have always found that students secretly like the feeling of being 'real' journalists under pressure. It keeps their adrenalin flowing and their minds focused. I usually increase the pressure as the clock approaches the agreed deadline, but be prepared to allow more time if groups haven't reached the point of being finished or nearly finished and correct in their sequencing, first lead sentences, and general story.

It's exciting for the young reporters to be told that their editor has heard they need more time and is granting another 'x' (10? 15? 20?) minutes but he is not very happy about it. By the time the third version is arriving, I tell them that the editor has ordered the printers to be on stand by for it and is holding the newspaper distribution trucks at their loading bays, something he never normally does!

Usually students have already overrun their deadline and had some 'editorial pressure' by the time they are due for the second sheet. At that point I silence the whole room and point out that, although they are running behind, they have done well, but more information has just come into the office which may update their stories, and the editor insists it goes in otherwise their stories will be inaccurate or possibly significantly wrong. At that point the groups are given the second sheet and a deadline of, say, another 20 minutes to complete the new version, along with a reminder of the urgency and need for accuracy!

Introducing Sheet 2

The first thing you need to ask your students to do is to save their article, copy it, label that copy as 'Accident 2' and include their names (or newspaper name) so that they don't overwrite another team's work. It's wise to wait until they've done that before handing each team a copy of Sheet 2.

Your students should know what they are doing by now and this is a relatively short and easy sheet to deal with so you might find they don't need such intense help as before. Nevertheless, it is still important that they work out how and where to include all relevant facts so that their story is again ready to copy and adapt when Sheet 3 comes along. Remember that they still shouldn't know that yet another sheet will soon be on the way!

Perhaps the most obvious and usable change in the story information is the fact that the driver of the coal lorry has died, but that is not the most potentially dramatic. One of the writers' frustrations will be that the most potentially dramatic facts (about the family having arrived to stay in the cottage) is vague and they can't use casualty figures that might include those people.

The main challenges for your sub-editors is working out where to include most of the new information and remembering to alter existing sentences and facts to the extent that has become necessary. They will need to read and re-read their altered articles to make sure they have picked up all of the changes.

Sheet 2: a possible solution

Several dead in M717 pile-up

At least five people were killed and several injured yesterday when sheep caused a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater.

Three car drivers and a lorry driver were killed when the latter's vehicle collided with a queue of cars that had built up behind a jack-knifed tanker.

The driver of a coal lorry also died after his vehicle skidded on approaching the scene of the incident, crashed through a motorway bridge and partially destroyed a holiday cottage below.

It was thought that a family had arrived to stay in the house and a Mercedes car was parked outside but there was no news of their whereabouts as this paper went to press.

According to a witness, the accident occurred in thick mist when a flock of sheep escaped onto the northbound carriageway at Harpston during the evening rush hour. At least ten ambulances attended the scene along with fire crews with heavy lifting and cutting equipment and the northbound carriageway was awash with a white liquid, thought to be milk spilled from the jack-knifed tanker.

Twenty-mile tailbacks on that carriageway caused further minor accidents and the motorway was closed in both directions following several minor accidents on the southbound side. A police spokesman urged drivers to find alternative routes. He told our correspondent that people were 'still driving too fast considering the dreadful conditions,' and that visibility was 'almost non-existent'.

Local farmer Ben Turklees said: 'The sheep seem to have found their way back into the field.' He told reporters he had blocked the hole in the hedge with an old piece of corrugated iron to stop them getting out again.

Police say they will be interviewing the farmer in connection with the incident.

The destroyed holiday cottage is owned by the Duke of Skeape who was unavailable for comment yesterday.

No names of casualties have been released at this time.

Most of the facts on the second sheet have gone into this new version of the story, with the main exception of the fact that the coal lorry driver's death occurred on the way to hospital. That and the information that the holiday cottage is owned by the Duke of Skeape are facts which may or may not go into the article, and the latter might even depend on how well known the Duke is to the general public.

Once they have done all that your teams may be feeling ever so slightly smug, especially if they have managed those changes fairly well. It's therefore time to compliment them on how well they have worked under pressure . . . immediately before giving them the shocking news that yet more information has just been received by the paper and the editor-in-chief feels it is so

important that he has put the presses back on standby and is refusing to allow most of the newspaper's distribution trucks to leave until the new version is in the final edition! You can tell them that they probably have no more than 30 minutes because otherwise the remaining trucks will miss their onward distribution connections and the editor will go 'ballistic'!

Don't forget to remind students to save their work, rename a copy as 'Accident 3', again including their names or team 'newspaper name' to avoid confusion.

Sheet 3: a possible solution

You may notice a certain amount of counting on fingers shortly after your students scan Sheet 3 and struggle to figure out the actual numbers of reported deaths so far! At this point, some teams can become so obsessed with casualty numbers they ignore the problem that other new facts have reached them which are equally as interesting and important. The main challenge is that this story has moved from a fairly simple single lead story to a more complex multiple lead story so there are even more facts vying for the top position in the first sentence, and one of them is that ubiquitous thing known as 'celebrity'.

It is always interesting to see how different writing teams tackle this problem. Some concentrate on the number of deaths, some on the celebrity side, but both of these aspects need to be at the top of the lead. A news reporter could not ignore the fact that, because they have had three number one hits in the previous year and are currently again at the number one spot, AQP is obviously a massively popular band and its members must be strongly placed in the current public consciousness. On the other hand, mentioning them in the first sentence while ignoring the relatively high number of other deaths and injuries would be appalling taste, so both need to be squeezed into it.

Paragraphs 3 and 4 illustrate the accident's *how*, *what*, *why* and general *who* of the incident, while the next two go back to looking at the band in more detail and include a quote to help describe their cheerful attitude shortly before the catastrophe. The placing of these facts and the estate manager's quote so far up the story might feel controversial, but public interest generally rules the day here as it is not just the most important facts that are near the top of the sequencing ladder, but also those that are most interesting from a reader's point of view.

The paragraphs following these return to explaining the cause of the incident further (escaped sheep and thick mist) and also to setting the scene more dramatically with the mention of the numbers of ambulances and the presence of cutting equipment, white liquid, tailbacks, etc.

Then there is mention of the rather pathetic-sounding actions of, and quote from, the farmer, and the important police statement regarding him, before my version returns to giving less important background on the band and the remarks (in reported speech) of the fan club secretary. Here you might debate with your students whether or not her quote about the world being a poorer place without the band is maybe just a little bit too trite and sugary within the tragic context of the greater accident, taking into account the feelings of all the other relatives of dead and injured.

The article's final couple of sentences represent the 'foundation of the pyramid' and give a sense of 'rounding off' at the end of the story.

You may well feel that some sections of this news story should have been placed in slightly different positions or connected in sentences or paragraphs to other facts. Looking at and debating this briefly with the greater group can be quite a useful activity for everyone involved. I am not going to go into further detail on how to form every part of the story following receipt of Sheet 3 because you can generally see my ways of thinking through looking at my version.

‘Actually Quite Pink’ members among dead in M717 pile-up

At least ten people, including several members of the chart-topping band Actually Quite Pink, were killed in a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater yesterday.

Boy Bob, the group’s singer, was in hospital last night in a serious but stable condition.

Four car drivers and a lorry driver died when the latter’s vehicle collided with a queue of cars that had built up behind a tanker which jack-knifed after sheep ran onto the northbound carriageway in thick mist during the evening rush hour.

The driver of a coal lorry also died after his vehicle skidded on approaching the scene of the incident, crashed through a motorway bridge and partially destroyed a holiday cottage below.

Members of Actually Quite Pink were staying in the house so that they could rehearse new material.

‘They wanted some peace to practice their new songs,’ said Hillary Smythe-Wilkinswythe, manager of Skeape Estates who look after the cottage. ‘The six lads seemed very friendly and were larking around a bit when I met them at the property to give them the key.’

According to a witness, the accident occurred when a flock of sheep escaped onto the northbound carriageway at Harpston. Several people were injured in the incident and at least ten ambulances attended the scene along with fire crews with heavy lifting and cutting equipment. The carriageway was awash with a white liquid, thought to be milk spilled from the jack-knifed tanker.

Twenty-mile tailbacks on that carriageway caused further minor accidents and the motorway was closed in both directions following several minor accidents on the southbound side. A police spokesman urged drivers to find alternative routes. He told our correspondent that people were ‘driving too fast considering the dreadful conditions,’ and that visibility was almost non-existent.

Local farmer Ben Turklees said: ‘The sheep seem to have found their way back into the field.’ He told reporters he had blocked the hole in the hedge with an old piece of corrugated iron to stop them getting out again.

Police say they will be interviewing the farmer in connection with the incident.

Actually Quite Pink hold the current number one spot with their single ‘Girls are great but I’m greater!’ and the band had three number one hits last year.

Sue Rose, secretary of the group’s official fan club, told reporters that their millions of fans would be in deep shock.

The destroyed holiday cottage is owned by the Duke of Skeape who was unavailable for comment yesterday. Rescue workers were still clearing the debris last night.

No names of other casualties have been released at this time.

Deciding when to help students

Different levels of help will be required for individual teams at different stages of the process. Also, although it is generally beneficial to assist through the use of leading questions, there comes a point during the writing of each story version at which it is most effective to help more positively. With this in mind, as each version progresses, I eventually find it best to lead by sitting at each team's keyboard then talking out various writing and editing ideas with that team while typing on their behalf. In working this way it is also helpful if leaders/assistants are reasonably fluent typists.

I might work like this to move things along more quickly and to prevent students from feeling too confused by information and overloaded by the volume of changes they are working through and the sheer number of possibilities. Only the teacher and assistants on the spot can judge at what point helping this way becomes more beneficial than guiding from behind by questioning.

SHEET 1. ONCE PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE BEFORE USING

Sheep escaped onto the northbound carriageway.

Traffic chaos on the M717 at evening rush hour.

A lorry of some sort had jack-knifed, blocking the carriageway. An eyewitness said that this was because the flock of sheep had suddenly run onto the road in front of it. It was thick mist at the time.

'The sheep seemed to have found their way back into their field,' said local farmer Ben Turklees. 'I stuffed a bit of old corrugated iron in the hole in the hedge to stop them getting out again.'

One of the lorries hit a line of cars blocked by the first lorry, a tanker (perhaps thought to be carrying milk).

Three people were killed in cars and several injured when the lorry smashed into a line of cars blocked by the jack-knifed tanker.

One sheep was seen to be limping after the incident.

The second truck driver also died in the collision. The road was awash with a white liquid.

Shortly afterwards, a coal lorry crashed through a motorway bridge and fell onto a house below, which was almost completely destroyed. Apparently it had skidded as it approached the queue of stationary traffic.

The house is thought to have been unoccupied at the time. The fate of the coal lorry driver is unknown at present. Traffic backed up for an incredibly long way back, causing more minor accidents.

The house was a renovated farm cottage that is sometimes let to tourists as a quaint holiday cottage. It has an attractive duck pond in front of it. Apparently it is called Orchard Cottage because it used to have an old orchard behind it, but that was a long time ago. The main farmhouse at Harpston, near Bendwater, is only about twenty metres away, but was unscathed. The farm and its cottages are owned by the Duke of Skeape.

A police spokesman said:

'The visibility is almost non-existent.'

'Traffic is backed up for miles and miles.'

'There are twenty-mile tailbacks on the northbound carriageway.'

'We are asking drivers to find alternative routes.'

'People are still driving too fast considering the dreadful conditions.'

'I'm off for my dinner now.'

SHEET 2. ONCE PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE BEFORE USING

Police said they will be interviewing the farmer who owned the sheep.

It is now thought that a family had arrived at the cottage, perhaps for a weekend break, as a Mercedes car was parked in the courtyard outside.

Fire crews were called to the scene with heavy lifting and cutting equipment.

The driver of the coal lorry died on the way to hospital.

At least ten ambulances attended.

Several minor accidents have occurred on the southbound carriageway as well. Police say this has been caused by drivers being distracted by the incident on the northbound lanes. Due to this and the thick mist, they have now closed the motorway in both directions.

The Duke of Skeape was not available for comment. He is thought to be on holiday in the Caribbean with friends.

SHEET 3. ONCE PHOTOCOPIED, PLEASE CUT OFF THIS LINE BEFORE USING

Police and rescue workers have been clearing rubble from the cottage and five bodies have been carried out, only one of them alive.

Rescue workers are still clearing debris.

According to Hillary Smythe-Wilkinswythe, manager of Skeape Estates, the boy band Actually Quite Pink had been booked to stay there this week.

'They told me that they wanted some peace to practice their new songs,' she said. 'The six lads seemed very friendly and were larking around a bit when I met them at the property to give them the key. One of them said I looked pretty good for a country girl!'

Actually Quite Pink had three number one hits last year and are currently at the national number one spot with their song 'Girls are great but I'm greater!'

A spokesman for Bendwater Infirmary told reporters: 'Boy Bob, the injured singer, was brought in by ambulance at 6.03 pm this evening. His condition is serious but stable.'

Sue Rose, secretary of the official Actually Quite Pink fan club said: 'I am appalled by this awful news. Their millions of fans will be in deep shock. The world will be a poorer place without Actually Quite Pink.'

A spokesman for the local ambulance service has just said that another of the car drivers injured in the incident died on the way to hospital.

A possible solution to Sheet 1 of Challenging Changes.

Several dead in M717 pile-up

At least four people were killed and several injured when sheep caused a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater yesterday.

Three car drivers and a lorry driver were killed when the latter's vehicle collided with a queue of cars that had built up behind a jack-knifed tanker.

It is not known if the driver of a coal lorry survived after his vehicle skidded on approaching the scene of the incident, crashed through a motorway bridge and partially destroyed a cottage below. The house was thought to be unoccupied at the time.

According to a witness, the accident occurred in thick mist when a flock of sheep escaped onto the northbound carriageway at Harpston during the evening rush hour.

Twenty-mile tailbacks on that carriageway caused further minor accidents and a police spokesman urged drivers to find alternative routes. He told our correspondent that people were 'driving too fast considering the dreadful conditions,' and that visibility was 'almost non-existent.'

The carriageway was awash with a white liquid, thought to be milk spilled from the jack-knifed tanker.

Local farmer Ben Turklees said: 'The sheep seem to have found their way back into the field.' He told reporters he had blocked the hole in the hedge with an old piece of corrugated iron to stop them getting out again.

The names of casualties have not yet been released.

A possible solution to Sheet 2 of Challenging Changes

Several dead in M717 pile-up

At least five people were killed and several injured yesterday when sheep caused a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater.

Three car drivers and a lorry driver were killed when the latter's vehicle collided with a queue of cars that had built up behind a jack-knifed tanker.

The driver of a coal lorry also died after his vehicle skidded on approaching the scene of the incident, crashed through a motorway bridge and partially destroyed a holiday cottage below.

It was thought that a family had arrived to stay in the house and a Mercedes car was parked outside but there was no news of their whereabouts as this paper went to press.

According to a witness, the accident occurred in thick mist when a flock of sheep escaped onto the northbound carriageway at Harpston during the evening rush hour. At least ten ambulances attended the scene along with fire crews with heavy lifting and cutting equipment and the northbound carriageway was awash with a white liquid, thought to be milk spilled from the jack-knifed tanker.

Twenty-mile tailbacks on that carriageway caused further minor accidents and the motorway was closed in both directions following several minor accidents on the southbound side. A police spokesman urged drivers to find alternative routes. He told our correspondent that people were 'still driving too fast considering the dreadful conditions,' and that visibility was 'almost non-existent.'

Local farmer Ben Turklees said: 'The sheep seem to have found their way back into the field.' He told reporters he had blocked the hole in the hedge with an old piece of corrugated iron to stop them getting out again.

Police say they will be interviewing the farmer in connection with the incident.

The destroyed holiday cottage is owned by the Duke of Skeape who was unavailable for comment yesterday.

No names of casualties have been released at this time.

A possible solution to Sheet 3 of Challenging Changes

‘Actually Quite Pink’ members among dead in M717 pile-up

At least ten people, including several members of the chart-topping band Actually Quite Pink, were killed in a multiple pile-up on the M717 near Bendwater yesterday.

Boy Bob, the group’s singer, was in hospital last night in a serious but stable condition.

Four car drivers and a lorry driver died when the latter’s vehicle collided with a queue of cars that had built up behind a tanker that jack-knifed after sheep ran onto the northbound carriageway in thick mist during the evening rush hour.

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12 Making it real

Creating exciting ‘live’ journalism exercises

Inventing and running exciting and unpredictable ‘live’ news story scenarios can be enormous fun for both you and your assistants, and for your newly trained reporters. It should be a genuinely creative and challenging exercise for you, which is always a refreshing thing in an educational setting in which many feel that too often their own creative and innovative skills need to be suppressed due to curricular and operational demands.

If well conceived and executed, these scenarios can be challenging for the students and an exciting way for them to develop and reinforce the skills they have been learning. This is important. Children will mostly fall back on safe, long-established and weaker thinking skills if given half a chance so, not only do the scenarios have to be gripping and challenging for their age, but those running them need to make sure that the young journalists are not retreating into over-simple work patterns.

Your original, self-created scenarios can test them on all aspects of their learning, from interview technique, communication and deductive skills, to framing reports and writing more accurately, objectively and cogently. Excitement can be a powerful educational driver for children, as it is for adults. It brings out their enthusiasm and can increase focus. However, it is also a double-edged sword because younger students may be more easily thrown off direction or might become so addicted to the fun of chasing new stories that they don’t bother to note down enough of the crucial and background information or use lateral thinking skills. Their news stories may be dashed off carelessly or end up being inexcusably short despite the wealth of information and quotes that has been made available to them!

Questions for news scenario leaders

You will soon need to be constantly asking yourself and your students questions such as these:

- Are they continually thinking well about how to find new or collaborating sources of information?
- Are they asking the right/best questions of their sources?
- Are they actually listening to the answers and framing relevant new questions?
- Are they teasing strong quotes out of their interviewees, noting them down and using them to illustrate the factual stuff?
- Are they researching background information well (e.g. the internet, school library, old local papers, asking around the locality, even emailing or phoning ‘experts’)?
- Are they functioning effectively as a team?
- Are they finding out and remembering to note down all the relevant information, and using it in their writing?
- Have they found the best lead in their news story writing?
- Are they sequencing the start and the rest of the facts well?
- Have they managed to drop their own opinion, waffle, padding, and use only the descriptive words and opinions that came from their sources in order to add colour to their stories?

- Are they mostly using ‘said’ or are they putting in descriptive alternatives to it which are more appropriate to fiction writing, and which may inadvertently express a form of opinion (such as ‘he growled’)?
- Are they employing appropriate language and qualifiers?
- Have they remembered to summarise key facts including those related to interviewees (e.g. ‘local inventor’) the first time they are used in the lead sentences, and then also remembered to expand on these (e.g. ‘The inventor, Martin Minztopp, of Truly New, Flicklechurch . . .’) as the story progresses?
- Are they generally using second names but quoting the whole name the first time it appears?
- Are their sentences tight and are they remembering to paragraph every one or two sentences?
- Have they discovered and used a ‘rounding off’ sentence or two, if there are any to be found within their information?

Creating news scenarios – what works best?

Obviously, the complexity of your DIY fictional news scenarios will depend on the age of the students in the group, their ability and their world knowledge. For instance, it would be rather too much to expect some ten-year-old primary school children to understand and be enthused by the subtleties of a complicated, current political intrigue, but an accessible version of that story might go down well with some more able Year 9 or 10 students (14–15-year-olds), especially those who are becoming more ‘news aware’ in their own lives.

If the group is reasonably able, it is particularly valuable to have more than one layer of ‘discovery’ for them, no matter what the age. This makes the students think harder, gives them a greater sense of achievement and often makes the writing more challenging. This ‘discovery’ can be in the form of surprising twists and turns in the story they unfold, or it can be in uncovering motives for things that have happened, or it may be that they discover that what had actually happened in some incident was different from what they had initially expected. Scenarios can all be set up with those attributes so as to get the children to think in a certain way, and we’ll look at that more shortly.

On the simplest level, ‘discovery’ in some scenarios for younger groups might just be finding an explanation for something that has occurred, or be simply discovering good witnesses who give satisfyingly rich quotes. It’s all part of the joy of the hunt.

Starting a story idea

Let’s look at some possible story scenarios for different ages and think about how you might develop greater levels of challenge in them.

Starting with a simple idea for a primary age group, you might paint some large, dog-like paw prints across the corner of the playground with a stencil and wallpaper paste mixed with a touch of poster paint, or flour with a touch of water, ink and a little polyvinyl acetate (PVA) glue in it. The colour might depend on where the paw prints seem to have come from, such as brownish from a muddy area, wet-looking from the pond or a nearby stream, greyish from some newly-laid concrete, etc. You might also leave an old bone lying around in the grass (giant ones are available from pet shops). This could be part of the story or a deliberate red herring to see if they will simply ignore other evidence that turns up in order to make an obvious story fit.

The obvious story, of course, seems rather boring so far: apparently, a dog somehow found its way into the school grounds and dropped its bone. This could be backed up by ‘witness’ quotes from the caretaker, other staff members, a parent ‘stooge’, etc.

However, the story would immediately be made more interesting if witnesses report that the dog had something unusual about it; for instance, that it was at least the size of a Shetland pony; that it was, say, dark blue (perhaps the same colour as its 'paw prints'); that it was limping badly; it had a whistle or a large, chunky sort of necklace around its neck; or it was carrying something odd in its mouth (a puppy, the headteacher's car keys, a wallet, a walkie-talkie, a silvery flashing object, a human hand). Now ask yourself if you are starting to get curious about where some of those possibilities might lead. It's easy – think of an idea, throw in slightly unusual objects/behaviour/situations/noises, etc., and this will trigger many more exciting ideas and connections that you can then build into original news stories!

Evolving your story

You can embellish each of those ideas with your own 'solutions' such as that the enormous dog had been treated badly and escaped from a genetic laboratory/circus/pet shop/breeding centre with its puppy in its mouth. You may now need some other witnesses, background or planted evidence to support one of these solutions, and you will want the children to be able to find their way towards that witness, background information or evidence. The initial prompt could, for instance, come from a parent or classroom assistant who just happens to be in earshot and has apparently 'overheard' the young reporters talking about the peculiar creature.

Rather than have this person simply tell them where the dog comes from, what has happened to it, why it is carrying its puppy, why it was in the school grounds, etc., it would be better and much more challenging if they told the children that they had heard of some other sighting(s) of this unusual animal. These sightings could have been by a parent 'stooge' who has been briefed about what to say, or by someone who might have allegedly been outside a certain building where the dog had jumped out of an open window, or they may have been by a friend or neighbour, Mrs Wendy Blankitt of 39 Grunge Copse.

Now the kids need to sit down and think about what they have to do next. I usually ask them to think of at least three people or organisations they might like to get in touch with to find out more information and to write a list of questions that they would want to ask each of them. It's up to you how you proceed from here, because you will know who you have available to help you, having already asked friends, relatives, staff members, obliging parents or school governors if they would mind spending a few minutes being interviewed by your cub reporters in person or on the phone. We all know some people who have a sense of fun, coupled with the ability to put on different voices, accents and 'moods', and they are the best people to ask if possible.

Perhaps after some leading questions from you or your assistant, a group of your reporters work out how to find the phone number of Mrs Blankitt (by using the internet/phone directory/directory enquiries/asking in the school office/asking the person who mentioned Mrs B, etc.). Once they have had their questions checked and refined by you or your helper (again, leading questions are best here rather than adult 'telling'), they can phone the lady in question on your mobile or the school phone. A speakerphone is very helpful because one student should normally ask the questions while the rest try and write down the answers on A4 clipboards and think of other questions to ask which are dependent upon the responses they elicit. They can swap roles if they like.

Introducing your reporters

By this time, you will have chosen a name for your newspaper, so I encourage the children to begin by asking if that is, so-and-so, and then say something like 'Good morning Mrs Blankitt, I am Jodi, a reporter from the *Teedly Vale Times* and I'd like to ask you a few questions about . . .'

Or they might say 'Hello, this is Toby from the *Barnston Bugle*. We have heard that . . . Would you know any more about that?' I'm sure you get the idea!

Now, 'Mrs Blankitt' might exist in real life or might not, it doesn't matter except that, if she does, or that address exists, you have to have agreement with her or the person there or you might get sued if untrue things appear in your little newspaper! We will look more at this point later.

More likely is that 'Mrs B' is a friend of yours playing a role and that the address doesn't exist (so you or someone 'in the know' apparently found the phone number for them, or she might be a colleague answering her mobile phone in the secrecy of the staffroom and playing the pre-arranged role of Mrs Blankitt, hopefully disguising her voice as she does so. What matters is that she knows exactly what the agreed story is and how to respond. She can make up further descriptive details if she is creative and fast thinking, but these obviously need to correspond with what has already been described by other witnesses, so you will need to have given her a little briefing (or crib sheet) detailing exactly what her character will 'know' of the story to tell them.

Mrs Blankitt might describe the unusual dog and some odd behaviour previously agreed with you or your helpers, such as the fact that it appeared to get out of a car . . . out of the driver's seat, that is (a link to the headmaster's keys idea), or that it had jumped out of the first story window of the factory behind her house which manufactures fabric dyes (hence its blue colour) or that there was a commotion in the middle of the night and she had stared out onto the park behind her house to see what seemed to be a bizarre vehicle descending between the treetops onto the dark grass. By the dim light of a streetlamp, she saw what looked like a very large dog trot from it down a ramp with something odd and wriggly on its back, then bound off into the undergrowth as the vehicle rose skywards again. When pressed, she might say that she hadn't told anyone yet because she thought they would think she was either making it up or going a bit mad.

Taking the story further

You can then have other people back up parts of this description of the strange creature and the thing on its back. The caretaker could pop back in and mention that apparently a neighbour of the school had seen the 'dog' the night before. They had looked out of the bedroom window to see the creature standing on their garden path, then something thin and wriggly with what looked like thin arms or tentacles appeared from the shed with a plastic plant pot on its head and jumped onto the dog's back before they cantered across the lawn and jumped the fence into the school grounds.

In your thinking stage, as you tried to develop the best story ideas, you might have liked the 'alien rides dog-like creature' idea and, to make it fit and create more questions, decided to make the fake paw prints appear to go over some fairly high wall or shed, or simply leave the giant bone tottering on the edge of an equipment shed roof.

You may be starting to panic reading this and thinking about the amount of preparation you might need to do to run one or a few simultaneous scenarios, but many of the best need little more than a tiny prop or two and good stories that the students have to unfold. They don't ultimately require any props if your witnesses, interviewees or telephone voices are good, but participants love little touches of corroborating 'evidence'. If they feel you put more into it, it always seems like they pay it back and put more into playing their roles as intrepid reporters in exchange. These sorts of colourful touches can also feature strongly in 'news photographs' which will brighten up any final work, newspaper, or display.

How the reporters move forward

At all stages students should be reminded to write copious notes and then have little team conferences to decide what to do next. This could be just for their own small reporting team or it might be opened up to the larger group/class for sharing and suggestions. Either way, at each juncture, and based on what they have found out, they should again try and alter or expand their list of people or organisations to talk to, and a list of possible questions for each.

Based on this story scenario, here are some suggestions about routes they might follow, but it is important for them to discover these ideas themselves. *Please remember, if you have only started reading this chapter from around this point, that all these 'people' listed below are only roles, not real people or organisations!*

At this point, the reporters could:

- Call the *neighbour* (anyone can play them on the phone) or actually interview a real neighbour who has agreed to be involved and knows his or her story part.
- Call the *police*. This is always a handy route because one relative/friend/colleague can play the police officer on the phone, or arrive as a plain clothes officer (or in costume uniform!) to be interviewed by different groups involved in several scenarios. He/she can then answer questions and mention other sightings, behaviour, actions or explanations; could drop in mentions of other people, places or organisations (so the reporters can follow up those leads) or, later in the process, give useful 'rounding off' information and quotes you might want the young reporters to have.
- Contact the *council parks department* by phone or email (any damage/marks/evidence /sighting to report?).
- Call or email the local *RSPCA, stray dog pound or animal sanctuary*. You can quickly create any number of appropriate-sounding email addresses for this kind of thing and have someone you know answer them, or answer them yourself on another computer in school.
- Call *NASA, the RAF or the local airport* and ask if they have had any sightings of spacecraft in the vicinity (here's the chance for someone you know to do an over-the-top American or stiff-upper-lip English accent!).
- Contact a local *pet shop, circus or dog breeder*.
- Ask *other staff members* if they have seen the creature(s) when they were working late the previous evening or early that day before school started.

Any of these characters, or others you or they can think of, should add some more information to broaden the story and can drop hints within their answers that should lead a clever reporting team to work out who else to call or interview, or what background information they might need to research. The young reporters will need to keep listening intelligently to the answers they elicit and to use lateral thinking in order to make connections between 'facts' they learn, what they are told and possible new questions to ask, as well as ideas for possible new people/organisations to interview. Regular leading questions can help them keep these things in mind, especially at key moments in interviews.

Other tricks for initiating and developing their stories

The use of *incoming* calls, letters and emails can be handy too. For any particular news story you could send an email into the class computer or school system on faked headed notepaper from any faked organisation or individual so the children can just click 'reply' before writing to ask their questions. You could set up an 'editorial' computer or email address for the students to receive

this kind of thing. You can even have a bank of possible answers prepared in advance, ready to just click back to them.

Another effective way of having stories initiated or developed is by Skype-type, videophone appearances. You will simply need to have organised various friends, family members, or even other colleagues (perhaps sometimes dressed as appropriate characters on the top half, or deliberately positioned in bad lighting and wearing glasses, wigs, hoods, hats, etc., to disguise familiar profiles) who can send in 'live' initiating messages, or be interviewed as story-related witnesses, or professional experts (such as police officers, scientists, professors in an appropriate subject area, etc.). The only limiting factors to their being seen rather than just heard can be their unlikely ages or appearances in respect to some of the characters you might need them to play.

Depending on the stage of the story reached, these 'voices' can work from a general, pre-arranged script or, just ahead of their 'live performance', you can feed them information by mobile phone on which to base their answers. It's a bonus if they can make their call from an environment that looks or sounds like where they would be as their fictitious personae!

Incoming emails or calls can also either initiate the children's story research or help them develop it further if they are at a loss to know how to move forward. An email might ping in, addressed to The Editor, *Saint Cuthbert's Chronicle*, *asking* for information about a story. For instance, 'Inspector Ian Dogsave' from the local 'RSPCA' or animal protection organization might email (or phone or call 'in person') to say that they have had reports about sightings of a large blue-coloured dog in the vicinity of the school or neighbourhood and then ask if anyone in school knows anything about it because their animal welfare officers are concerned about the creature's wellbeing.

This is a crafty route to take for several reasons. The email/call can not only subtly answer some potential questions for your reporters but it can also create more questions if required, and it can drop hints about other pretend or real people or organisations they can try to interview.

Photographic 'evidence'

A photograph is an easy and handy way of providing 'evidence', making the whole scenario more believable and engaging, and brightening up their reports or newspaper at the end. You could take a photo of a giant dog if you know one, or lift one off the internet and then colour it in quickly with a PaintShop Pro or Photoshop-type of program.

On the other hand, you could have a picture of something more peripheral such as a very vague or blurry blue shape in some thick undergrowth, a bright streak in the night sky or of some 'damage' apparently caused by the dog jumping on a shed/car/fence and your paper might even be offered the picture by email from the parks department or a neighbour who took the photo.

The point is that, once you think about this creatively, the possibilities are endless . . . it's fun and none of it needs to take up too much time. It's just a case of thinking out the stories, planning how to execute them so the students can work them out in stages, organising a few people to play multiple roles for you and possibly preparing a couple of bits of 'evidence'.

Doing it yourself

You and your assistant(s) can play some or even all of the roles if you are desperate for possible actors or the time in which to organise them. This can work relatively well but will inevitably take away some of the exciting 'reality' of the scenarios. Keeping all the witnesses and interviewees in school or even in class is obviously a much easier route for a very busy teacher and can be partly planned and partly made up as you go along, especially if you know the scenario stories well and you and your colleagues enjoy a little acting from time to time. You can even draft in a couple of children from other classes to give pre-arranged answers in interviews.

Running a 'news conference'

'News conferences' are great fun to run and/or in which to play a key role, and they can generate extra learning possibilities. You can control them tightly and, with a little practice, allow assembled reporter teams to gain little hints and titbits of relevant information – but not much at a time, so they have to think fast and frame accurate new questions. If time is nearly running out in a session you can steer them towards asking questions to which you can give answers that tie up whole stories or aspects of stories, or lead them to work out who else they might ask to interview in order to complete their reports.

Several, able, late secondary-age students have told me that they had found my 'news conferences' on residential courses particularly challenging and enjoyable, and felt they had gained in confidence through developing thoughtful, clear and determined questioning. I have played a wide variety of characters in such journalistic conferences from fussy, nit-picking bureaucrats to rough-spoken, mischievous farmers. Some of the characters have taken on minor legendary status among my older students, such as the revolting, Somerset-accented Peter Pigley, Joe Jenkins (a large corporation's slick and slippery PR man), or the efficient and rather scary Detective Chief Inspector McIntosh, with his no-nonsense, bossy Scottish voice and manner.

As Peter Pigley, a local pig farmer, I would usually appear wearing a scrappy wig, dressed in a torn and stained long green plastic coat or battered old waxed jacket, wellington boots and a woolly cloth cap or straw-riddled beanie hat. If I was feeling particularly mischievous I might smear part of my hands and face in some hygienic but dubious-looking brown gunk, offer to shake hands with the worried interviewers, and keep rambling off track about pigs and the price of bacon, or ask them if they were any good at mucking out a pig shed, etc.

As DCI McIntosh, I often wore a rummage sale, dark pinstriped jacket or long coat and felt hat, and had my assistant usher the group of reporters into a room in which rows of chairs were arranged facing the place in which I sat imperiously. I would initially ignore them as I ostensibly read briefing sheets of 'new information' at a desk with a large pad and pen on top, a mobile phone, glass of water, and perhaps a walkie-talkie and any 'evidence' I needed to show them or read from.

When dealing with an able secondary school group I would welcome them stiffly, introduce myself and inform them brusquely that I was very busy, as I expected that they could understand due to ongoing events, so that my time was limited. This was often received with murmurs and nods of understanding by those currently working on dramatic stories! To begin with I sometimes read them or made up a short statement peppered with appropriate-sounding jargon, about the particular investigation(s) in which they may be interested, but mostly I would wait for them to ask questions.

When individuals raised hands I asked them to identify their names and the paper or news organisation for which they worked, then, as they enquired about certain points, I would appear to answer them fairly clearly in a top policeman kind-of-way, but would often actually answer quite vaguely, avoiding key answers to begin with, and adding both irrelevancies and occasional hints of possible things about which they should frame more specific questions. The young reporters might or might not pick up these clues and hints, depending on the age, ability and clarity of thought within the group, so I would often have to drop in further hints as the session progressed.

My assistant would sometimes ring my phone or walkie-talkie once or twice, sometimes discreetly from the other side of the room but often from out of earshot so, as if she was my deputy or a policewoman with a witness, etc., she could 'inform' me of up to date information to which I make up a series of fragmented 'telephone voice' responses that would frustrate the

eagerly waiting reporters. I would then feed them enough of the 'new' information to either complete part of the story or force them to ask further questions or think up an amended investigative route.

Usually, just as they realised what sorts of things they should really be asking, I would tell them politely but brusquely that I had to finish. Then, as mild panic ensued in the room, I would concede to answer one or two more questions until I knew they had enough of the next or final information and had written it down along with a few relevant quotes. My assistant would then chivvy the reporters out of the room saying things like: 'Hurry along now, the Chief Inspector is really very busy!' or 'DCI McIntosh has a meeting now!' or something else along these lines. As in most fun things in life, the tease makes the whole experience more exciting, richer, more challenging, more realistic and ultimately more confidence-building for the students, who feel that they have managed to be clever enough to acquire relevant information against the odds!

The effectiveness of being a slightly difficult interviewee

Acting as a difficult interviewee or source of information may seem odd to teachers who have spent their careers trying to clarify the world for young people, but students can gain much from dealing with awkward contacts. They can be continually forced to use creative intelligence and tightly controlled language to figure out what some answers really mean, to flag up titbits of new information, and to frame better follow-up questions to ask. It also helps them realise how important clear, accurate communication is. On top of that, a difficult detective hunt is a large part of the enjoyment and challenge of the learning process, and how difficult you make it at any one time will be based on the age and ability or your groups and the time available.

Playing these roles can be great fun, but if you truly feel you are not up to a bit of serious over-acting yourself, you can draft in more extrovert friends, family, colleagues, drama teachers or much older students to play appropriate parts. If you do this, make sure they know the technique and exactly what new information they are eventually allowed to release, along with the detailed back story for their reference.

The news conference is a very useful tool for organisers because you can keep quite a number of reporters intellectually and constructively busy at the same time; you can move one or several stories forward if they are heading into the doldrums; and you can use the conference to tie up loose ends or send teams in the direction of other phone 'sources' who will conclude the stories for them if they ask the right questions. This also often involves the students in asking their editor (you) if they can re-interview previous witnesses in order to ask them more targeted questions. Acting as a general professional 'source' such as a senior policeman, government spokesman, PR or information person, you can even help to round off several teams' news stories in the conference at the same time, a useful device if you can see that an approaching session deadline means the reporters will need to move onto writing their articles as soon as possible.

Researching background information

One particularly useful tool for research is, of course, the internet. Allowing students to use this for investigative purposes can have both positive and negative aspects for the scenario organiser. Your reporters will find it helpful for background information about a subject of which they have little experience, and it can give them ideas about who and what to ask or do next.

The main drawback for the news scenario creator is that, because your story is fictional, your students won't find any mention of some, or all, of the happenings, places, characters, things and organisations mentioned, so you will instead have to steer them towards questioning your planted phone sources or fake documents and tell them they always have to ask their editor to

acquire on their behalf any phone numbers they need. These just happen to be in the address book(s) of the mobile phone(s) you allow them to use – because you know the people playing the roles! If you are incredibly organised in advance you might even re-list the numbers of your role-playing friends and colleagues in your phones under their characters' names or positions, and if you or your colleagues are particularly internet savvy you might invent some 'blogs', biographies, mini webpages, official papers, information, etc., for them to find on your local intranet.

In an in-depth journalism course or workshop I usually deliberately introduce aspects of stories for which I know the young reporters can winkle out genuine background material on the internet, such as scientific or technical data, old news and geographical, biographical or historical information. This can help to enrich the learning process and make the story seem more realistic – and your fearless reporters will be quietly proud at having uncovered appropriate background data on their own.

Using news scenario techniques collectively

There is nothing to stop a time-pressured teacher from using these scenario techniques collectively; that is to say, working with a large group or class size to interview, think and discuss, collect quotes and work out the truth of a story which can then be written either collectively or individually. It is again just a case of planning the story, organising helpful 'voices' who can be interviewed on speakerphone or Skype on the interactive board, creating incoming emails or other 'evidence', and briefing friends, colleagues or older students who will play roles when they come into class to be interviewed by pupils through a show of hands.

The atmosphere won't be so 'hands-on', real-feeling and exciting for students compared to working in fizzy little reporting teams, but it can certainly be quicker to organise, less potentially confused and more controllable both in terms of time and organisation. 'Thinking teams' can be set up within class to list possible 'people' or 'organisations' to interview and to create lists of possible questions in advance.

This process could be part of a focus on journalism or might include 'real' stories that relate in some way to aspects of a current class project.

13 More about creating news scenarios – and some we made earlier

Developing a story

Different groups, different challenges

To recap, the aims of creating fictitious news scenarios for students are:

- to challenge and develop skills in thinking, factual writing, language manipulation, interview techniques, questioning, and 'intelligent observation';
- to help students communicate more accurately and cogently in both written and spoken language;
- to stimulate excitement, enthusiasm and inspiration for learning in several cross-curricular fields;
- to assist in teaching journalistic techniques;
- to help young people to be able to identify, grade and process information more effectively, to interpret language and situations better, to develop their ability to 'see between the lines', and to think more for themselves.

With these aims in mind, any scenarios, and the stories they generate, need to be constructed with sufficient fun, complexity and challenge for the students' age and ability. This type of 'challenge differentiation' has, of course, to be borne in mind when developing ideas for a specific group. Most scenarios can be devised at different levels of challenge, but what can also make a particular scenario suitable for an older and more able group (but not for a younger or less able group) is the complexity of the concepts involved, the difficulty of putting them into an article, and the world knowledge required to grasp and be stimulated by them.

To get a better idea of what kinds of things work well in news scenarios and how to develop them in effective ways, we'll look later in this chapter at a few ideas which have been used before, most of them many times over. You can either copy or customise them, or simply get the flavour of how they work before you then create your own.

I'll describe a couple in depth and just the bones of others so you can develop them in your own way, but first we'll start with how to create scenarios which relate to things about which your students already have some understanding or knowledge, because a degree of context can make the scenario more grippingly true to life, more intelligible (especially for younger or weaker groups) and more fun!

Making it link with things they know about

Creating your own scenarios for your students can mean that you are free to make convincing links to current items in the news or popular cultural scene, to school or local happenings or

myths, or to interesting local locations, etc. For instance, if there was an ongoing story in the news about a massive new dance sensation that was sweeping the country or world called, let's say, the Penguin Dance (or Duck Dance, Elephant Dance, etc.), you could invent a story that it was started by one, or a pair of, local teachers, parents, children in a different class, fictitious local residents, etc., and have your cub reporters track them down, interview them and photograph them (in their penguin outfits?), or interview them on the phone and ask for photos to be emailed or delivered to them (handy because you can download any pictures of people in penguin costumes or make them up in Photoshop).

The interviewees would, of course, have all sorts of back story already worked out for them about why they had created the dance in the first place (come on, be creative!), why they made up some of the crazy dance movements, how it first became known (at a talent show, charity event, carnival, PTA occasion, conservation demonstration, zoo staff wedding, etc.) and why it had exploded into the public's imagination. It would be helped if you already had appropriate costumes to hand.

Developing a story idea

Of course, that's a very simple story as it stands, fine for young groups but too simple for older or more able teams because it doesn't offer enough ferreting, thinking and writing challenges. To make it more interesting and complex, you could arrange that someone lets slip to your young reporters that they know of another person/pair of people who claim(s) he/she/they invented the dance first. It might be even more useful if the pictures showing the original outfit(s) covered the dancers' faces so this 'dispute' can't be quickly resolved. Remember that, if you are panicking about having to organise too much, a mask with fairly ordinary clothes or even just a masked face might still be enough of a costume in the photos (perhaps plus some funny poses!) and you can still make the story work without any special costume at all. Ultimately, if you can't think of something in the real news to which you can link, you could pretend that there is, and a story they work on might be completely invented.

If you wanted both to complicate the dance craze story further and make it more dramatic, news could come in, or be discovered by the young reporters while doing a live or phone interview, that the competing parties have very recently had a brawl over who could make the claim to fame as inventors of the craze, and it would be amusing to the students and everyone concerned if there was a photo of that happening. It could be even better if the brawl was in costume, but this may mean you would have to have at least two similar outfits.

It might seem entertaining to have this pretend brawl take place in view of your reporters, but it would probably be simpler and more credible to have a photo or video faked up in advance with yourself, a friend or family member in costumes, or just two unidentifiable people pretending to have a fight . . . and if one was wielding a plastic duck or a beach flipper it might be even more fun! It would be even better for the story if it had apparently occurred at some local public event, such as in front of the Mayor at carnival, etc. You might simply have faked up the action in the picture and photographed it quickly in front of the local town hall, local theatre, on the school stage, or in front of some long 'town hall' curtains at home, etc.

Your reporters, as is the case with most real ones, will need to work harder to get the story right when they have not been present at an actual happening. This is, of course, because they can't just dash off a report about what they saw, but will have to find out all the facts, quotes and differing opinions from each side and from any participants, witnesses, police or hospital spokesmen, etc. Indeed, in the world of professional journalism, apart from specialist journalists who know in advance to be at major sporting events, government meetings, etc., real life reporters often don't have the fortune to be on the scene when something newsworthy occurs.

They usually hear about it after the event and have to collect their information and descriptive quotes by interviewing people.

Using local connections

Another way of giving students helpful and more realistic context for their story is to set it in some interesting place they know or know of, or use some curious geography or landmark. You could set it in the school grounds, in some local park, a central town square or street, on the local beach or harbour front, at some well-known beauty spot, key town building, etc.

Of course, if an amusing scenario story that you create involves a local market gardener protesting about a new bypass being driven through his land by hanging off the most impressive bridge in town, clutching a couple of cauliflowers with his feet tied to the handrail by runner bean tendrils, it doesn't mean that someone actually has to do it (please don't!). Witnesses can say they saw the incident, someone on the phone or staff can tell the story of how they rescued him, a fire brigade spokesman can elucidate on their involvement, the protester's wife can be interviewed while shedding tears of joy at his rescue, a boat owner can explain how he fished the protester out of the river below when the tendrils broke, the protestor might be interviewed on the phone from his hospital bed, etc. Perhaps the fire brigade spokesman is actually a local fireman in uniform (whom you've asked to take part) and perhaps the boat owner is another teacher's brother who actually does sail, so you can produce a photograph of that witness in his rowing boat.

Making photo 'evidence' is easy

One small apparent drawback in this story is that it sounds like hard work trying to fake up a photo of that event actually happening, but you could easily produce photos of the rescuer, or the rescued person (perhaps with appropriate vegetable accessories), or both of them together in an 'after the rescue' shot, or just someone with a sailor's hat on (the boat owner) who is quoted in the article. Ultimately, though, you don't even need to have a photograph of everything in your small newspaper, especially if are just using the challenges but not putting any of the work into a newspaper format.

The secret is to be creative, fun and exciting in the story possibilities you develop while also finding ways to set up and run these scenarios that are not too complex and time consuming for your particular situation. To produce a sophisticated-looking little newspaper with all of the well-edited articles in it and nicely illustrated by dramatic and colourful photos and graphics is a great project for a Journalism Week, Writing Week, Residential Course, School Camp or Summer Camp. For a smaller everyday project in school, just printing up individual stories in columns on A4, or a few on a folded A3 sheet with photos and headlines, may have to suffice as celebration and legacy of the work achieved.

Avoiding complaints or litigation

Although it's much more convincing and fun to link stories to real life (especially for older age groups), you don't want to get sued, so you might have to be careful not to say anything about an actual business, organisation or person that isn't true without them agreeing to that and understanding the point of the exercise. With that in mind, it's probably also worth putting an explanatory disclaimer on the front of anything you publish, even if it's just for circulation within school or to the students involved. Something like this might help: 'The stories printed here are fictitious, based on fictional scenarios, and are part of an educational exercise in English and Journalism.'

In many of the little newspapers we printed for the children to take home, we built that kind of line into a band along the base of the front page. The lettering doesn't have to be very big, but does need to be readable and visible.

Another advantage of printing such a clear explanatory note in an obvious place is that it also helps prevent the possibility of someone thinking a story might be true or complaining about the content of a story, even the complainer has nothing whatsoever to do with a person or organisation mentioned in it.

Steering clear of silly criticism

I once ran a holiday journalism workshop for children in and around the offices of the local district council that had sponsored the event. Despite the fact that it was a council event, someone else on the council staff complained about an article in the little mock newspaper we had produced because it had a story about a crazy (but rather amusing) scenario loosely based on the contemporary British prime minister, leader of the opposition and possibly also the Queen. Despite the fact that the story was unbelievably mad (I have a vague recollection that one of the characters had allegedly attempted to murder the other!) and that it was illustrated by photos of a few 10–12-year-old children on the front steps of the offices, very unconvincingly dressed in their zany idea of politicians clothes (taken from my dressing up bag), the complaint was incredibly that 'people reading the article might think it was real!'

A similar thing happened, around the same time, at the end of a secondary-age residential course. Someone on the house staff, of limited imagination and intellect, complained that a story in our newspaper pages on the coursework display board was violent (no doubt a character had probably been 'murdered' in it for some entertaining but justifiable reason). We did wonder if that particular complainant had ever read a real newspaper or switched on a radio or television set!

From then on we always placed the explanatory disclaimer on the front of our little newspapers, on display boards and even just on a page with a single team's news article on it, and we never received another complaint.

Avoiding more serious complaints

Although television comedy sketches often purport to show famous people doing or saying ludicrous things, it is worth remembering that their production and broadcast companies employ expert lawyers to vet what they can get away with, and they also have considerable funds to back themselves in court if sued. We ordinary mortals have none of this support, so it is generally better to play safe. For instance, many of your students will understandably want celebrities to feature in their made-up news scenarios but it would be sensible to change a famous person's name when creating your fictitious character, or at least alter its spelling even if still allowing it to sound vaguely similar. This can have an advantage beyond the legal as it means that your professional young 'reporters' should double check all spellings of the names of people, places, organisations, products, etc.

In the now distant era when Margaret Thatcher was prime minister of the UK, a scenario leader thinking up some amusing pseudo-political scenario might have made the name of one of their scenario's characters something like Marguette Patcher, Margrit Barcher, Market Hatcher, or something along those lines. Although everyone might have guessed who the character was very loosely based upon, it would have reinforced the point that these were fictional scenario characters and situations and not real life. However, this might not be enough to prevent litigation, so inventing a completely fictitious president, prime minister or celebrity, with no obvious connection to a real person, is probably the safest route.

It is important to think about what a fictional article might say, suggest or imply about any real person or organisation (even one with a different name) and how it says it. It's vital to try to ensure that what happens in any scenario associated with them couldn't be thought of as likely or true by a rational person. It's still possible to make a libellous statement even if the writer has tried to veil the identity of that person or organisation. One has to use one's own judgement in each case and err on the side of caution.

Managing the sessions

Reporters' guidelines

On weekend residential journalism courses, once we think that our students have gained a feel for sequencing and have had a reasonable amount of performing, reporting, writing and editing experience under their belts through group scenarios, we usually hand them individual stickers printed with the name of their newspaper or internet news group above the word 'REPORTER', then gather them together in our computer-filled newsroom to give them a little talk about *the rules of the game*, such as:

- Always ask your editor (me) or my assistant editor before you go off anywhere to interview or phone anyone.
- Stay within the boundaries set and don't disturb other working groups or classes.
- Good teamwork is essential so you will work together in small reporting teams which we will decide and sometimes change.
- As teams you will need to consult with each other continuously over what to do, who to ask to interview and what to ask each witness in detail, so between interviews you will need to write down at least three different characters or 'organisations' you might like to interview by phone and a list of effective questions for each.
- Teams of three/four or more can split their manpower at times, but the rest of the group and the 'editorial staff' (us) must always know where they are and what they are doing.
- Carry a clipboard, plenty of plain paper and two sharp pencils at all times.
- Teams conducting mobile phone interviews should do so in quiet areas and use the phones on speakerphone so the rest of the team can hear and write down every fact and quote they can.
- Teams should delegate a different lead speaker each time so that each person gets a turn to do the main interviewing.
- Always introduce yourself pleasantly and efficiently to those you interview (for example, 'Hello, I'm John Smith from the *Kressingham Chronicle*. Can I ask you . . .?').
- If photographs are to be taken, either we will take them or we will delegate the job to specific team members.
- Team members taking photos must also work on interviewing and collecting story facts so they are involved in the challenges and stay in touch with the thread of the developing story.
- Borrowed mobile phones or cameras must be given back to organisers immediately after interviews are finished or photo-taking is completed.

You will also need to go over various risk assessment issues, such as not running with pencils in hands, not running indoors, boundary setting, always reporting back immediately to the editorial management team, not going off anywhere on your own, etc.

Using cameras

If we have decided to allow reporter groups to use digital cameras at times, I usually run a simple mini-session on journalistic photography immediately *before* the above reporters' briefing, touching on things like: operating the camera, trapping the action, showing key story details, getting in close with the camera to key parts of a scene/action, catching expressions and relevant objects, effective cropping, etc. I might show them several strong, and a few fairly hopeless, photos of the same event or scene, as well as three or four exceptional press photographs to help sharpen their creative 'photo-journalist' eyes (there are plenty available on internet image banks).

Time permitting, I sometimes set up an instant 'frozen moment' scenario then ask group members to suggest what photo they might shoot, from what angle and distance, and to walk into the scene to demonstrate with their arms how they would frame the picture most effectively. Usually, I would have created at least one key part to the scene I had set up and at least one 'straggly', almost irrelevant part containing less interesting characters or action, so I would be looking for students to identify the part that was most newsworthy. Depending on the scenario shown and the ability of the group, I might also ask them to find an unusual, creative but still effective angle as well as a more obvious one.

As most students and, indeed, the general public are not used to thinking in photo-journalistic terms when they snap a picture, you may be surprised at how much difference a small session like this can make to the quality of supporting imagery that groups can produce. It sometimes also helps individual students to 'see' the story in their minds better.

If we are going to produce a newspaper, with their stories in it, at the end of the course, my assistant and I will also snap crucial photographs as 'safety copies' in case those taken by the young photographers aren't strong enough. We try to use their pictures, of course, to give them as much ownership as possible.

Use of mobile phones and character 'voices'

On most news scenarios we use phones and mobile phones because:

- it makes the process more life-like;
- we can create a wide variety of convincing stories, story settings, characters and interviewees compared to doing it all in person;
- many of our ex-students, other helpers, friends, families and colleagues play multiple roles and most find it terrific fun;
- people who look ordinary in real life can sound like extraordinary people when they shift into character voices;
- we can control the direction, complexity and length of stories tightly from one central area, in and around the newsroom and still keep track of, oversee and direct, what students are doing.

My assistants and I use our own mobile phones and usually a couple of old ones we keep for this purpose. Story scenarios are planned in advance so that we can ring to ask if our friendly 'voice artists' will be available at the approximate times we need them, and we tell can them about the scenario they will be doing and what their character(s) need to know or have discovered, seen, will say, etc. At this stage we can't know all of the characters and sources our reporters will want to call, but we can guess the key ones and guide them towards those we've prepared. The rest we arrange by ringing our voices during the workshop and updating them on who they are, what they know, what they have to say and how easy or hard we want them to be

as interviewees. The latter may vary with the age and ability of a group/team and the remaining time available.

We give our 'voices' a list of information about each character they are to play (including their full names (and spellings), ages, jobs, relationships, etc., and the detailed information their character is able to divulge about the story at that particular interview, and we ask them to note all this down or very occasionally give/email them a sheet of printed notes. These notes might include particular quotes we really need them to say and any hints, 'thoughts' or 'facts' we want them to try and drop into their interview responses which may help to lead our young reporters onto thinking of other people or organisations to which they might want to put further questions. This all sounds a bit time intensive, but we do it in a very informal way and it's a fun reason for keeping in touch with people.

As your student reporters find out more things in a story and encounter more red herrings to get around, they will learn to ask if they can call characters back to ask further questions, or interview new characters, such as (depending on the story they have at that point) the woman in the house across the road from an incident, the coastguard, a local club for hang gliding enthusiasts, the nearest zoo or wildlife park to a strange animal sighting, and of course spokespeople for organisations and companies, hospitals, the police and other emergency services.

Allowing creative variations in scenario stories

Depending on your confidence, you can add little touches as a scenario progresses and you may have to cover the occasional mistake or bout of over-creativity by one of your physical interviewees or phone 'voices' by spontaneously adapting aspects of the story so far. Often this can give you new ideas about how to enrich the scenario story but, very unusually, you might have to backtrack and have the interviewee tell that reporting team he or she had made a mistake in what they said previously or had not told the exact 'truth' for some reason. The main thing is to tell your phone 'voice' in advance what they need to say and what they can't say or give away at any particular point, but still encourage them to seem spontaneous, in character, and to add in any other irrelevant details they feel will enrich that character.

Although it can be useful to give a background and setting, you don't need to tell most 'voices' every detail of the story of which they are part, only who they are and what they know that's relevant at any one time. In the early stages you might want interviewees to give fairly minimal information so the groups have to work harder, and with more able and older groups you might want some 'voices' or witnesses to be distinctly stubborn or awkward so the reporters learn to be brave, fast thinking and working out new questions to ask. You will probably have to ring up particular 'voices' before you put the students on to them, and it is essential to have a couple of nearby private breakout areas/small rooms/walk-in cupboards/doors outside to which you and your assistant can regularly disappear to make your secret calls and confer with each other on the current state of each team's story investigation and what you may need to do next.

Utilising talents

You may discover that your most talented voice artists can often perform in many different voices and accents, so you can use them for different characters on different scenarios. One of my best was so exceptional that she could not only do most voices, accents and emotional states we threw at her, but she could convincingly play several different characters on the same phone call without our young reporters having a clue they were talking to the same person! For instance, on one occasion she was a switchboard telephonist, then someone friendly in a university depart-

ment, then a rather bossy and difficult specialist professor of some sort. She even played voice mail and answer machine voices (complete with beeps and clicks!) when we wanted to either know what students had found out without asking them, or when we wanted to delay them from reaching a key character too quickly because we needed them to interview other characters beforehand.

If you have all your 'voices'' numbers in all the phones (it's even better if they are all on speed dial buttons) you can call them 'on behalf' of your young reporters and hand the phone to the reporter team, saying something like: 'I found the number for the local police station as you asked and there's someone on the line now. Don't forget to speak clearly and introduce yourselves.' Or perhaps you might say: 'We couldn't get in touch with anyone at Grim Biotech yet, but I've found the number of their security department/a van driver who delivers there sometimes/a man who runs a business next door/the woman who lives in a cottage near their sewage outfall into the local river . . .', etc.

'Story starters'

To initiate scenarios you can have 'story starters' walk in, phone in or email with their beginning lines for stories . . . often only a few seconds after you have briefed that 'voice' on your phone from the room next door! You might need to get a particular team of students quickly involved in something, so that you can say: 'I have someone here/a local builder/a very angry shopkeeper/ the manager of Blinkharton Racecourse (depending on the story) on the phone who wants to speak to a reporter. Who is free to deal with this?' Working in this way means you can put reporters into teams of two to four, add more reporters into teams whose stories seem to be mushrooming, and even switch the odd student away from a story in which they are less motivated or when they are not functioning well in a particular team.

Walk-in 'story starters' can be people the students know from the school or centre, helpful parents or complete strangers to them who are playing invented characters. As mentioned in the previous chapter, you can also have emails or letters arrive, or make something dramatic happen or appear where or when your reporters should notice it if they are suitably observant, such as someone in a bizarre costume having been seen by your students or by others, odd posters turning up on tree trunks in the grounds, bizarre happenings, weird sounds, or the 'chance' discovery of some peculiar, ancient, valuable, scary or very out-of-place object.

It is, of course, somewhat easier to run made-up news scenarios the second time around because you will know most of the details of effective stories in advance and so will some of your phone 'voices'; you will have discovered which of your friends or colleagues have been hiding an amazing talent for playing convincing telephone roles; and you will have gained a feel for the average timings of each story and how to make any part of the process more complex, simpler, longer or shorter in real time in order to fit in best with challenge levels and session timings.

Some we made earlier: tried and tested ideas for fictitious news scenarios

'Flying Farmers'

Let's start with a particular favourite of my mine which I call 'Flying Farmers'. This one is rather complicated to set up but has been run very successfully a great many times during courses for more able 12–16-year-olds and sometimes older. As these were based in a rural residential centre we used a rural theme and had freedom to do more dramatic things than we would in, say, an urban school setting. In fact, you might say that this scenario always went off with a bang . . . literally!

This was often the first of our own pre-prepared news scenarios, and it usually took place in the early darkness of a winter's evening, which added extra drama to the event. 'Flying Farmers' may be too complex for many organisers to set up and risk assess, but I'll describe it in order to demonstrate the sorts of gripping scenario that it is possible to run in a Journalism Week or residential setting, and the way a series of different possible investigative routes can be constructed.

One of the reasons for using this as the first scenario in a residential setting was that it could grip and involve all of the students on the course at the same time, which gave us leeway to start other made-up news scenarios in sequence. As required, we would then pull small teams of reporters off the 'Flying Farmers' investigation, and set them off on those other breaking stories. Fairly soon, the initial group of around 15 students working on it would have shrunk to around 5 or 6 , and eventually only about 3 or 4 would actually see it through to completion, the rest being thoroughly engrossed in other stories by that time.

Before our young journalists were packed into a deliberately tight corner of our small computer suite newsroom for the brief talk on reporters' guidelines and safety described earlier, we would have discreetly positioned a sturdy wheelie bin outside the deliberately-opened window at the back of the narrow double room. Around the end of the talk I was always apparently called away to the office on some pretext so that, as my assistant recapped a few of the points with the group, I was able to nip outside and set off a couple of pyrotechnics, the first being a safe smoke 'grenade' and the other being either a very loud army training 'thunderflash' or a large, wire-triggered stage 'maroon', placed inside the empty and open wheelie bin along with a small heap of cooking flour. The bang was always spectacular and, as the students leaped into the air in astonishment, my assistant would pretend to be just as surprised as them.

Needless to say, I had always disappeared from the scene by the time the group had found their way outside via the nearest fire exit. They were greeted by a dramatic sight. The air between the trees was filled with smoke and dust (flour) illuminated theatrically by the centre's automatic security lights, and the air smelled of explosive pyrotechnics. The small orchard area outside was littered with debris: clothes, pieces of fabric and long streamers of toilet paper fluttered from the trees, and there were bits of shiny metal, plastics, green fabrics and half-burned pieces of paper and card all over the ground. Perhaps most significant of all, the young reporters would soon discover that the entire area was scattered with green wellington boots (spare leftover pairs normally stored in the basement of that outdoor centre)! They were strewn around the grass, some were hanging from branches and on the low roof of a building, and there was always a pair stuck upside down into the top of a thick hedge, sometimes apparently attached to the legs of a pair of old, padded-out trousers – as if a body had fallen head first into the impenetrable and thorny hedge.

'Flying Farmers': building realism through suggestion

While my assistant began helping the young reporters collect their wits and their clipboards, I would usually burst out of the fire exit behind them (having rushed inside via a different door or window) and ask if they were all okay and what on earth had made the incredible bang which, I maintained, had been heard just as loudly overhead from the distant office at the far end of the centre.

As the entire group of excited reporters searched around the debris, a few would eventually ask if they could examine the remaining bits of paper and soon some bright spark would inevitably point out that some of these appeared to be parts of a letter and also the charred remains of a passenger list from an organisation called CnE (we had even made a quick 'company logo' for this paperwork).

We had previously copied the letter and the 'passenger list' several times, then torn and burned the edges of these copies with a lighter so that just enough information and clues to begin the story hunt could be found or inferred by piecing together some of these fragments. Our

reporters would always set to this with gusto and eventually decide that the deafening noise may have been caused by a plane blowing up overhead, that these were the damaged passenger lists and that the unfortunate travellers had been on their way to Dublin where they were to stay in the 'Wheatsheaf Inn'. They even worked out the flight number.

The letter was addressed to a Mr Woosterhouse and signed by Ron James, the hotel's booking manager. Hidden among its charred fragments was information that the hotel had arranged a coach to collect the party at Dublin Airport at a specific time. If our young reporters were on the ball they would eventually notice that one person on the list, called R. Fields, had a dash beside his name instead of a seat allocation.

As other scenarios began in sequence and small teams of students volunteered to move on to those, the shrinking remainder would brainstorm what to do, who to call and what to ask each in each case. They would probably start by calling 'the police', 'the nearest main airport', the airline and also 'the Wheatsheaf Inn in Ireland'. Voices with suitable accents and demeanours would either be helpful or difficult, but even the difficult interviewees might drop titbits of information or indirect hints about other people or organisations. This would lead the reporters forward so, slowly, the team could piece together the facts that a group of local farmers had been on a charter flight on 'Cheap 'n' Easy Airlines' (CnE) that had taken off from Bristol Airport on the way to a farming convention in Dublin. The plane had apparently blown up as it passed high above the residential education centre, and they eventually worked out that the explosion may have been caused deliberately through the use of a bomb triggered from the ground as the plane crossed overhead.

'Flying Farmers': setting a red herring

Following quite a bit of thinking, calling and interviewing, our reporters' suspicions would always fall upon a farmer called Ron Fields because he had been extremely disgruntled recently after losing his position as secretary of the local farmers' union to his long-standing competitor Mr Woosterhouse. They would even discover that this had been due to his having been prosecuted by the police recently for causing damage to several road signs and a wall in a village at midnight by driving his tractor while drunk and wearing only his underwear! Reporters' suspicions seemed to be confirmed by the fact that Fields had been booked on the flight but had not actually boarded it.

The latter was an effective red herring but, to cut a long story short, after hopefully noticing a small anomaly in this scenario through other witness and professional accounts, the team would eventually ferret out the fact that the wife of Mr Fields had a degree in chemistry and that she had been having an affair with another farmer. In the course of actually writing the story, some of the team would also find out that the errant pair had just been arrested in another part of the country and that Mrs Fields had been charged with blowing up the aircraft with a fertiliser bomb in an attempt to kill her husband and making it look like a terrorist attack so she could inherit his farm and marry her lover. By this time, the team would probably have changed or adapted their draft story lead once or even twice.

Along the way, our reporters would have interviewed, or attempted to interview, spokespeople for the police, the airport, the airline, the Dublin hotel, the Civil Aviation Authority and a hospital; explosives experts and/or the anti-terrorist squad; neighbours of Mr and Mrs Fields; student and staff witnesses to the explosion; administrators in the regional farmers union and/or some wives of some of the deceased farmers; locals whose properties and businesses had been affected by falling debris, etc. They would also have had fun trying to deal with the difficult Detective Chief Inspector McIntosh (me) at a live police press conference during the final stage of their investigation. This usually pulled together the final threads of their story, but also often caused some rewriting of their lead!

The complicated investigation, teamwork, thinking, planning, interviewing, re-interviewing, note-taking, sequencing, re-sequencing, writing, rewriting and editing required before team members can achieve a finished story like this should help to demonstrate the educational riches that a good fictional news scenario can generate for an especially able group of 12–16-year-olds. I hope this will also give an insight into the way the news scenario process can work and how engrossing, exciting and fun it can be for the students.

A four-part scenario

This type of scenario is entertaining and challenging for secondary groups because it starts off as three separate scenarios, with a team working on each, but what none of the students know to begin with is that all of the stories they are working on are also part of a larger story and it only all comes together when a fourth story breaks.

I have already explained how your newshounds can interview by phone, in person and email and how scenarios might begin and information come to them via walk-in 'story starters', phone calls, emails and letters, stunts and effects, objects or human 'plants', press conferences, etc., so I don't need to go into every detail of how they find their way through the story maze for the scenario set out below. Again, you could use all or parts of this scenario but, hopefully, the following description of this story set can serve as inspiration for you to devise your own linked news scenarios.

Group A's story:

A local villager rings in to say that a German hiker and his companion have been ranting on animatedly in broken English about 'talking cows' and how they had to run away from them. She mentions that they had asked to sit in her small front garden to finish their picnic, but she had suggested that the village green beside the fountain outside the local shop would be a much nicer place and, anyway, she was a little disconcerted by them as their story seemed so bizarre.

Reporters may try to get more information and background from the local police, zoos, animal experts, etc . . . none of it turns out to be particularly pertinent. Hopefully, at some point, they realise they can call the village shop to ask the shopkeeper to go outside and ask the hikers to call them on a mobile or the villager's phone to tell them about it. One of the hikers calls the news office (in a suitable accent) to say that he and his partner have been 'molested' by talking cows. Not only have the cows been talking, but they have been very rude to him for wearing lederhosen (traditional leather shorts) and calling the couple 'silly moos', apparently for eating beef sandwiches. He gives reporters plenty of peripheral 'colour', of course. With any luck they will find out where it happened (at Apple Tree Farm, Lower Clappit) and try to contact the farmer there.

Group B's story:

There are reports from a worried peripatetic music teacher that the children in a local village infant school have been behaving very oddly indeed and she had to give up teaching some of them. Reporters call the headteacher but initially get evasive answers from the school secretary, and are told they can't talk to the headteacher for a little while as she is currently 'very busy dealing with a small problem following a visit from the county schools' nurse'. Reporters discover the name of the nurse, we 'find' her office number for them and they hear from her that the infants have had lots of stings, blisters, scratches and stains around their mouths and faces and that the children weren't 'as responsive as normal' when she tried to deal with it. They also said some disturbing things to staff, such as that one of the dinner ladies smelt 'like toilet disinfectant' and some children had told the headteacher that she was too bossy.

Eventually, the reporters ring the school back and persuade the headteacher to talk to them. Reluctantly, she describes how, when the children were allowed outside at break-time, they had apparently been crawling around eating grass and clover and behaving in peculiar ways, which is why she had called in the nurse. Within the interview she mentions that 'it happened at break time, just after they'd had their morning milk'. She adds lots of colour about how worried the staff are and how they are calling in a local doctor, etc.

If the reporters ask the right questions, or if you want to make it easier, she tells them that the school's milk is supplied by Appletree Farm Dairy.

Group C's story:

The third team is told that a local 21-year-old girl has just won the incredibly prestigious International Atom Prize for chemistry. They call her home phone number but get a rather grumpy, rough-spoken man who says that she isn't there at this time because she's staying at the university. If they ask the right questions, the reporters can discover, for instance, that the amazing young person is that man's daughter and they might also find out which university she is at. If they don't, they can call the International Atom Prize Trust and get some background and details of her university from there.

Eventually, they get to a professor in her department who is very proud of her. He gives them some background 'colour' and explains that she was a child prodigy who went to university at 15 and has been awarded the prize for creating an incredible drug. They are given a ridiculously long scientific-sounding name (such as 'paramoxyfrubeneroneomycic acid') for it and hopefully they get her name (Gillian Sezworthy) and phone number, and possibly even her local address (if they didn't already get it from the man they talked to first).

When they speak to her they discover that the drug is 'semi- hallucinogenic but makes people speak their true feelings'. It has already been used successfully by police forces to interrogate dangerous prisoners and terrorists, has saved many lives and has been licensed for this use in several countries. Its effects only last for about fifteen minutes and it's considered totally safe and humane.

Group D's story:

Reports come in of a massive explosion and fire at Pip's Cider Farm. They discover from neighbours, the fire brigade, etc., that the farm is near Far Clappit and there is one fatality. Eventually, they find out from police that they are treating the explosion as suspicious and that the name of the victim was Pip York.

They get lots of dramatic description about the explosion and fire from the lady who lives in Bramble Cottage across the lane from Mr York and she or someone else tells them that York had just won the gold medal for cider at that year's National Agricultural Show. She mentions that he had just beaten his competitor from Pear Tree Farm at Upper Clappit who had won the gold medal for five years. If they ask, they find the competitor's name is John Sezworthy.

Ultimately, when it suits you, this story's news team can discover from the local police (and/or other sources) that they have arrested Mr Sezworthy for the explosion, fire and murder of Mr York, and that Sezworthy was found hiding in an outhouse on his own farm.

They will eventually need to find out that it is now known, or suspected, that John Sezworthy had, without her knowledge, attempted to use his daughter's amazing psychotropic drug to win the gold medal for his cider. He had put it in a large batch of cider hoping it would make the judges slightly drugged and therefore say that his was the best cider ever. However, he discovered that it reacted with the cider, went purple and made it taste horrible, so he had poured the giant vat of it into the little stream on his farm at Upper Clappit and accidentally contaminated the water that the cows drank at Lower Clappit, making them speak the truth too!

Links begin to be apparent

Before story D breaks, it is expected (and hoped) that, during each reporting teams' investigations, phone interviews, etc., someone will eventually overhear one of the other teams taking down and discussing details that fit strangely well with some of the background information for the story they are working on themselves. For instance, the place name of Appletree Farm in Lower Clappit appears in stories A and B, Pear Tree Farm at Upper Clappit appears in Stories A and D, and the name of Sezworthy should eventually appear in stories C and D too. If they are thinking well, the young journalists begin to realise that two of the stories are linked. If they are even more on the ball, they might wonder if some of the other teams' stories link too, and try to work out how and why.

If the reporters are slow and don't pick up any of the links you may have to ask loudly across their heads things like: 'Did you say his name was Sezworthy?' or 'Which farm did the milk come from?' etc., to wake them up a bit! If they don't make the links they could write their articles as single stories, but a better option is to get them to write all four stories singly, but linking them in a larger news feature. The most effective way of doing this might be to create what I call 'mother and daughters' stories by taking the most dramatic key story, writing it fully in a version that also contains relevant related facts or aspects that have come out of the others, then writing the other stories as smaller separate stories beneath and around that lead story.

Amusingly, the most obvious lead story to most students is the murder, explosion and fire, but, to an adult, the fact that cows have started talking is actually far more amazing! You can either let the students off with the simple solution of having one lead story about the murder/fire or, if they are quite old and especially able, you could ask them to run a news feature that leads with both the talking cows story *and* the murder/fire story at the top of the page, followed by a smaller story beneath about the International Atom Prize winner.

They could then choose to include facts about the oddly behaving children in the talking cows story and in the extended murder/fire story, but I would tend to mention the children who behaved like cows after drinking the contaminated milk in those main stories yet still run a separate 'daughter story' about the children under a title such as: 'NIGHTMARE FOR TEACHERS AS POISONED PUPILS ACT LIKE COWS!' or something similar.

The main point for your students to discover is that there are different ways of dealing with complex and/or linked stories, so it is useful to understand the nature of a news feature and the concept of 'mother and daughters' stories because not all stories are, in fact, just one story. Some might simply become much too long and complicated for readers to take in as one story, and could end up being clumsy and hard to write.

You could also ask your students to try and imagine types of story that could really be more than one story and perhaps you could try to verbally create a main story and subsidiary stories that link to it. A good trawl through old newspapers and news websites ought to provide you with some examples of linked stories like this. The important thing is that each of the stories can still stand up as a genuine story in its own right, rather than just be a part taken out of a more complex tale.

Devising related story scenarios is also a good way of getting about 9 to 20 students involved in something which will eventually link up, so they can all be involved in writing different parts of it. Even if they don't actually write those stories, you can all have challenging and creative fun making up the ideas for them as a class or group, and discussing different ways of organising and laying out the imaginary news feature that would come out of it.

Taking it further, totally devising the stories, writing them and laying out a news feature like this on computer, perhaps with relevant posed photos, captions, headlines, etc., can be an excellent and engrossing way of combining English and Journalism with Graphics and IT skills.

MORE 'SOME WE MADE EARLIER' IDEAS

Finally, to help get your creative juices flowing, here are a few of the sorts of ideas that I have used for fictitious news scenarios:

- An envelope addressed to a reporter care of the newsdesk then the name of our made up newspaper. Inside it, a threatening note (created by pasting different newspaper letters together) has corn flour in it which it claims is anthrax. The rest of the story you can work out, but the best route is probably that it's found not to be anthrax though the writer may or may not have a stockpile of whatever it is. Think who/where/when/why/how and a new scenario will soon begin to unfold in your head.
- Half bury some large fake fossils (I often use a huge papier mâché triceratops head) and have someone 'who was just out walking the dog' say that they've seen something odd in that area. Failing that, buy a couple of 'Jurassic' beef leg bones for dogs in a pet shop and bury them (it's even better if you stain them first with diluted black ink). Your reporters can make the 'find', call various experts, email a photo to a professor of palaeontology, get the find confirmed as a new type of dinosaur and have the creature named after them!
- Acquire some playgroup or school parachutes used for parachute games, hang them from buildings and/or trees, make up exciting story ideas and off you go! We've even done it with a 'dead body dummy' hanging from a branch out of reach. Try to be really original and zany with your plot (while still keeping it logical), so that your story will be harder for students to figure out, more fun and more interesting.
- Prepare an old or cheap wallet by inserting into it documentation you've had fun making up on your computer. Many websites supply blank forms and certificates but you can make your own and work out the who/where/what, etc., of the story as you go. Putting in a little foreign currency and/or conflicting foreign ID items can start off complex story ideas, for instance.
- Create a 'Chinese whispers' situation where others are briefed on what to talk excitedly about within earshot of your reporters, such as the bizarre appearance or disappearance of someone or something. You might combine this with a brief appearance of someone in costume in front of people that your students know, or in a faraway window that they can't reach, etc. We have frequently used a passing figure dressed in an over-the-top Mexican outfit, and also a strangely-dressed and spooky masked figure who briefly stares in a classroom window.
- Brief kitchen staff with details about how they have seen a very odd little figure escaping out the back door or open window and ask them to complain that food and scraps keep disappearing. Someone could say they've just lost a bag of flour. Before they talk about it, lay an erratic flour trail around the grounds and get it to end with a scatter of wrappers, flour, scraps and skins below a tree, in a shed, etc. You can create red herrings about it being caused by an escaped monkey (call wildlife park/zoo/lab/private owner/pet shop, etc.), but it turns out to be a 'wild child', a boy or girl who was lost/left behind/ran away/ lost their memory falling off a bus, etc.
- Email to your newsroom an odd photo that you have faked up or lifted from the internet. It might look like a weird creature, a cow wearing giant sunglasses, a boy with two heads, etc. Have fun making up the rest of the story and inventing more 'evidence' or witnesses.
- Choose a big story in the news about which your students will have heard and make up new, apparently linked story ideas, especially local ones. Be careful not to upset or defame anyone through doing this, though!
- Create a story scenario that turns out to be a modern version of the plot of the Shakespeare play or literature book your students are studying. This can sometimes be done best by breaking it into different parts and setting different teams onto each. It can end up like a 'mother and daughters' story described earlier.

- Cut out a stencil or several and, using washable water-based paint or dye, spray weird footprints, odd slogans or a strange symbol on outside walls or paths around the place. Work out the who/why, etc., of your story first! If a story is not complex enough, a trick is to think of a couple of simple, but totally unrelated stories, then see if you can make them link somehow to form a story that's more interesting that the starter tale.
- Buy a net of cheap satsumas and hang them all over a small tree in the grounds in winter, just out of reach, or raid the kitchens for leftover fruit and put a mixture of fruits on the same tree. New discovery? Escaped pollen from a nearby genetic engineering firm? The effects of radiation and/or global warming? Practical joke?
- Create posters for a missing pet or escapee from a film set or zoo, such as a large reptile, snake or big cat. You can have cute and/or gruesome results in your story, depending on what you tell 'voices' to say or what other 'evidence' you allow to be found.
- Create posters from a local-sounding or secretive protest group, weird sect, or promoters of some bizarre activity, or perhaps posters that seem to have been put up by opposing groups. You can take the story from there or connect this to another story that you have thought up.
- Start or add to stories linked to odd objects students will find, such as an old torn tent pitched in a secret corner or peculiar place; a scatter of bottles and cans of alcohol with a couple of items of very 'bloodied clothing' (red food dye or fake blood on jumble sale items); a hairdryer with a brush and make-up, hidden behind a tree; several empty wallets and purses in a dark place (one with some helpful little lead still inside it); a diary with only one or two very bizarre entries and half a page missing; a heap of clothing beside a lake or river; a 'hidden' parachute; a note about ammunition scribbled on the edge of that week's local paper which also has a particular story or photograph torn out of it, etc.

I hope that you enjoy the creating your own challenging, intriguing and entertaining news scenarios. As you can see, the possibilities and potential complexities are endless!

14 Recounting, spin and bias in journalism

How journalism is ‘developed village gossip’, and some exercises to raise awareness of deliberate and accidental bias in language

Recounting is something we all do naturally and journalists are really just professional ‘recounters’. Their job is to recount facts about a situation in which they usually haven’t been involved themselves. There are, of course, exceptions already mentioned, when journalists can plan ahead to be in newsworthy locations, as is often the case with specialist war, culture, politics or sports reporters, or to place themselves into an ongoing news situation, such as the *aftermath* of an earthquake, burst dam, explosion, political scandal, etc.

In any event, people in the news media are theoretically paid to be accurate in their recounts, but also to be interesting and gripping so, to look at it another way, a news journalist might be thought of as a truthful village gossip, or perhaps a storyteller of facts rather than fiction. Whether or not this is the way it is in the real world can be an interesting debating point to raise in class!

We all recount things to those around us and much of everyday conversation involves recounting. Whether it is in the case of relatively mundane events in our daily lives or more important personal things, we recount orally, in writing (in the form of diaries and on social networking sites), and sometimes more creatively, in the form of poetry or songs about real situations, events or feelings.

From recount to ‘official news’ based on an incident in school

Let’s look at how a relatively small but interesting recount might occur in a school situation and how it might develop from a simple oral recount to a more complex news article.

As children, teachers, parents, visitors or passers-by, we would all inevitably recount to our friends, colleagues and families the details of the horrifying moment in the playground when Little Bill fell off the very top of the climbing frame, bounced spectacularly off someone’s ‘space-hopper’, landed in a crumpled heap (or fell directly from the safety railing at the top of some high secondary school outdoor steps) and ended up lying, quaking spasmodically, on the tarmac with his head in a pool of dark red liquid, causing panic and distress among everyone around him.

Sorry, I know this scenario sounds like any teacher’s nightmare but it caught your attention and so now, to put your mind at rest, I’ll reassure you that, thankfully the liquid turned out to be some form of concentrated raspberry drink he’d had in a plastic bottle in his pocket and the little lad was only quaking because he was laughing so much. However, the moment would have been a relatively dramatic one and have sent out powerful emotional messages to those around Little

Bill and even to those who weren't there but would hear about it.

Any teachers or supervisors present would probably have felt their hearts nearly explode on seeing it happen and so the staffroom and school would have been buzzing later with recounts of the incident. Teachers would tell the headteacher, their colleagues, friends, families, other pupils and even (possibly) some health and safety inspector about it.

Bill's friend John might tell his own teacher who wasn't present, his family, a friend from another school, and so on. Immediately after the incident, those present might recount their views of what they had seen and discuss their opinions of why it happened, why Bill was lucky to have escaped with nothing more than a fright and a good laugh, what Mrs P did when she saw it happen, how loudly the girls with the skipping rope screamed, how Mr J tripped on a flower container as he ran to dial 999, etc.

Within the school day, it might be relatively notable (if very local) news and you can already begin to imagine an interesting mix of facts, inaccurate information, quotes, opinions and rumours forming about the incident and issues linked to it. This could be an example to analyse and use in class as a demonstration of how a recount is really just news which formally becomes news in the newspaper, TV or internet sense of the word if the facts are sufficiently important and/or interesting.

Creating 'witness' statements to highlight aspects of bias and opinion

You might take this (or a similarly dramatic situation that you have imagined in your own school environment) then ask one or two relatively extrovert pupils to tell the 'recount' (without hearing each other doing it) as if the first of them had been there playing on the same frame or sitting on the same steps, and the second had arrived a second after it had happened, then type all their words up for display on the interactive board. You could look at differences in the way they might recount the same incident to a friend or to a teacher or a parent (opinion content, type of language used, what verbs, adjectives, hyperbole, abbreviated note form, etc.), and you could compare those findings with similar analysis of the way you might report it to your headteacher or to an inspector in a safety meeting (you could even write your spontaneous 'verbal report' in advance and perhaps an 'official accident report' as well, for comparison).

Imagining that they are reporters for a school newspaper, you could ask different pairs to make up possible quotes and actions for other witnesses (different aged pupils, teachers, the janitor, a visiting artist, the headteacher, an ambulance person, etc.), and then, based on those diverse facts and quotes, you can write a newspaper article collectively using a laptop and digital projector.

Afterwards, your class/group can go back over the article with you, underlining or highlighting in different colours the emotional words, opinion words or sections, basic verbs, 'vibrant' verbs, connectives, vocabulary differences from different witnesses, etc.

Depending on the age or ability of your students, you could then do the same process a second time over, by imagining (Heaven forbid!) that the accident had actually been disastrous and the red liquid was blood. Perhaps this time you would pretend to be news-hungry reporters for a real paper. The new situation would make dramatic changes to the story lead, the story itself, the witnesses and professionals involved, the official spokesmen, and changes to what witnesses, teachers and children did or said at the time.

Analyses of the story and its language would throw up especially interesting variations in the emotional language used in quotes and through the use of opinion words and phrases, etc. Particularly interesting to look at can be the 'accidental' opinion words used by the newspaper's 'fact-writing' reporter(s) in the news article (e.g. words such as horrific, tragedy, devastated, struck dumb, nightmare, stunned, etc.). You might discuss if these opinions or emotions should normally be found in quotes from those involved rather than in the 'factual' bulk of the article.

It would be helpful to have also previously chosen an example article from a newspaper or website which uses 'accidental' opinion words while reporting a factual news story, in order to highlight this irony of concealed opinion in so-called objective and factual reports. An older or relatively able class could take an article and try to break it down into two different categories: 'accidental opinion' words and phrases, and 'spin' inserted deliberately because of the bias of the newspaper itself.

Working with opinion based on fact

A further interesting exercise would be to try to remove all vestiges of opinion or spin from the class's article or from a well-chosen newspaper article (ignoring opinions in any quotes) and then, after reading your students a couple of different sorts of opinion columns from a newspaper (e.g. official newspaper editorials, columnists' articles and readers' letters), set a task for your students, either collectively or individually, to write a local newspaper's opinion column of the dreadful playground incident described earlier. Ask students to imagine that, as reporters, they have discovered that a similar incident had occurred the previous year in the same place at school to give them something to get their teeth into.

To examine other forms of opinion in papers they could also each, or collectively, create a 'letter to the editor' about the incident in your imaginary newspaper from a 'concerned local parent'. Quick analysis of both of these texts should show plenty of opinion and emotive language, and comparisons between these two texts in both the language and subtlety should be interesting, informative and make your students more aware of deliberate and accidental bias in writing, even sometimes in writing which is supposed to be purely factual and objective.

Another exercise on studying spin, bias and coloured language: 'Two sides to the wonder product'

You can make up your own mini projects to highlight bias and spin in language, tailored to the skills and ability of your group or class.

To inspire you, here's an idea based on a faulty product. Let's say it appears to be a remarkable new kind of satellite navigation device that tells drivers where they are to the nearest few centimetres and will also inform them, in real time, about road conditions, traffic accidents, floods, ice, or any harsh weather approaching them. As a special safety measure, the device immediately takes over control of their vehicle in urgent circumstances, giving it avoidance and re-routing instructions. The only problem is that this highly desirable new product seems to do odd things occasionally, such as redirecting a family of five into a large farm muck heap due to a non-existent road accident around the next bend; suddenly diverting a bus into a tunnel that is too low for that vehicle because it has wrongly decided that a tornado is approaching; or wresting control from the chauffeur of a party of visiting foreign dignitaries, causing their limousine to swerve left down a slimy harbour slipway instead of turning right to be welcomed by the town's mayor – apparently because it has decided a building crane has just fallen into that street.

One small group of students can write the sales leaflet or advert for the wondrous new gizmo while other groups write attributed quotes or more formal reports about wonderful or not so wonderful experiences brought to them or others by the erratic device, including some groups writing from the points of view of those unfortunates described above, some from police, ambulance or consumer protection agencies, etc. The whole class can be involved in working out who they want to be and in producing convincing small pieces of writing using language and 'facts' related to those people's positions and experience with the 'Savvynav', 'Travel Brain' or

whatever you decide to call it. If you want, they can each type them in a font that is readably large when tacked onto the wall around the interactive whiteboard.

When everyone is ready, groups read out their little bits of writing to the whole class. The class becomes collective reporters with you typing on the computer linked to the board, bringing together all these professional and public quotes, statements, reports and adverts, first as a news story in a quality paper then, second, after copying the story, turning it into an equivalent news story in a sensationalistic tabloid paper.

Afterwards, you can ask everyone to point out and comment on the emotive, formal and persuasive elements of each quote/advert/report, etc., the accidental and deliberate use of opinion/spin/bias in them all, and how much any of these elements have been carried into the quality and tabloid news reports. This is a rich exercise which can involve as much time as you decide to allow, and has the advantage of drawing together many of the subtler aspects of language bias which school exercises often treat separately.

15 Beyond print journalism in educational settings

The so-called ‘death of print’ and other discussion points

Many newspapers have been struggling for existence since their heyday during the end of last century and the very first years of the 21st century, and numerous papers have gone out of business, particularly in the USA. Industry experts have brandished confusing statistics and dramatic projections at each other, and argued over whether or not print newspapers are ultimately doomed within the next couple of decades. The true picture is probably more complex, in that many newspapers have been losing circulation steadily while others have been holding their own relatively well. Similarly, some newspapers’ websites have not been making money while others have been financially successful.

Apart from large circulation drops in print newspapers (some of them also linked to current economic factors), one of the main things experts have pointed to that would suggest the future demise of newspapers is the fact that very few young people nowadays consume their news in paper form, but largely through other media. Future readership projections based on this demography have therefore suggested that print journalism will collapse as the generations move on, but no-one can tell if enough of the present generation of young people might also move onto buying print papers when they get older, as they have done traditionally.

The apparent slow demise of news in the printed form is due mostly to the inroads made by the internet and other non-print forms of news distribution such as 24-hour news channels, and the fact that these can provide news coverage in so-called ‘real time’. The old technologies and distribution methods in print journalism are not only slow, but also cumbersome and expensive compared to modern ones. Some leading industry experts predict that eventually only a relatively small number of newspapers may stay in existence, namely some local papers and perhaps a few expensive ‘high end’ nationals for which people might be prepared to pay for the luxury of having them delivered to their door. Even these may only be distributed once a week instead of on a daily basis, as has happened to many local daily and regional newspapers.

How papers still survive

The continued life of a newspaper title appears to be dependent upon adapting the nature of the newspaper and its content to fit with the times and/or developing a commercially successful online version of the paper to keep the business and title afloat. Finding how to make money in new ways from their expensive printing and distribution sides is also essential.

Many newspapers, especially tabloids, rely heavily on so-called ‘celebrity’ news compared to the proportion of ‘hard’ news that they used to carry. This process grew steadily as radio, and then television, became insidious in most people’s lives, building familiarity with charismatic personalities in the sports, arts and entertainment fields. The expansion continued more rapidly because the advent of 24-hour television news and internet news distribution meant that people became less dependent upon papers as their main source of hard news. Areas such as celebrity gossip thus became important ways of attracting potential readers. Newspapers have steadily

adsorbed the features of magazines and now compete with any number of celebrity-featuring magazines themselves.

Even if newspapers are battling to stay in business, it doesn't mean that news consumption itself is dying: in fact quite the reverse. News consumption has been rising steadily during the period of relative decline in the printed news sector, and there has been a rapid ongoing revolution in how people consume their news through continuous innovation in areas like internet news supply tailored to individual interests, and news available on social networking sites, mobile smart-phones, electronic tablet devices, etc. Ironically, a problem for some modern news consumers is that they can be so inundated with news, special interest news and internet social interaction 'news' that they have trouble finding the time and concentration to focus in depth on any one article or subject!

The story form stays fundamentally the same

None of this significantly changes the basics underlying the form and writing of a news article, whether it is in print, broadcast or online. The lessons learned from the Basic Sequencing Exercise generally apply no matter in what format the news story is distributed.

Perhaps one of the main differences, however, is that, online, on mobile phones and on most website main pages, news stories are initially packaged in 'teasers' or small, bite-sized portions, rather than as full articles, as in traditional newspapers. This approach to subjects seems to mirror the way items appear in 'bite-sized' pieces on review sites and social networking systems such as Twitter and Facebook and is caused by the nature of the internet itself.

Depending on the media and technology available to the consumer at any one time or place, he or she can then choose to follow stories in more depth on that site, or online, or via other broadcast media online such as television or radio, and there's an ever-growing network of web links and instant connections between digital forms of distribution to assist in quickly finding as many related stories and background facts as a hungry news consumer could wish for.

For some school teachers, running journalism projects involving non-print forms of publishing might initially sound more daunting than concentrating on the printed page, but it is generally less work because you or your students can quickly and easily 'publish' work produced in the form of a simple school, class or news website, in a blog, in a 'topic website', etc., instead of producing a print newspaper, which can take a certain amount of time and expertise to bring into being if you want a convincing quality product at the end of the process.

It isn't the purpose of this book to delve deeply into the technical details involved in any one form of publishing work, but more to suggest ideas that teaching professionals might use, including ways of inspiring students. However, setting up a website is easy nowadays and most schools in the UK and other developed countries have access to 'virtual learning environments' or 'learning platforms' which are intranets for single schools or groups of schools. Help is not far away, as many teachers in school have reasonable skills in these areas (as do a number of older pupils), there is usually a technical specialist on the staff and some advice is available online.

First, let's look at some of the non-print areas of news distribution you and your pupils could explore, and then at some suggestions of how they might be used within class projects.

Non-print ways of publishing

For non-print ways of publishing the work you could:

- Publish students' work on a purpose-made website or on virtual pages of a learning platform, either available to the class or school only, available to the greater school network, or open to

the entire internet. This might be very basic and only have news articles on it from a journalism project or topic, or it might be more sophisticated and contain things like news, features, selected creative writing, blogs and 'opinion' columns, illustrations, photographs, adverts, etc.
- Produce 'web-look' pages using a desktop publishing program such as Microsoft Publisher.
- Produce virtual newspaper pages by putting together several text pages, sections, photos, etc., onto one PowerPoint slide. Several groups can work on different articles or parts. (These slides can also be printed on A4 or A3.)
- Record news bulletins or a news review show in sound as a 'radio broadcast' or podcast.
- Record your news bulletins or news review show on video, as a 'television broadcast'.
- Do the above and save it on YouTube – but you may have to get permission for your system's filters to allow you to access YouTube, and may also need to set it up so that the item is a 'closed area' within the site.
- Make a voiceover of the programme and then illustrate the action with simple photographic, puppet or Plasticine animation. Alternatively you can include snippets of video, using a program such as Movie Maker, or put together a series of digital stills using a program such as Photo Story (available as a free download). In any of the above you can have mini teams of pupils working on different parts.
- Act the news programme out 'live', either in front of the rest of the class or in assembly, as if the presentation is taking place in an actual news studio. You would need an 'anchor' person/people, studio presenters and specialist correspondents, and the rest of the cast can act out the necessary people, professionals, reporters and interviewees as if in various locations relevant to the stories.

Publishing on a website or learning platform

Publishing work on a website or digital 'learning environment' is relatively easy and the finished arrangement could resemble, for instance, an internet news website with hyperlinked pages. It would be good to begin by taking a look at a few online sites on the interactive whiteboard as some students will need to become familiar with the look of those sorts of sites and layouts. Some suggestions might be the BBC *Newsround* site (especially for younger students), the BBC main news site, some varied national newspaper sites, some of the internet service providers' own websites and some exemplary school websites. You may have problems with your system filtering out specific sites or pages and you might want to take a peek at the content on some of those pages just before you show them on the interactive board to students, although there is probably little in the news media that they haven't already glimpsed on television, their older siblings' computer or in relatives' tabloid newspapers!

As well as asking your students to find similarities in the way web and print news stories are constructed, it might also be useful to ask them to make comparisons between, say, the layouts of stories on the front and inner pages of a newspaper, and the layouts of equivalent stories on various sorts of websites. You could take a quick look at the different use of space, layout, the number of sentences in each paragraph, how long the initial articles are in each case, the choice of fonts and point size, the varied usage of colour and background, the use and placement of photos, video clips, hyperlinks, etc., and your students could decide on a model to follow when they put together their own web pages, explaining in their workbooks or on linked web note pages, why they have chosen to do things in certain ways.

Using scenarios, stories, plays or topics as 'news initiators'

As stated earlier, your students' web pages could simply involve straightforward individual news stories, or the whole collection could be developed into a virtual newspaper with a main page and linked pages of news, features, selected creative writing, blogs and 'opinion' columns, reviews, e-letters to the editor, video clips, illustrations, photographs, adverts, puzzles, etc., with 'inward' links to them and links between the pages. These virtual newspapers could be completely based on fictitious news scenarios; on all sorts of school subject areas and/or on a current educational topic such as Ancient Egyptians; 'hot news' drawn from different parts of a Shakespeare play; or 'news' created from a story, play or film script being studied in class (or one just chosen by you for this purpose).

The latter might involve looking at the main event(s) in the story from different points of view, such as made-up interviews with each of the principal characters and even random witnesses that might be in the story or play setting. As added inspiration, you might decide to start with the students creating a dramatic scenario of that part of the story – the semi-frozen moment just at or after the most significant bit of action – or simply freeze that point of the action in the play.

Either actually, or in their minds, your young reporters could interview the characters who are 'onstage' at that point in the play and even characters not present at that moment. You would want to have already brainstormed with those who are playing characters in order to help them build up relevant 'quotes' to say. Students could either video and edit all these interviews before placing them on the website or report in writing that is gathered together under an umbrella section of text.

If you want to move more quickly and don't mind losing the fizz and extra dimension of a live scenario section, you could set your pupils straight onto the tasks of brainstorming ideas for questions and making up suitable answers for the characters in the story or play, then writing it all into their web reports.

Increasing and linking learning outcomes

Different writing teams might be encouraged to choose to 'spin' the book or play-based news story to make it more favourable to a certain character or group of characters and less favourable to the favoured hero or heroine. Other teams could change the focus of spin in their versions. Some teams might write web 'blogs' as if they were created by certain story or play characters, trying to 'spin' that character's particular diary writing, news and opinion and perhaps attempting to write in the same quality and tone of language that the character might use. Some teams might write the story in the style, and with the bias of, a sensation and celebrity-fixated downmarket tabloid or equivalent website, and others could also write it in the style of a quality broadsheet paper, or a BBC-type website.

You can introduce any current curricular foci of which you need students to be aware, such as the correct use of speech marks and other punctuation, finding ways of injecting active verbs, the use of varied sentence openers, etc.

For some groups of pupils you might hold their attention especially effectively by choosing as your news creation source a recent dramatic episode of a popular television soap such as *EastEnders* or *Hollyoaks*, or even a real or imagined episode of a family action drama on television such as *Doctor Who* (especially one set on Earth). You can bring in as many of the suggestions described above as you want, such as interviewing all the characters present just after a dramatic moment, changing the 'spin' to favour different characters, linking to specific foci, etc.

There is a wealth of learning outcomes available from these kinds of journalistic activities, and we will look at a few more ideas for the 'journalistic' use of websites and learning platforms in schools in the final chapter of this book.

16 A few suggestions for making a project newspaper

Laying out and making up a simple newspaper is enjoyable and quite easy if you are relatively familiar with desktop publishing (DTP) packages such as Microsoft Publisher or QuarkXPress. The only drawback is that to put together a sizeable paper and do a fairly professional job of it can require a bit of personal time unless you know someone who can help who is fluent and fast in working with this type of program.

You may well have Microsoft Publisher in your school or education centre's system or on your computer at home as part of Microsoft Office, or a similar package as part of another office system. Even if you haven't used something like Publisher before, you only need to experiment playfully with it for a short while to get the feel of how to use it sufficiently well to put together a simple but attractive newspaper comprising your students' work.

If you feel slightly daunted by the thought of this task there will usually be another member of staff in school who has the expertise and enthusiasm to either mentor and assist you or put it together themselves. It may also be that your IT co-ordinator or technical person will be able to help.

In secondary school, particularly computer-literate, older students will either have had experience of using DTP packages or will be so fast at learning how to use one they will happily take on the task of putting together your little newspaper, possibly even at home or in lunch hours. The best situation might be to have a small team of two or three older secondary students working together on it. Some able, older students, who have really got the feel for both the task and the software, can often make up pages of a newspaper at an astonishing rate, and these are useful organisational and presentational skills for them to carry into later life.

Project newspapers may vary from a single A4 or A3 sheet produced by individuals, pairs or small groups of students, through small project, class or form newspapers, right up to the production of professional-looking school or college newspapers. There is no reason why a teacher can't use different variations of these within a year, depending on what fits in best with curricula, projects and workload, but the key is to start actually using news forms and formats regularly so that they become available tools for improving organisational, presentational, language and learning skills.

Young people love making newspapers and news websites for all the reasons already described, such as the feeling of taking on 'real' and more adult roles and the pleasure of having been involved in creating a complex and professional item of which they can be proud.

Making the material into a newspaper

Suggested stages in organising material produced and making it up into a newspaper are:

- *Insist that your students produce all their work in the same agreed form*, font and point size (e.g. always in Times New Roman point 12, or possibly point 14 to make it easier for you to

read onscreen from behind them). Also ask that they only use a simple tab at the beginning of each paragraph, and *do not* put any Word Art in the text or use space bar spaces to move text along or down, or put line spaces between paragraphs. Remind them to place any suggested headline at the top in the same font and point size, and to type the by-lines (first and last names) of those who worked on the story at the bottom in italics. If you need to credit them after or before the article or on an 'editorial panel' somewhere, it helps you to have the correct spelling of their names to hand and it also means that you can quickly find to whom you need to talk about a particular story. If they don't keep to these rules, putting the articles into something like Microsoft Publisher will then be slower for you, because you'll have to get rid of all their varied styles, formatting, and random spaces before redoing it in the DTP program!

- Ask students to *save their work under a simple, clearly explanatory story title*, but explain they must add their names to that as there's a chance there could be stories on a similar theme or with the same title. You might mix stories up, leave some out due to thinking that they are the same, or find that someone has deleted one because it was saved under the same title as another story.
- As they finish and edit each piece, have them *save each item produced into appropriate folders* that you've had set up in categories such as unedited news, unedited features, unedited opinion and comment, unedited reviews, un-cropped photos, illustrations, adverts, puzzles, clip-art, etc.
- Even though the students should have edited their writing by this point, either by themselves or with editing partners, you might like the idea of setting up a little 'editorial board' of trusted student writers (or visiting student teachers, or talented pre-university students) who can go through all the work in pairs, or on their own if highly competent, to check and improve the accuracy, sequencing, meaning, sense, writing, grammar, spelling, punctuation and 'tightness' of articles. Otherwise (or even after that stage) you may want to edit all the writing yourself or with colleagues to *bring it up to 'publication quality'* because, if lots of people are going to see your paper, you might feel it ought to show a high standard of writing. As always, the quality, and the related time you spend to achieve it, depends on the time available, what you want as a final outcome and how professional you feel it needs to be. Personally, if the newspaper is a major part of a project, I prefer to raise the quality to as high a standard as possible because I know children can benefit from seeing all of their work edited tightly – in the same way a young professional reporter might learn from having his work tightened and changed by editors within his or her own paper.
- As all of the work is finally edited and improved, *move each perfected article over to 'mirror folders'* of the first folders (marked 'edited news', 'edited features', etc). That way, you will have a good idea of the amount of material that needs to go into the paper, a feel for how many pages it might take up and whether, if there is enough of it, you might be able to lay out sections of the newspaper according to type (news, features, opinion, reviews, sports, etc.) as in real life newspapers.
- *Choose and crop photographs* taken, either of anything relevant to the stories or of generic photos or clipart from the internet. Photos might be of dramatic moments in the news scenarios, or in the tableaux or drama versions of plays, etc. If you are working with older and more able pupils, they can do that task themselves after a little input. It would be worth looking closely at photographs used in different types of newspaper beforehand, both for yourself and with your young journalists. Things to note especially are what is included in the field of view and what is not, the angle and position of the camera in more unusual or dramatic shots, and so on. If in doubt, err mostly on the side of cropping tightly rather than loosely. It's worth looking a little at this on the interactive board with the group, cropping frames around different photographs increasingly closely in order to find which give the most dramatic view or

explanation of the story, or best portray emotions, action, events, etc. It's worth remembering that there are some pictures in which chopping off the tops of people's heads leads to a more intense view, even if the finished version also deliberately includes someone else's face or a key object. The worst thing is often dead space around a subject or event, such as lots of sky above people's heads.

- *Decide on the shape and size of your newspaper.* Hopefully you will have thought about this long before you get to this point! If you are going to print your paper, its size and shape might depend on available paper and the maximum size of paper that goes through your available printers. If you are going to run photocopies of it from an initial colour print of each page, you need to think ahead about what size of paper runs through your copier and whether it will be in colour or black and white. For practicality we sometimes printed the originals in colour on A4 sheets for use on display boards, then photocopied them onto A3 sheets (2 x A4 to a folded sheet of A3), with the final copies either in black and white or colour depending on the hardware available. Some colleges and schools are lucky to have semi-professional printing facilities, in which case contact your print room first to see what might be possible. Sometimes schools can organise a sponsorship printing deal with a local printer or a local newspaper in return for a sponsorship advert by the printers in the paper.
- *Make one template for the front page, one for the back page, and a standard template for all the other pages,* with hidden guides for the column rulers, etc. You, or the collective group, or a small design team of students, could create a design for the front page template, including the newspaper's name, font, Word Art, logo, the disclaimer line at the bottom, the date, etc., and possibly things like a horizontal or vertical 'teaser strip' at the top, bottom or side, where catchy mini-headlines attract readers to articles on inside pages.
- *Make up the front page first,* choosing the most important news articles for it, making a text box for each headline and a separate one for each main body of story text. Although you might do this yourself for speed, *it can be useful to work with at least the front page on the interactive board, taking suggestions from the entire group* or class, discussing such things as how news stories often spill across more columns at the start than they do at the end, how they connect visually to the width of headlines, how they often wrap around photographs, etc. Discuss and use a bigger point size and bold type for the first lead paragraph or two in each story, and a smaller point size for the rest of it. To gain space for bigger type for the lead, big headlines and a fair-sized photo, think about running only the first parts of headline stories on page one, and the remainder of those stories on inside pages (don't forget to put a 'continued on page –' and 'continued from page 1' line in small italics at the bottom and top of sections. You will need to drop the second part of the text into another text box inside, of course.
- *Drop related photos into picture boxes* and try them out in different sizes and positions relative to the text box(es) of each related headline and story. If you are assisted by someone with some ability in DTP, your class could work in twos and threes at a time with that person, laying out and making up parts of pages, improving their creative design and thinking skills in the process. Don't forget to make text boxes for captions to go with each picture.
- You might *look at page layouts together* in newspapers and magazines and note how pictures, graphics, colour, layout and columns are used to break up the text effectively as well as to relate things to each other. You can discuss the size and position of visuals (photos, illustration, headlines, adverts, etc.), how they might visually fit best on a page, how to make visuals on double pages balance each other in some kind of way, how this balance changes in a two-page spread, etc.
- *Continue with making up the paper* by dropping text, headlines and photos in and choosing which stories should feature in the most prominent positions (either on the front page or at the top of other pages) until most of the stories and other materials are used up. As you work

towards the end of the newspaper or of each section, you will have to stop a few times to try to work out roughly how the rest of the material is going to fit, what is going to go where, and what you are going to do if you think you might end up with a story too many or a blank page left over. If one of these is the case, you may have to put part or all of some stories in bigger or smaller point size or add in, take out, blow up or reduce some of the photos by using the diagonal tabs, etc. If you find you have too much or too little material to fit into an even number of pages, you may have to edit down or cut off the ends of a few less cogent stories, or fill space by creating some 'adverts' for the paper such as upcoming things in school, a list and/or photos of contributors, etc.

- *Hopefully by now you will have worked out how to circulate your newspaper!* It might just be a class or form paper, or a paper you put on display boards in your classroom, library or around the school or department, or it may be a more ambitious production which is handed out to every pupil in the year or school. Some of the most exciting projects with which I have been involved have been put together quite professionally by groups of secondary school students in conjunction with existing local newspapers, some of which have distributed their modest 'newspaper' as a special supplement within their commercial paper. Most local newspapers want to appear socially active in their community, and they know that good PR, sales and market awareness can come from working with local schools, so it's always worth asking. They may even offer to help train your students or assist them in editing their stories if you suggest it in a positive way!

Further reading

I have not yet come across another book or website which discusses journalism activities that include the use of dramatic scenarios, but you can find some further information on making a traditional classroom or school newspaper if you type something like 'ideas for making a newspaper in school' into your internet search box. Mostly commercial links will appear, but some may give you further ideas for creating newspapers in an educational setting. Many sell lesson plans and templates such as interview note sheets for young reporters, but you can easily make these up yourself if you think you might find them helpful.

The BBC's CBBC children's site lists many ideas for classroom newspaper topics, many of them based on current issues: http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_3290000/newsid_3292300/3292327.stm

A few links are also available for making a non-print version of a newspaper under search titles such as 'create a school newspaper online'.

17 Headlines and headline games

What does a headline do?

A headline usually tells the reader the main facts of the story in the least possible words and it doesn't normally add or imply anything more. Having said that, headlines may also have other roles, such as to tease or entice readers or entertain them with amusing puns.

A quick way to begin teaching the various roles of headlines is with the well-known acronym HEADS. Here's how it works:

Headlines:

H = *Highlight the latest news*, introduce stories and focus attention on what is interesting and/or important in an article.

E = *Entice readers* with interesting or important facts. Sometimes this can be done by not fully explaining the story yet.

A = *Advertise significant stories* by their size and position. Bigger headlines are normally placed at the top of each page where the more important stories are to be found.

D = *Decorate pages* with varied typography, break up the boredom of unchanging text and make each page more readable.

S = *Summarise* key elements of the story (usually based on facts mentioned in the lead).

The first one or two sentences of a news story are a summary of the most important and interesting facts (MIAIF), and the headline is usually a sort of summary of the summary, or at least of part of it, to the point that it has, at times, been described as the 'super lead' of the story. In the body of the article itself, the story lead (the first paragraph or couple of sentences) normally contains all (or at least 5 out of 6) of the 'Five Ws and an H', but a headline might sometimes only contain the *who* and *wha*t of the story, so the reader has to burrow into the main text to discover the *where*, *when*, *why* and/or *how*, in order to gain a satisfactory understanding of the story.

Perhaps surprisingly for something so short, a headline can also be much more than just a compact summary of a key point or two. We will look at this more as the chapter progresses.

As a 'summary', a headline is so concise that it usually can't cover all the main points that will appear in the first one or two sentences which follow it, especially if it's a dual or multiple lead story in which there's more than one main dramatic point of interest. For instance, in the three part Challenging Changes story for older students, the lead in the initial version is single and fairly straightforward when based on the initial information received at the time, apart from the necessity of a qualifier because the reporters can't be sure of the exact number of deaths to begin with. So the lead point in that version is largely to do with the number of deaths, followed by generally what happened (multiple pile-up), where it happened (northbound carriageway of the M717), etc.

As more information comes in, the story becomes more complex because it involves an incredibly famous boy band, so the band becomes one of the lead points along with the number

of deaths. Once these new facts have arrived, the deaths of band members and the mega-famous singer's serious injuries have to be mentioned at the start along with the other lead points. It becomes very hard to write a news story's beginning containing this much complexity without the first sentences growing into something ridiculously large and unwieldy, and writing a small enough headline for a story with this many key points can become equally problematic.

There are three options to dealing with this problem, the first of which isn't a commonly taken one:

(1) The headline could be ludicrously long:

Mail deliveries to and from abroad disrupted by freak invasion
of hundreds of rare bats which has stopped work at the
International Postal Centre in Chiswick, London

or a little shorter:

Foreign mail disrupted by freak invasion of rare bats
which has stopped work at London depot

(2) It could concentrate on only one or two of several main points, but lose some slightly less important ones:

Foreign mail disrupted by invasion of bats

However, this makes it sound as though the setting of the story might possibly even be abroad and it doesn't mention the international mail centre in London or the stoppage of work. Alternatively, the headline could be shorter again:

Foreign mail disrupted by bats

This is the same as above but without the dramatic and emotive word 'invasion'. Or, perhaps:

Bat's cause mail chaos

This is tight and teasingly interesting, but possibly confusing to readers because it doesn't explain that only foreign mail is being affected. How about a shorter, jokier, teasing and tabloid, but even more confusing, headline:

Bats foul mail

The pun on the word 'foul' is a tabloid device but might be used by 'bridge' papers which position themselves between the more sensational tabloids and the serious quality 'broadsheets'. Alternatively, one could backtrack and add a key part to the latter, to end up with:

Bats foul foreign mail

which has the same tabloid elements but more accuracy.

(3) The headline could be divided into parts (known as 'decks'), for instance, into a large-sized but short main headline with a longer sub-heading beneath:

Foreign mail disrupted:
invasion of bats at London depot stops work

This works well in most situations because it probably has all the necessary elements and yet allows for its main headline to be sufficiently large. It is also quite typical of the sort of extended headline link that online news sites often employ.

Using shorter words

Another trick used in writing a cogent headline isn't simply cutting down the number of words in it, but finding ways to change words into shorter synonyms. For instance, 'former' is often changed to 'ex', 'attempt' might be changed to 'try', 'employer' to 'boss', 'gigantic' to 'giant', 'journey' to 'trip', 'excitement' to 'thrill', etc. A professional headline writer has a head full of specialist vocabulary involving short equivalents for commonly occurring words in news stories. Of course, the use of some of these words can be dependent upon the type of newspaper in which they are to appear. For instance, a serious quality paper is unlikely to use the short synonym 'heist' instead of 'bank robbery', or 'grass' instead of 'informer', though it may use a fashionable term such as 'supergrass' (meaning super-informer) if it becomes ubiquitous enough.

Newspapers that are prepared to be more playful in their headlines can sometimes find shorter and more original words through the use of puns and other wordplay, such as in utilising the word 'foul' in the example above or, 'Bulldozers still on M89!' emblazoned above a photo story about traffic chaos caused when a herd of cows is discovered sleeping in the middle of a just-opened motorway.

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The following short section looks at possible styles and forms of headlines. Some teachers may think this information too detailed for their purposes, but the content will be of use for those organising school newspapers and can also be the subject of experiments by pupils in various types of presentation work. Others may wish to give their groups a sense of these variations as this can help students to become more thoughtful news consumers and more consciously aware of design qualities and techniques employed by news distributors and other media.

Types of headlines

There are four main types:

ALL CAPITALS HEADLINES
which are relatively rarely used nowadays

PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY ARE SURPRISINGLY DIFFICULT AND ANNOYING TO READ, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEY ARE LONG OR THERE ARE SEVERAL OF THEM PRINTED ON THE SAME PAGE.

Capitals and Lowercase Headlines
have been used for a long time. All words in them have initial capitals except for unimportant ones such as conjunctions, articles and prepositions of fewer than four or five letters.

Down-style headlines
have become increasingly common in recent years and are strongly favoured by most internet news sites, perhaps because they are faster to type and because they seem less formal in this age of informal emails, clothing and behaviour. Just as in 'normal' text, all letters are lowercase except for the initial one in the line or any proper nouns, and this makes it easily readable.

all lowercase headlines
are often more of a statement of trendy design than a common newspaper style themselves. They tend to be used in publications that are self-consciously stylish, such as a newspaper, magazine or supplement for, or about, the arts or fashion.

Forms of headlines

There are many different variants in headlines so, to avoid getting bogged down with technicalities, here are just a few key sorts:

T h e b a n n e r h e a d l i n e i s d r a m a t i c a n d r u n s r i g h t a c r o s s t h e p a g e !
A version of this, called a 'skyline', runs across the front page above the masthead or flag, that is, above the name and logo of the newspaper. A 'cross-line' head crosses all the columns of the story to which it relates.

Flush left
headlines
do what they say
These short, two to four line headlines are set to the left and leave some white space on the right. They are one of the most frequently used forms nowadays.

Side heads
run alongside
a story
They are most commonly set flush to the right and usually appear somewhere around, or just above, the middle of the article.

Headlines break loose
Separate parts found taking over two lines!

The example above is called a 'kicker' headline in which a small headline introduces (or 'kicks off') a larger one that introduces the story or feature article. The first is often underlined, one or the other is usually in italics, and there is normally a small line space between them. The kicker is usually about half the length in print of the main headline or slightly less and, just as is the case in single-line heads, no words are repeated within the entire headline block.

A kind of reversal of that form is when the main headline has a smaller 'deck' beneath it, similar to a sub-heading, such as in:

Politicians brawl in the Commons
PM 'utterly appalled'

The first line is the headline for the whole story and the second is, in effect, a kind of sub-heading teaser for a key part of it.

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Opinion in headlines . . . is that a fact?

As with the stories to which they relate, headlines for news reports should, theoretically, be factual and not involve opinion or comment. Opinion is meant to be placed in clear sections of the newspaper and not muddled up with the 'objective' world of factual reporting. I say 'theoretically' because in the world of newspapers, as in the world of humans, it is sometimes quite difficult for us to recognise what represents a pure fact and what has been shaded by opinion.

At the simplest level, if two countries were at war, what the press of one country might describe as a '**fabulous victory!**' won by '**great heroes**' might be described by the press of the opposing country as a '**bloody massacre!**' caused by '**war criminals**'. Both these sets of possible head-

line abstracts are obviously heavily spun with opinion. While it is possible to conjecture that this situation only occurs because one side is not a democratic country, cultural, historical and societal bias in thinking can also creep into news distributors' headlines in democratic countries with the freest of free presses.

As a similar example of how this might happen, a BBC Television programme, *The Real Dambusters*, tried to seek out the true facts behind the famous Second World War bombing raid against German dams in which dangerous low-flying techniques and specially designed 'bouncing bombs' were used. Although the producers and presenter of the programme were initially effusive about the bravery, training and technical skills involved in preparing for and carrying out the raids, they also came to sympathise strongly with the great pain caused to thousands of German civilians whose homes and families were washed away in man-made tsunamis when the dams burst.

After interviewing people in both countries, they found that, for many British and Americans, the 'Dambusters' episode is still a source of cultural pride and has, for some, even reached almost mythical proportions. A major film was made of it, a famous piece of classical music was created with that title, and many programmes have looked at the development of the revolutionary 'bouncing bomb' and the training and daring of the air raid itself.

To modern German people, however, the programme's interviews showed that the episode is thought of as a great tragedy of war (deliberately blowing up dams during war is now classified by the Geneva Convention as a crime against humanity). You can imagine how this historical and cultural difference could still affect the way headlines might be written for any modern news stories associated with the raid or the characters involved in it. On the British side the passing of one of the elderly men involved in the bombing was referred to recently as the '**death of a hero**', while the death of a German villager who had managed to survive the flooding might equally be referred to as the '**death of a brave survivor**' in a news report in that country.

A mini workshop on biased headlines

These are all interesting and thoughtful points for possible group discussion and you could invent a little challenge for your own students to see what opposing headlines they might come up with in two or even three different national, social or cultural contexts – perhaps something recently in the news. Another possibility would be to look at how different groups or individuals in a novel or play that your group is studying might write a headline for some dramatic moment in that book. For example, they could imagine Banquo's family-run newspaper writing about his treatment by Macbeth or, rather, about the murder and their suspicions over who ordered it. How would the students manage to slip in hints of wrongdoing by the Thane of Cawdor without making it seem like comment? They could write headlines written from the bias of one side of the story or another for an event in a *Harry Potter* novel*, Lord of the Rings*, *Avatar*, a well-known Disney film, or any current film, programme or book.

Most newspapers also have their own (or their owner's) political bias which inevitably affects not only the choice, spin, size and placement of any story, and the way that story is written, but also the way some of the headlines are written. The *Daily Mail* in the UK, for instance, has been frequently lampooned for its alleged anti-immigration stance, and panellists on satirical television shows have made jokes involving real and pretend *Daily Mail* headlines that purportedly show the paper to be almost absurdly obsessed with levels of immigration. Comedians have joked about the *Mail*'s alleged use of spin and spun headlines to make mundane or poorly related stories seem to back its editorial opinions on these issues. Of course the majority of (or perhaps all) newspapers inevitably have their own political and/or issue-specific bias.

What you throw away is as important as what you keep

Working with headline creation can involve setting up useful little thinking and writing challenges for your group. Creating succinct, accurate, catchy headlines can be an excellent exercise in identifying (sometimes quite subtle) key information and also in learning to sacrifice other potentially strong ideas in order to keep the punchy character required. Most professionals will say that, as a good writer, what you throw away is as important as what you keep, and sorting out the wheat from the chaff in creating a strong headline for a complex story can involve this process in a relatively manageable way.

Let's take a quick look at the qualities of different types of headlines before going on to look at some suggestions for simple headline-writing exercises and games.

Headlines are usually several of the following:

- brief (or relatively so);
- catchy;
- cogent (they often concisely and accurately describe a situation);
- written in the present tense (usually, but not always!);
- interesting (because they summarise some of the most important and interesting facts);
- teasing (because they don't, won't or can't tell the whole story, and often deliberately don't answer some key aspects such as the *why* element, for example);
- playful or cheeky – they can use puns, or references to popular or traditional culture, etc., deliberate misspellings, colloquialisms, reversals, or play with the boundaries of accepted good taste;
- 'musically' catchy, if they employ rhymes, alliteration, rhythmic patterning, assonance, etc.;
- typographically different to the stories below them, in that they are larger and sometimes use a different font. They might use initial capitals (though not in some papers or websites) and sometimes all the letters are capitalized. They are normally in bold type and occasionally in reverse print (white on black) or colour.

Some examples of the above

You may wish to share these examples with your group.

- Brief (or relatively so). Note that many employ an active verb:

Dog Bites Man **Golfer Dies** **Village Explodes** **Time, Gentlemen!**

Chip Lovers' Demo **Volcano Erupts** **Revolution!** **Caught Napping!**

Train Derailed (*i.e. rather than sentence-like such as* **A Local Train has been Derailed Near Penrith Possibly Due to A Section of Bent Track)**

- Catchy or surprising:

Village explodes **Man Bites Dog** **Fish don't swim** **Swimmer Flies**

What knot? **Trial by cheese** **Officers' mess** **A Big Tweet**

- Cogent (i.e. tight and to the point. It might briefly describe a news fact, event or situation):

Golfer Dies **PM sacks cabinet** **Spacecraft Lost** **President Quits**

Men Live Longer **Boxers Harm Brains** **Britons Are Fat**

- Interesting (because they summarise some of the most important and interesting facts):

Headache Drug 'Cures' Heart Attacks **Tomatoes reduce sunburn**

Design flaw means bridges might fail **Deep-Frozen Skier Survives**

Exercise Helps Prevent Diabetes **Eighty storeys float on mud**

- Teasing (because they don't or can't tell the whole story, and often deliberately don't answer some key aspects such as the *why* or *how* elements, in order that the reader wants to know more and reads on):

Scary Noodles! **Deep-Frozen Skier Survives** **Naked Cheek**

Would YOU eat here? **Elephants on ice** **Drowning *not* waving!**

Eighty storeys float on mud **Swimmer Flies** **Tara's Not Telling**

- Playful, cheeky or 'laddish', headlines often use puns or references to popular or traditional culture, misspellings, colloquialisms, reversals, or play with the boundaries of accepted good taste:

Man Bites Dog **Naked Cheek!** **Singing star falls flat**

GOTCHA! *This infamous headline from* The Sun *– after an Argentinean cruiser was sunk by British torpedoes during the Falklands War – covered much of the front page:* The Sun*, 4 May 1982.*

IT'S THE SUN WOT WON IT! *Cheeky front page headline claiming* The Sun *had caused the Conservative Party to win the 1992 UK general election:* The Sun*, 11 April 1992.*

Ronnie's Not a Roll-on Stone *This was a story in which an ex-lover alleged that Ronnie Wood of the Rolling Stones didn't smell very fresh:* News of the World*, 17 January 2010.*

A Beach of a Landing! *This refers to jumbo jets nearly blowing people over on a beach at the end of a Caribbean runway.* The Sun*, 16 January 2010.*

Leek for My Stew *A photo story with a picture of pop singer Rod Stewart's girlfriend playfully hitting him on the head with a leek at a market.* The Sun*, 19 January 2010.*

- Musically catchy, because they employ rhymes, alliteration, assonance, rhythmic flow, etc.:

Miles Smiles **Flying Pharaohs Take Off** **Singing stars fall flat**

SHAME AGAIN *News of the World*, 1 January 2010

Lee's Trees Are the Bees' Knees!

Pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake, Pat's on the bake! **Week's Knees Freeze**

- In the present tense (but not always!):

Golfer Dies **Volcano Erupts** **PM Sacks Cabinet** **Stork Comes Early**

Plague of Ants Caused by Warm Weather **Brits Are Fattest in Europe**

Peace Declared in Vashistan **It's A Race Against Time!** **Politics Stinks!**

President Promotes New Bill **Loser Sues** **Painter Survives 20 Storey Fall**

There are exceptions to this: headlines are sometimes written in the past tense when the story is adding something new to a story that has already, or previously, been news:

Painter Who Fell 20 Storeys Was Waving to Milkman

Death of Queen's Trees Was Due to 'Careless Use of Weedkiller'

It is also possible that a headline would be tightened by taking the verb out, yet leaving the meaning clear:

Brits: Fattest in Europe **Currency Stronger Last Month**

Death of Queen's Trees Due to 'Careless Use of Weedkiller'

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Let's have a quick look at other possibilities for this last headline.

A tighter form for this header would be **'Careless Use of Weedkiller' Killed Queen's Trees** and even tighter might be **'Weedkiller' Killed Queen's Trees**.

If any more text was removed it might lose much of its appeal because it would then contain too few of the most interesting/important facts, and could also lack suitable accuracy. For instance, **Weedkiller Killed Trees** sounds fairly uninteresting because it doesn't say *where*, *when*, *why* or, most importantly in this case, contain the key *who* element. It would also probably be legally risky for the newspaper to print the first word without the speech marks because they indicate that somebody (but not the newspaper) claimed that the cause of the trees' demise was weedkiller. Some other person or expert might then say that it wasn't weedkiller that had caused the problem, or a gardener or other person apparently accused of putting weed killer there might sue the newspaper because of the slight to his or her reputation.

'Weedkiller' Killed Trees is not only safer for the paper, it is also vaguely teasing because a reader might want to know why there is some doubt built into that statement, who might have claimed that, what might have actually happened, etc. However, **Queen's Trees Killed** is more interesting than the previous version of the headline because it mentions someone very famous and it also teases the reader by not saying how or why the trees might have been killed. However, it's a little vague and the 'weedkiller' element appears fairly crucial to the story, so it might seem a bit of a cheat, and would lack that key news value, if weedkiller wasn't mentioned.

It would be useful to discuss with a capable group why this initial headline has speech marks around part of it, how that part contains a partial quote from someone, and why keeping that word in 'quotes' may protect the newspaper from being sued if the information in the quote is wrong. Of course, the answer depends largely on the reliability and authority of the source. If it was just another gardener who said it, the quote could be suspect and require the quotation marks, but if the quote was part of the summation of an official enquiry it would be safe to use without them, although putting in the marks still shows that someone said it.

Just to be even more confusing, a version of this headline might still appear in the present tense, as in **'Weedkiller' Kills Queen's Trees** and it can be quite hard for students to understand why it might appear either in the past or present tense. If the trees are still dying and an expert has just made this quote, then the present participle is the obvious choice: **'Weedkiller' is Killing Queen's Trees**, although **'Weedkiller' Killing Queen's Trees** would be preferable as it's tighter. If the trees had died some time ago and the results of a study or enquiry have just been released, then the past tense would be used.

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An exercise on tightening a headline

When working on headlines with your group, you might want to use the following ideas and/or create your own based on a familiar subject, topic or school story. The first little workshop session starts by using a ridiculously long headline and then asking the group to collectively cut it down.

Let's say a story in local paper involved a 16-year-old lad falling off a cliff and dying at a well-known, scenic area where families picnic. The headline might read:

> **A sixteen-year-old local boy called Fred Jones has fallen off a fifty-five foot cliff while showing off to some girls at the well-known local beauty and picnic site called Hangman's Hand, and he died due to serious internal injuries and also head injuries**

except for the obvious fact that this so-called headline isn't really a headline and is so cumbersome and ridiculous it would never make it into even the most appallingly written local paper! In fact, it's not really a headline at all but an un-sequenced summary of the MIAIF of the story.

You should ask your students to make it a tighter by first noting what the most important and interesting facts are and sequencing those. Of course, by the time the headline writer gets to do his job in a real newspaper, the writer of the article will already have identified and sequenced the most important and interesting facts and based his story on this sequence, so the headline writer's job will have been made easier and he will also have a few 'tricks of the trade' shortcuts to use as well.

You might begin by asking the group to identify and list all of the facts, and see if they have come up with the following list.

Key facts in the order given in the above headline:

He was a sixteen-year-old boy.
He lived locally.
He was called Fred Jones.
He fell off a cliff.
The cliff was fifty-five feet high.
He was showing off to some girls at the time.
It was at a well-known local beauty spot and picnic site.
The beauty spot was called Hangman's Hand.
He died.
He had serious internal injuries.
He also had head injuries.

Then ask the group to sequence the list of facts.
For a local paper, those facts might be grouped in order of interest and importance like this:

Group A (most important)
He died.
He was a sixteen-year-old boy.
He fell off a cliff.
He lived locally.

Group B (second most important)
It happened at a well-known local beauty spot and picnic site.

Group C
The beauty spot was called Hangman's Hand.
He had serious internal injuries.
He also had head injuries.

Group D (least important)
He was called Fred Jones.
He was showing off to some girls at the time.
The cliff was fifty-five feet high.

Obviously the headline needs to be much tighter than the previous pathetic effort, so things like the boy's name and the fact that he was showing off to some girls at the time, although important in the story itself, are probably not important enough to feature in the headline or, indeed, in the first sentence or even two of the story itself. To make the story tighter, the first thing to do would be to ignore all the less important facts in group D, and cut down some of those in group C. For instance 'he had serious internal injuries and he also had head injuries', could now be just 'serious injuries'. So now you might get something like this:

Local boy dies of serious injuries after cliff fall
at local beauty spot Hangman's Hand

Of course, it's still not all that punchy or short enough to fit in the paper without being set in type that is too small for the purpose, so perhaps we need now to cut more from the middle of the sequencing list, that is, all of the facts in groups D and C.

Also, the word 'boy' is a bit vague because it covers a wide range of possible ages from a one-year-old up to the late teens. You'll notice we haven't mentioned the fact that he is sixteen in the headline because the precision of that is less important than the other facts we need to

use. We could choose 'sixteen-year-old lad' but that's cumbersome, or just 'teenager', or even 'teen', but we might still need to add 'boy' to that to be more specific (as in 'A local teenage boy'. Using the word 'lad' instead of boy seems precise enough for his age band, tells the reader he is male and also somehow seems quite sympathetic-sounding within the sad context of the story. So the headline might now read:

Local lad dies in cliff-fall at local beauty spot

or, slightly less sympathetic, might be:

Local youth dies in cliff-fall at local beauty spot

In common usage, 'youth' seems to suggest a young male to readers rather than a female, and perhaps the paper doesn't actually want to sound too sympathetic to him as he might have (given the circumstances in which he met his fate) been behaving stupidly. 'Youth' also seems, perhaps, more 'arm's length' and objective. However, the headline is still a bit long and is irritating because the key word 'local' still appears twice. We have to decide which 'local' to take out and, news-wise, the fact that the boy is local is more interesting to local readers than the cliff being local, and we have the additional fact that there is a relatively subtle alliteration at the beginning ('Local lad'). So we could cut sections D, C and B entirely, and maybe switch from the phrase 'local beauty spot' to its real name, as long as it is a place that is genuinely well-known to local readers. This will be more specific in the information provided (by naming the actual place) and will be tighter as it only uses two words instead of three. Now the headline will read:

Local youth dies in cliff-fall at Hangman's Hand

The name of the place is dramatic and evocative which, in the context of this story, also helps this headline work well. However, as this is probably a relatively big story locally, the editor might still find it too long. He may prefer a less wordy headline so that it can appear in a larger and more eye-catching font size and therefore decide that the headline should only cover the facts in group A. The headline would then look something like this:

Local lad dies in cliff fall

or

Local youth dies in cliff fall

The editor might be happy with one of these, but if he wanted to add more drama, he might choose a more dramatic word than fall, so he might yet change it to:

Local lad dies in cliff plunge

If it was tightened any more, it might start to lose too many essentials. For example, **Local Lad in Cliff Plunge** is very punchy but doesn't tell us if he died or not, which would mean missing out the most interesting and important fact. **Lad Dies in Cliff Plunge** completely loses the local connection. Local people will be much more interested in the story if they know it is a local boy who has died. They may even be wondering if they know him in some way.

Looking with your group at the above thinking sequence (or a similar one you provide) can be an effective way of helping students to grasp the concepts and skills of cogent and catchy headline writing. People are often surprised to hear that headline writers in newspapers are usually highly-skilled and well-paid individuals because their talents are so valued by the industry. It seems rather a lot to expect a beginner 'journalist' in school to be able to produce headlines that are as clever and cogent as those of a professional without first getting some tips, practice and an idea of why some things work but others don't!

Headline writing pointers

- A headline should try to convey the essence of the story.
- A headline writer may have to concentrate on one or two key points at the expense of others.
- A headline should be brief.
- It should contain key words.
- It should 'sell' the story in some way.
- It should omit all unnecessary words possible (like most articles, prepositions, conjunctions, adjectives, adverbs, etc.).
- It might use shorter synonyms.
- It may contain puns, alliteration, rhymes or other wordplay.
- If possible it should contain a strong active verb.
- Less interesting verbs can be omitted if implied (but well-chosen active verbs can lend it power).
- Write headlines in the active voice, not the passive voice.
- The headline might reflect the tone of the article: serious for a serious story, jokey for an amusing story, colourful for a colourful article, etc.
- Headline writers try to be as specific as possible in telling what has happened – vagueness doesn't attract readers (unless it's intriguing).
- A headline can sometimes be on different 'decks', each part standing as a separate headline.
- If too many points vie for inclusion, headline writers go with the most important angle(s) or split the headline into separate 'decks'.
- Words should generally not be repeated in a headline or in any part of a 'decked' headline, otherwise they lose their power.
- Headline writers don't say what has not happened but what *has* happened.
- An opinion in a headline should be in single quotes and is usually attributed to whoever said it.
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- Good headline writers avoid clichés if they can and use original words where possible (though sometimes they use a well-known phrase as deliberate wordplay).

There are two ways in which professionals approach headline writing:

The first method is to find a key word or two that conveys the most significant or most catchy point of the story, then to add a few words until the headline is complete.

The second method is to create a phrase or sentence that states the main elements of the story, then to edit this down by cutting out excess words and changing words to shorter synonyms until the headline is perfect.

Online headlines

Discussing online headlines can be another way of providing more familiarity with the subject, and comparisons between these and equivalent print news headlines can help students to think about them in a more detailed and observant way. As internet news is often supplied in a continuously 'rolling' format, the way in which the headlines and text are written and keep changing in a big 'running' story can be particularly interesting.

A look at some online headlines for the same rolling story.

All of the headlines below relate to the story of the remarkable rescue of 33 Chilean miners trapped deep underground for 69 days. The story had built up massive international public interest over the period of time in which the miners were incarcerated underground, and these

headlines all appeared on news distributors' websites on the day of their rescue (13 October 2010).

During the day, headlines changed continuously on the distributors' main pages and on their many linked pages as news website teams received fresh and updated information, photographs and video clips. Because of this, some of the following headlines show different numbers for those rescued, but that's simply due to the real time required to surf between the sites and collect some of the headlines for this book. All of the sites were being continuously updated and their journalists were changing parts of their running stories.

Due to the 'real time' element of news distribution, there are obvious similarities between how internet news services package their news and how 'rolling news' is presented on 24-hour television news channels. The way internet services portray material could perhaps be thought of as a sort of hybrid between 24-hour television news and printed newspapers, in that the news and headlines are constantly updated, there is a mix of text with still and video imagery, there are instant links to take the viewer to related items and to offer more depth on aspects of the story, and there are sometimes visually rolling, scrolling or changing lead items, headlines and teasers.

On this particular day, most of the websites also displayed some form of headline statement or 'marker' pointing out the live and ongoing nature of their coverage, which helps demonstrate how news distributors understand the value of 'immediate' news. The major difference from television is, of course, that online news is, like newspapers, more text and photo based, while television is mostly video based (much of it live). However, this is changing, as the use of online video streaming is becoming increasingly widespread.

A brief selection from some of the online headlines that day:

The Guardian online:

Tenth miner winched to freedom in Chile

The active verb 'winched' adds power to the headline. It is a true fact as well as a way of helping readers to visualise the drama of the event. The word 'freedom' is also emotive, which adds power to this simple headline. The very first word tells us the number of men rescued so far, showing how significant that fact is on a running, almost 'real time' story like this.

As a typical example of most news website's formats, *The Guardian* site's main page provided story teaser 'headline sentences' beneath this main headline and photo, and these teasers were themselves hyperlinks to related items. 'Inside' the website one of the main articles was a newsblog presented in a diary format based on time slots, with the latest blog additions popping up regularly at the top of the list and the time of each event listed beside them. This format ran chronologically alongside the rescue itself with more news sections appearing as new facts came in and the latest number of those rescued displayed prominently beside the relevant time as each of the men arrived safely at the surface.

Dealing with the blog in this way meant that its writer(s) didn't have to keep continuously checking and re-editing the entire content of the lengthy and growing article to update it, but could just add the latest 'diary entry' at the top of the story as more facts flowed in.

The Daily Telegraph and *The Sunday Telegraph* website, Telegraph.co.uk:

Chile miners rescue: live

The use of the word 'live' was a selling point common to the coverage of most of the websites. It would seem to indicate how much the editors want their readers to know that they are as up to date as possible in publishing the newest of news, and it invites their readers to feel involved in the unfolding action.

This is a tight and simple headline and its writers have even cut down the word 'Chilean' to 'Chile' which, although grammatically incorrect as it stands, makes the headline punchier and saves

valuable space on the site's main page. It is small and doesn't really tell visitors the current main facts because its principal job is to pull people into reading this 'headline sentence' below it:

> ***Rescue of the 33 men trapped since Aug 5 going according to plan as the 11th miner, Jorge Galleguillos, reaches the surface***

Another role for such a short headline is to tease visitors into following links and reading more material on the site.

This 'headline sentence' is longer than most traditional print sub-headings, and tells more information than a conventional headline. It has certain characteristics of a headline, in that it loses some of the insignificant words (such as the first article 'the', and the verb 'is' before 'going') and it has put numbers into figures rather than words because they take less space and are more instantly readable. This headline sentence feeds readers the most important and interesting facts at that moment, which are that the rescue is going to plan and then that rescuers have currently saved the 11th miner in their 'to do list' of 33 trapped men.

In another way that is typical of many news websites' formats, the 'headline sentence' below was also followed by a list of short bullet point 'teaser' links, enticing readers to click on them and follow different aspects of the story. For example:

> **Chile miners rescue: oldest miner freed**
> **Chile miners rescue**
> **Mario Sepulveda: 'I do not want special treatment'**
> **Rescued Chile miner vows to go back to work**
> **Record times spent in captivity**

It can be seen from the titles of the above links that many of them cover aspects of related 'human interest' stories, designed to intrigue visitors and entice them to stay longer on the site . . . and to be exposed more to the advertising that pays for the site and yields the profit! This is a common technique on all commercial news websites.

BBC News website:

> **Joy as Chile miners reach surface**

True to its reputation, the BBC has a simple, cogent and informative approach here, but it also contains an emotional side to it which is factual, not opinion, because there was patently an enormous amount of joy at the rescue site and around the world at the sight of the men being rescued from what had earlier seemed an almost inevitable, lingering death. The fact that this headline doesn't state the number rescued could reflect a deliberate choice to leave this main headline standing from the point at which the first few miners began to be rescued, as the changing number of rescued men were displayed on a main-story teaser link beside it.

The Sun:

> **Up, up and hooray**

and

> **Make miner large one**

Significantly, *The Sun*'s specialist 'punsters' ran the only jokey headlines for this story that I noticed on news websites that day. In this instance, *The Sun*'s light-hearted approach seemed to sit rather well with the sense of joy and celebration surrounding the miners' release. However, had a disastrous problem developed during the rescue, their headlines would have needed to change very quickly to avoid editorial embarrassment.

The *Daily Mail* and *The Mail on Sunday* site, Mail*online*:

> **CHILE MINERS RESCUE: Back from the dead! ELEVEN miners taste fresh air for the first time in 69 days (but 22 still wait 2,000ft underground for their turn to be rescued)**

It is interesting to notethat sometimes online 'headlines' can be quite lengthy. It is probably because due to limited space on their main page that some headlines are really not just headlines but also the first lead sentence of the story; in effect, the 'top of the pyramid' rather than the cloud above it. There is a blending of traditional headline and lead sentences here.

'Back from the dead' is of course untrue, but is an idiomatic expression used for effect to show how, if the rescue hadn't succeeded, the men would inevitably have died. That and the use of dramatic figures such as 69 days and 2,000 feet underground, although true, are obviously designed to ramp up excitement in the reader and persuade them to read more. The level of sensationalism in the various headlines would be a good point to discuss with your group, as would *The Sun*'s jokey and laddish angle on headline writing.

Reuters press agency:

> **More Chilean miners freed in miracle rescue work**

It's interesting to note that even an organisation as 'neutral' and professional as Reuters still managed to allow a touch of opinion to slip into their headline. Although it was a very remarkable rescue, whether it was a 'miracle' or not is arguable – but the headline demonstrates the way in which commonly held 'opinions' appear in news headlines and stories even in those publications or websites which attempt to be unbiased and appear to rigorously separate fact from opinion in their news stories. As discussed earlier, we all have opinions which colour our views of the world and there are cultural, universal and commonly held opinions that most readers usually don't notice as examples of opinion.

The difference between online news services' ability to update and adapt their coverage compared to their printed paper counterparts becomes very obvious in a large, ongoing story such as this, and the changing headlines reflect this 'real time' dimension, in that the sites are constantly editing and updating as the incoming information alters and expands. While many of the services below stressed the 'live news coverage' aspect of their stories, they also ran links to live or very recently recorded video coverage, and provided links to social-interactive sites such as Twitter and Facebook.

***

Some exercises on headlines

Looking at online, TV and print news headlines together

As a teacher, you could look at an ongoing situation, similar to that of the Chilean miners, and, on the interactive board, present various news distributors' websites in order to compare the similarities and differences in the way they treat a specific story (format, language, spin, etc.), how each site writes its main page and linked headlines, and the way these headlines change as the story develops. It would be even more informative to compare how this is performed on those sites compared to 24-hour television news and printed daily newspapers.

You could then tell your group little snippets of a 'news' story every few minutes and ask them to write updated headlines as the story changes. For this exercise, you could either copy out an ongoing, diary-format 'newsblog' such as the rescue story described above, or make up a news story yourself beforehand to which you then add changes and new information. This could also be an entertaining way to follow up and consolidate your group's learning about any event or

sequence of events in history such as the run-up to the Second World War, the murder of Tutankhamun, the unfolding plot of a Shakespeare play, the plot progression of a book you have been studying, etc.

The exercise could even be based on the chronologically-changing 'news' leading up to a major event in class, school or the local community, and could have straight factual headlines, 'punny headlines', alliterate headlines, and headlines with gently amusing comments about how some personalities or groups are dealing with things related to the event. Enjoying the fun of making up 'live' headlines can mean that your students hardly even notice that their learning is being reinforced!

A little exercise based on online headlines and teasers

A simple task to give to students after exposure to some news websites is to put them into 'headline-writing teams', give them just the bones of a few big, fictitious or real news stories, then ask all of the teams to create the main headline for the main page story, then to make up teaser-links (similar to those above) for related stories that they imagine. This is a creative little activity and especially enjoyable to do if given appropriate stories. To make it even more fun, at the end of the exercise, you can give points out of 10 for each set of headlines and teasers produced by each team, and see which team has the most in total. A team which has made up few but better quality teasers may win against teams who have thought up a greater number of lesser-quality teasers.

An exercise in scoring the power of verbs

Another useful exercise is to ask your group if they can spot emotive words and 'vibrant' verbs in a selection of headlines. If you also give them the first paragraph or so of each story, they can then read through the headlines and lead sentences in pairs or collectively, highlighting any verbs. Once they've done that, they can go back through the headlines and give each verb separate scores out of ten for 'vibrancy' and 'effectiveness' within the context of that story. They need to have completed the first stage of identifying the verbs before they are allowed to start the scoring part so as to give them a sense of measured comparison between the verbs.

An entertaining and challenging game involving the creation of quality and tabloid headlines

Give small teams of your student headline writers all, or some, of the following stories and ask them to make up tight, appropriate headlines, comprising at least one quality newspaper and one tabloid headline for each story. They can put down more than one for each story if they have the time, but the emphasis should be on quality not quantity. The writers can have relatively free reign on their tabloid headlines but, even if they succeed in making them funny, the headlines should generally be cogent, factually accurate, possibly teasing and alliterate, or use assonance, puns or other forms of wordplay. Teachers with primary school groups may want to run from Story 3 onwards and select appropriate stories. As before, you may decide at the end of the activity to have the class give points from 0 to 10 for each headline and see which team has the highest.

After the fictional story 'excerpts' that follow, I have listed some possible quality and tabloid headlines for each story which your students can compare totheir own efforts once they have completed the game.

What's the Headline?

For the invented news stories which follow, write headlines suitable for a quality newspaper and then for a tabloid covering the same story. More than one headline can be created and they should all be in the present tense. The quality paper's headlines should be concise and accurately reflect the most significant point or points of the story. In the tabloid headlines, extra points will be given for clever use of jokes, puns, alliteration, half-rhyme and other amusing devices! Imagine you are writing for a newspaper that covers a country or region featured in the story.

N.B. The following stories, characters and events described are completely fictitious and are only designed for use as part of an educational exercise.

Story 1

Whitehall sources revealed yesterday that Prime Minister Kenneth Frown not only had a secret affair with his private secretary, Lucy Cardswell, but also with her twin sister Penny at the same time.

Frown admitted to the first affair earlier this week but news of the second affair took even seasoned government-watchers by surprise.

Cabinet colleagues are thought to be considering if their leader's position is still tenable.

***

Story 2

The former Prime Minister lied to parliament over his conduct of several major national and international issues, according to a statement released by five of his present and former colleagues.

According to the statement, issued by the group of ministers and ex-ministers during a press conference yesterday, William Flyer told major untruths over the government's secret roles in foreign wars, government policies on taxation and the National Health Service, his part in the 'Jobs for the Boys' affair, and his involvement in last year's scandal involving millions of pounds of drug money allegedly accidentally laundered by the Great Government National Bank.

***

Story 3

Forces chiefs may ban smoking for all military personnel. No front line or support staff will be allowed to smoke, even off base, under proposed new Health and Safety rules to be inserted in their contracts.

'There is really no point in training up our troops to reach a level of peak fitness if they smoke and reduce the impact of all that training,' said General Rikhard Addams. 'We also have a responsibility to young recruits to create an environment where they won't feel pressured into starting smoking by their mates.'

Servicemen caught smoking more than once could lose their jobs.

***

Story 4

Two of Britain's largest jam makers are to cease production this week due to a massive fall in the sales of traditional preserves.

Manufacturers Chipton and Bardle blame the collapse in sales on our busy modern lifestyles, saying that people don't have time nowadays to eat a traditional breakfast or afternoon tea. A spokesman for Bardle told reporters yesterday that cereal bars and cereals have taken over as the nation's number one breakfast food.

This paper's food critic, Liv A. Mealticket, says that another reason for the decrease in sales is that, because people have more money but little time these days, when they do sit down to a proper breakfast at the weekend they prefer quality 'craft-made' preserves, produced by small local artisans.

***

Story 5

A cat that got into the refrigerated storeroom at the Yummety Bunz 'Mega-Eat' restaurant in New President Square, New York, ate parts of over 100 beef burgers and caused the restaurant to be closed over the weekend due to a possible health scare.

A Yummety Bunz spokesperson said that the cat appeared to have found its way into the cold store through a broken ventilator from a nearby roof. When kitchen staff arrived for work on Saturday morning, the cat appeared to be so full and so cold that it literally couldn't move.

Management officials told this paper that they had decided to close the restaurant for 'decontamination' and that all the stock in the storeroom was destroyed in case the animal had transferred dangerous bacteria to the meat. The restaurant is thought to have lost potential takings of over $100,000.

The cat, known as Nick, belongs to 26-year-old Miss Sylvia Hightail who lives in an upstairs flat next door to the restaurant.

'I took him round to the vet's straight away, as he looked like he was about to explode!' she said yesterday evening. 'He is making a good recovery but, unsurprisingly, seems to have lost his appetite.'

***

Story 6

The pilot of a jumbo jet lost control of his aircraft over the Atlantic yesterday when eight elephants that the plane was carrying suddenly shifted position at the same moment.

A Bigstuff Airlines spokesman said later that the aircraft became uncontrollable for several minutes after the elephants all moved to the same side of the plane at the same time.

The animals comprise the starring 'Elephant Line Dancing Team' from the international travelling spectacle known as The Great Animal Supershow. Apparently, the co-pilot of the plane had connected his personal stereo to the plane's speaker system but inadvertently played music to which the elephants had been trained to dance, and the big creatures clumped into action in time to it.

***

Story 7

A Scottish fly fisherman caught something unusual on Tuesday when he rescued his neighbour's cat by fishing it out of the fast-flowing trout stream at the bottom of his garden.

Rod Pause was fishing from the bank of his garden when his neighbour's £4,000 pedigree Persian cat leaped out of a bush on the other side of the river in an apparent attempt to catch the fishing fly as it landed on the swirling surface. When Mr Pause gently reeled in his line he realised that the cat must have bitten the fly and had the hook stuck in its upper lip.

'It took a fair bit of skill to land the poor animal,' said Mr Pause. 'It was threshing about in panic so I had to treat it very gently as if it were a large salmon, guiding it carefully through the currents until I reached it with my landing net.'

The cat, known as Paws, made a full recovery after the hook was removed from its lip and Mr Pause has been given a present of a new wicker fishing basket by his neighbour, in gratitude.

***

Story 8

Members of the steering committee of the Great National Medical Council were evacuated from their London headquarters yesterday after the building they were in shook violently in what was thought to be a sequence of earth tremors. It turned out later that the apparent earth tremors were caused by underground blasting, part of current tunnelling work underway on the Prince Harry Line extension of the London tube system.

'It was awfully frightening,' remarked Sir John Peregrine-Wolfhampton, MD. 'We all thought it was an earthquake at the time and elderly gentlemen on the committee literally flew down all three flights of stairs and across the busy street, dodging the traffic as they went!'

***

Story 9

Some US and European species of trees have been growing up to 25% taller in recent years, according to a major scientific report released yesterday by the Inter-Governmental Council for Climatic Change.

It is thought that some species, including the famous English oaks, are growing considerably taller due to the increased level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and the rise in average global temperatures.

***

Story 10

Cows are partly responsible for global warming, says a UN report out today. According to a study on which the report is based, cows produce large quantities of methane, an invisible gas which is six times more effective at causing global warming than carbon dioxide.

'Not only are bovines big releasers of methane but, when you think of the vast number of cows there now are in the world due to human agricultural processes, it's not surprising that they are considerable contributors to global warming. Humanity must radically reduce the numbers of ruminants in agriculture. This is a serious issue that the world has to deal with as soon as possible,' commented Professor Yan Hooph, Chairman of the UN Research Committee on the Causes of Global Warming.

What's the Headline? *Some possible headline solutions*

Story 1

Quality:
Frown Threatened by Twin Affair Scandal Grows: PM Had Affairs with Twins

Tabloid:
PM's Double Trouble! Twin Trouble for Frown! An Affair Too Far?
PM in Double Trouble! PM Played Both Cardswell! Twin Affair Makes PM Frown

Story 2

Quality:
Ex-PM accused of Serial Untruths Ministers Call Flyer a Liar
Colleagues Accuse Flyer of Lying

Tabloid:
Flyer, Flyer, Pants on Fire! F-liar! Flyer's a Liar! Flyer's Nose Grows
Ministers Brand Flyer a Liar

Story 3

Quality:
Forces Ban Smoking Smokers Banned from the Forces Forces to be 'Smoke Free' Zones

Tabloid:
Forces Ban Fags! No-Smoking Guns! Barmy Army Smoking Ban!
No Ciggies for Squaddies No Smoke Without Getting Fired!
Put Them Out Lads! Forces Forced to Quit Cigs

Story 4

Quality:
Jam Makers Cease Production Due to Falling Sales Jam Firms to Close

Tabloid:
Jam Makers Reach a Sticky End! Jam Co's Come Unstuck!
Jam Firms Face the Crunch! Jam Makers Face the Cereal Killers!
Preserves Firms in a Jam! Jam Firms Not Preserved

Story 5

Quality:
Feline Burglar Costs Restaurant $100,000 Cat Closes Manhattan Eatery
'Cat' Burglar Closes Flagship Restaurant Popular Restaurant Closed by Cat

Tabloid:
Cat Burgles Burger Bar! Restaurant Cat-astrophe! Nick Licks a Hundred Burgers!
Yummety Bunz Burgled by Cat Cat's $100,000 Night on the Tiles
Feline Food Junkie Takes the Rap! Cat Wolfs Restaurant Stock! Cat's Raid Costs $100k
'Cat' Burglar's Catch Costs $100 k Popular Eatery Closed by Cat Cat-astrophe!

Naughty Nick's $100k Blowout! 'Cat' Burglar's Massive Burger Haul
'Cat' Burglar Caught Red-Pawed! Cat's $100,000 Dinner Out

Story 6

Quality:
Dancing Elephants Nearly Crash Airliner Dancing Elephants' Near Air Disaster

Tabloid:
Jumbo Jet Goes Out of Step! Flying Elephants Dance to Near Disaster! Dancing Dumbos!
Flying Elephants Face the Music! Jumbos Step Out of Line! Dumbo Jet Nearly Crashes!

Story 7

Quality:
Fisherman Catches Cat Fisherman Lands Unusual 'Cat'Fish Fly Fisher Lands Feline Fish

Tabloid:
Pause Rescues Paws! One Pause Catches Four Paws! Cat Caught 'On the Fly'
Meeeowch! Whose Line is it Anyway? Fisher's Cat Catch! Fisherman Lands Feline Fish
No Paws 4 Thought! Eight Lives to Go! Fisherman Hooks 'Cat'fish Rod's Big Cat-ch!
Furry Catfish: A Fisherman's Tale! Rod's Rod Catches Cat! Fisherman's Purrfect Catch!

Story 8

Quality:
Doctors' Leaders Evacuated GNMC Evacuated in 'Earthquake' Scare
GNMC Staff Flee Tube Blasts

Tabloid:
Prince Line Blasts Shake Docs Tube Blasts Shake Top Docs
Doctors Chiefs Make Wrong Diagnosis! Top Doctors Get the Shakes!
Top Docs Hit by Strange Vibrations! Top Docs Rumble Down Below!
The Earth Moves for Top Docs GNMC: Shaken *and* Stirred!

Story 9

Quality:
Climate Change Makes Trees Taller Trees Reach for the Sky
Global Warming Boosts Oaks Trees Grow a Quarter Taller

Tabloid:
Global Warming Boosts Oaks Oaks Go Up in the World!
Trees Get Taller . . . it's no J-oak! Warmer Times Make Trees Branch Out
Trees Grow Up With Climate Change! A Trunk Call to Humanity!
Our Bad Breath Makes Trees Leap! Global Heat Makes Oaks Soar

Story 10

Quality:
Cows Contribute to Global Warming Cattle Add to Global Warming
'Cows Exacerbate Climate Change' Claims UN Report

Tabloid:
Cow Gas Cooks the World Farting Cows Get UN Hot and Bothered
'Farting Cows Should Get the Hooph!' – UN Expert Scientists' Beef Over Windbag Cows
Windbag Cows Get UN in a Moo-d Debate Heats Up Over Cows' Hot Air
Cows Turn Up the Heat Cows Cause Hot Air Farting Cattle Warm the World

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18 Legacy

Adapting journalism techniques to enrich any educational project

Teaching effective journalism techniques and utilising lively drama scenarios in various forms should not be considered as one-off events, or simply something to be ticked off in an English or Drama curriculum box. With a creative mindset, their educational potential can turn them into powerful and flexible instruments in a teacher's regular toolkit.

On top of that, the creation and upkeep of school, department or student newspapers, active websites and blogs can be at the heart of special focus days or weeks in school, in residential centres, and in projects for able, gifted and talented children. It could also be part of a permanent school communications hub bringing together and developing English, other subjects (both curricular and ex-curricular) and the learning and refining of multi-layered skills.

Those teachers with whom I have worked who have discovered the potential of these techniques tend to employ them on a regular basis and some primary teachers use them in topic work in an organic, sometimes spontaneous, way.

I have noted a couple of 'starter' possibilities here just to get your creative ideas flowing. Hopefully you will develop your own ways of using these techniques to broaden both routine class work and special projects.

Some classroom ideas for using journalism and scenario techniques in primary school

A highly regarded primary teacher of 8–10-year-olds, who has worked with me in the past, teaches all her classes the basics of sequencing, report writing and the skills to run dramatic scenarios, and then uses aspects of these on most teaching projects. In a project on ancient Egyptians, for example, the children might reinforce the story of the mystery surrounding Tutankhamun's death by holding a mock trial. Each person might take a role as a character from the period, a prosecution or defence lawyer, a witness, a jury member, or a member of the press gallery. Once the trial is completed, the newspaper reporters' group might put all the facts and quotes they have collected onto the interactive whiteboard and everyone in class might work in small teams (each for a different newspaper), trying to angle the story they write in their chosen way, but still using the 'facts' of the case.

Before the court case is staged, pupils work in little groups to study their agreed characters or to research what characters they might become as 'witnesses', etc., and then write out ideas, points, possible questions for witnesses, descriptive quotes or answers, etc., so they are organically increasing their learning, embedding it, and becoming increasingly organised through their planning in advance of the little mock trial. Some become sufficiently confident to ad lib well enough to add a touch of realistic colour to the proceedings.

With, younger pupils in, say Years 3 or 4 (ages 8 and 9), they might look at a book such as *Fantastic Mr Fox* by Roald Dahl, or the story of the three pigs, from the perspectives of specific

characters. The whole group, or different groups, might inventively brainstorm reasons why a particular character is right; for instance, why the Wolf in the 'Three Little Pigs' has a legal right to his dinner like everyone else, how his insides ache with hunger (animal cruelty to wolves), how the pigs built their houses on his land and/or without planning permission, etc.

Individuals or small reporter teams might then interview everyone, scribing as much as possible down on clipboards, or collectively with the teacher or assistants' help on the interactive whiteboard. They may then individually write the story in one of two ways: the first version attempting to be as objective as possible and the second biasing the story towards a character they *didn't* initially support, yet still using the story and quotes gathered. The most effective outcome tends to be when opposing sides are written about favourably in separate news stories like this.

Some classroom uses for journalism and scenario techniques in secondary school or college

This type of technique can, of course, be transferred to almost any historical moment or work of fiction, at any age band in KS 2 and 3 (ages 12–16), and can be a particularly useful way of helping pupils learn more effectively through their own efforts in researching, interviewing, and writing both objectively and persuasively.

If, say, a secondary school group was studying *Macbeth*, different individuals or teams of students could become news reporters and each write one the following news stories:

- An objective 'quality broadsheet' report on the events.
- A sensationalistic tabloid version of the same material.
- A blog blaming the three witches for the tragedies that followed their pronouncements to Macbeth.
- An opinion column or blog looking negatively at the role of Lady Macbeth in her husband's downfall.
- A 'favourable' obituary of Macbeth in his own newspaper, *The Daily Dunsinane*, or an unfavourable one in *The Macduff Mercury*.
- A news report on Royal Commission proceedings following the play's events, or on the posthumous 'war trial' of Macbeth, or proceedings in the Coroner's Court, or a 'flash' news report or podcast following the discovery of Banquo's body, etc. Suitable examples of any of those generic formats can easily be found online, in newspaper court reports, etc.
- A news report based on the facts at a specified point during the plot but before the final denouement.
- A rolling internet news story picking out, say, four or five points in time in the unfolding story, then creating little news reports for each time, utilising changing main headlines, 'headline sentences', 'links' and short linked stories, etc.
- The latter could equally well be covered by writing convincing presenters', witnesses' and experts' scripts for the same 'rolling' story appearing on a 24-hour news channel.

It would be especially challenging, entertaining and gently competitive to have small groups working on different options from the list above, knowing that they will eventually be presenting them to each other in a special sharing session. Reporters or reporting teams would all need to know the play fairly well already and carry out their own research both into aspects of the play and into the writing styles of the relevant newspaper type, internet site, obituary, court report, internet news site, etc. They would have to back up their facts with suitable quotes and believable witness statements from characters in the play, and could, of course, have terrific fun inventing the latter while attempting to write them in the language of the time . . . or at least in the general style of the Bard.

Being intrepid investigative reporters, they might (perhaps with teacher assistance) 'track down' credible third party witnesses who don't actually appear in the play. They would need to think about and research possible jobs, positions, crafts or activities for any invented witnesses (e.g. armourer, saddler, stable-hand, cook, maid, peasant, sentry, farrier, etc.), while trying to avoid anachronisms by bearing in mind the setting and period of the play.

The perfect transition project

Journalism is a perfect medium to be at the heart of any primary to secondary transition link project because it utilises many skills, can encompass all areas of school, curriculum, personal and group experience, and is challenging and engrossing for all ages. The project can be as simple as asking the rising primary pupils to create pages of news reports and features based on various activities encountered during their future schools' induction days (including the experience of visiting itself) right up to creating a print newspaper or electronic virtual newspaper which can even be presented to year groups and parents. An example title might, for instance, be *The Smith's School Transition Times*, or something similar.

I especially favour the second approach, of producing a full print newspaper or compact virtual newspaper, as it can involve both primary and secondary students, cover a wide mix of aspects of education and experience in both schools, and older students can be involved in helping incoming students through providing information for, writing, editing and developing news articles, features and blogs about any of these aspects. This can be done by individuals, pairs and teams meeting at either school, and through email, Skype and other online connections, as the articles and the shape of the paper develop.

A project like this is a useful and effective way to utilise frequently underused shared server links or 'virtual learning environments' within pyramids and networks of schools. If primary students will be moving on to more than one school, those going to the same future schools can work individually and together in their links with pupils from the secondary's other feeder schools as well as with pupils in the secondary school itself. Working on their own secondary-linked project like this is an excellent way for pupils to start taking on more individual and collective responsibilities, and is a move towards increasing independence from their primary school. It also raises confidence through a growing sense of genuine involvement in, and belonging to, the new school.

Small groups of pupils from different feeder schools can be put into teams of investigative reporters who will form bonds as they work together going around the 'big' school, within a fairly wide but relatively set itinerary, finding and interviewing subject teachers, student guides, management team members, selected groups of pupils, club members, cooks, sports, drama, music and art enthusiasts, etc. They could even form their own mini teams of specialist correspondents for some of these tasks.

Creative projects such as stories, poems, songs, or drama linked to transition, or other types of activity experienced during this transition period, can be incorporated on 'Creative Pages' of such a real or virtual newspaper. If a secondary college has a video or sound studio, the project can be planned and written as a 'programme', edited together and produced in the studio (with student presenters) for broadcast over the internet or VLE. We live in a multimedia, social networking world so we should be helping our young students to be media savvy in the most sophisticated ways possible, as early as possible!

What's so perfect about a journalism transition project is that it:

- can encompass anything staff or students might want;
- is challenging and fun for younger and older students alike;
- will help develop journalistic, English, presentational, IT, interpersonal and other key skills;

- is an engrossing and entertaining way of learning about a new institution and its ways;
- can create effective mentoring and new peer group bonds through working on shared challenges and the sharing of knowledge and skills;
- will develop confidence through feeling both part of the new institution and also part of a new (transition) peer group;
- can build the confidence, language, technical and interpersonal skills of the older, mentor students and enhance their sense of responsibility;
- will enable younger students, through 'investigative reporting', to enjoy taking on the responsibility of learning themselves because they will, in effect, become 'experts' disseminating their knowledge to others, which is a very confidence-boosting way of learning;
- will make the younger pupils feel genuinely involved in their new schools before they leave their old ones and, if the project is run well, many will become positively impatient to move on.

As the possibilities are so wide for projects like this, I will not detail them any further here, but leave it for you and your colleagues to work out journalistic challenges that will best suit your school pyramid or network's requirements. However, one thing I would restate is that, developed as a broad venture and approached holistically, a project of this sort can form the perfect annual transition link and enrich skills, knowledge, confidence and community within all of the schools involved.

Creating an effective news website in school

One of the greatest forms of legacy a school could gain from using these techniques is to develop a core team of trained student reporters and writers who can develop and/or maintain an effective school news website. Although it would be possible to do this through any commercial web-hosting site, the easiest and safest way would inevitably be to use your school/cluster/pyramid's virtual learning environment or digital learning platform on which to create a planned set of pages hyper-linked from one constantly updated and colourful front page.

There are at least two different ways of doing this. One is to create one virtual newspaper for the cluster, school or English department, and the other is to create two or three competing virtual newspapers within a school.

Let's look briefly at how the second scheme might work. Each of the competing virtual newspapers might act a little like old-fashioned school 'houses' which would be awarded virtual points or credits for 'hits' and possibly also awarded virtual credits by its visitors, who could be given a monthly 'spend' of points. It would be most effective if everyone could read this virtual paper – staff, students and families – and, to make the idea of looking at it regularly more appealing, the spending of virtual credits on giving 'review points' to an article or blog could enable the spender to be entered into a grand prize draw (with prizes of book tokens, cinema tickets, tokens for the canteen, or suitable gifts donated by local businesses, etc.)

Students could be assigned to a particular virtual newspaper on reaching a certain year group, or be reassigned to a different paper each year. On the other hand, a project of multiple virtual newspapers might only run for a limited time, such as for a particular month each year, or every second year.

Whether it is decided to have one school virtual newspaper or several, members of the English department will generally be the most likely candidates to be the ultimate webmasters, checking the final quality and acceptability of all the material posted, organising writers, etc. There will inevitably be other members of staff in other departments (especially IT) who are prepared to be involved in the project. Perhaps the school could consider creating a responsibility called 'Virtual Newspaper Co-ordinator', 'VN Controller', 'News-site Editor', or suchlike.

If a school has one permanent virtual newspaper, it might consider having a semi-permanent editorial board of trusted older pupils, say 11-year-olds in primary School, or 15–18-year-olds in secondary, depending on what the top age is in that school. All school pupils could email in articles, news reports, photographs with captions, sports reports, reviews of events in and near school, blogs, opinion columns and letters to the editor, and staff (or perhaps parents) might do the same. The adults could help by passing on their facts, knowledge, plans, reviews to pupil reporters who would actually write the article, and perhaps take relevant digital photos (either some photographs featuring things mentioned in the story or, at least, a head and shoulders snap of the teacher, assistant, student, visitor or parent who is telling them the story or giving the information). Artistic students could create graphics or find clip art to go with stories and layouts. All items would have to be by-lined and confirmed to be the work of the writers, so sources and responsibilities are obvious, and submissions would need to be double-checked as necessary.

Editorial board members could check and edit articles as required and work on layouts, cropping photos, illustration, etc., depending on age and ability. They can build up a list of competent pupil illustrators, cartoonists, sports writers, arts reviewers and so on, and chase them to lodge copy quickly and regularly. This is easier when everyone in a secondary school or above a certain year group in a primary has a personal school email address and is used to using it regularly.

If such a site is updated relatively regularly, it might feature on the 'Welcome TV' or PC monitor in reception, in some communal areas, and perhaps permanently on a dedicated computer in the library, although everyone should be able and encouraged to visit it from their own computers at home or in school. With a little planning, a virtual newspaper such as this can become a vibrant new centre for the school community, but it is essential not to allow it to be taken over as a sterile official PR outlet for school and headteacher or enthusiasm for it will die overnight.

With the right ethos and a keen team at the top, membership of the editorial board can be something to which pupils can aspire, and everyone will gain in terms of knowledge, skills, communication, teamwork and community connection.

The overall legacy

I hope this book has not only given you some useful hard knowledge and a raft of ideas about how to use journalistic and role play techniques in education, but that it has started you thinking creatively about how you and your colleagues can practically adapt and build these sorts of methods into your everyday teaching as well as into special projects of any scale.

Age isn't an issue. Combining journalistic challenges with scenario-based learning activities can begin as soon as children have gained sufficient basic communication skills and world knowledge. They can also be used to develop minds and abilities long after the stated age range of this book.

The highly practical and professionally-experienced educators who peer reviewed this book at the draft stage, pointed out that, with only a little thought, most of the techniques described in it are transferrable upwards to all age groups in the educational process, and secondary specialists particularly mentioned that there is great scope for using these sorts of activities for ages 15–18, which I have been doing successfully for many years.

The techniques don't change across time, language or geography, so virtually everything in this book can be adapted by educators in any place in which people are literate and have freedom to access the internet and other news media.

Learning and practising journalism techniques can help students develop increasingly sophisticated skills in questioning, assessment, planning, creativity, more accurate communication and disciplined clear-thinking.

For the professional educator, the varied applications of journalism techniques and scenario activities in well thought-out, varied and imaginative ways can become vital parts of the creative curriculum because they teach and reinforce such a wide variety of important skills and help make staff and students more aware of across-subject connections. Seeing and analysing the world in this kind of incisive, cross-curricular way is true ‘Renaissance thinking’: the development of a well-rounded and adaptable mind that is both creative and practical.

Glossary of journalistic and workshop terms

A simplified collection of common journalistic and workshop terms for reference by teachers, students or by organisers and staff of student newspapers

A

ABC Audited Bureau of Circulation is an organisation that compiles statistics on circulation which affects how much a newspaper can charge for advertising space.

ad An abbreviation for 'advertisement'.

air A word for the white space on a printed area.

angle The emphasis or 'spin' chosen for a story, or the perspective from which a news event is considered.

AP Associated Press, a co-operative international news-gathering service.

assignment A news-gathering task given to a journalist.

B

background story A factual article created to assist its news audience by detailing the facts behind a current news event. The term 'backgrounder' can also mean a meeting with a source to collect information that is background to a current story.

bank A computer folder, or group of folders, where stories are stored before use.

banner A headline that runs right across the top of a page.

blind interview An interview where the identity of the person interviewed is not disclosed precisely, such as 'a federal spokesman said . . .', 'Ministry of Health sources confirmed . . .'

blow up This can mean either to enlarge a photo (or the enlarged photo itself) or to use more of a story than is justified by its news value.

body type Type used in the main parts (or 'body') of stories as opposed to the headlines.

break The place in a story at which it jumps to another column or page. It can also mean the time that a story is available for publication.

broadsheet A large, traditional newspaper format, twice the size of a tabloid paper. When 'tabloid' papers became associated with lower quality journalism, people often referred to 'quality' newspapers as 'broadsheets' but this fell out of use as most papers moved to tabloid or near tabloid printing format.

bulldog The earliest or first edition of that day's paper, or one that is printed ahead of its publication date.

bumped heads Headlines with a similar look that run right beside each other so they might sometimes be read together by accident and make the layout monotonous.

by-line The name of the writer which is shown at the top or bottom of the story.

C

caption Text (usually in the present tense) relating to or describing a picture or illustration, normally placed below, beside or above the picture.

circulation The numbers of copies of a publication distributed to sellers. Advertising rates for all papers are primarily based on these.

classified advertising Adverts listed by type (e.g. for sale, cars, property to rent, lost and found, etc.). They are usually kept to a certain maximum size, hence their common name of 'small ads'.

clean copy Articles and other text nor requiring further editing or corrections.

clip A newspaper clipping (cut or 'clipped' from the paper).

colour To give a story colour means to enrich it with human interest or descriptive quotes. To colour a story can also mean to give it an editorial bias.

column Either (1) the narrow vertical sections in newspapers or, (2) a section where an article by a particular writer or 'columnist' appears on a regular basis. The latter usually contains the writer's opinion rather than 'hard news'.

columnist A writer whose opinions regularly appear in the same location in the newspaper, often in the 'opinion' pages that follow the newspapers 'leader' column but sometimes in a separate columnists' section.

compact paper A term used by some tabloid-sized newspapers to try and position their papers as quality publications and so distinguish them from more sensationalist tabloid papers.

compose To turn 'copy' into a computer file (it used to mean to put together the paper in lead reversed letters, ready for printing).

copy All written material in a newspaper office (it also means to reproduce material on a photocopier).

copy editor Someone who edits or corrects copy before it appears in the newspaper or news website.

correspondent Either (1) a journalist who works away from the main office of the paper, in a different part of the country or world (see also 'stringer'), or (2) a specialist reporter who deals with a specific subject area such as politics, business, science, etc.

crop To cut part of a picture to create more visual impact, to remove distracting features or to fit available space.

crusade A newspaper campaign to try to create a change for the better.

cub A reporter who is new and possibly still learning the job.

cut (1) To reduce the length of a story, or (2) a term for a picture copied from a computer library.

cutline Another word for a caption (see 'caption' above).

D

daily A newspaper that comes out each day, or at least each weekday (usually appearing in the morning).

dateline A line at the beginning of a story that indicates the date and source of the story.

deadline The latest time to get copy into an edition of the paper.

dingbat A small typographical image such as a little box, icon or star.

display ad A bigger advert than a classified advert, often with a frame or border.

dope Information or rumour often picked up ahead of the story proper.

downstyle A headline style in which only the first word and proper nouns are given initial capitals. The opposite of 'upstyle'.

dummy A mock layout showing where every article, picture, advertisement and headline will appear. See also 'layout'.

E

ears The spaces on either side of the newspaper's name at the top of the front page which can carry things like teasers for articles inside, a weather summary, an index to items inside, etc.

edition A print run of a newspaper. Some daily papers have several editions which change a little as different news comes in. Early editions are usually sent to distant places to which distribution takes longer.

editorial (1) An article which is based on the official opinion of the newspaper (or at least it's owner or senior editorial staff). This usually appears under the 'masthead' of the paper (name, logo, etc) on the first editorial page. (2) A term for the area in a newspaper office in which news is gathered, written and edited.

editorialise To express opinion in a news story, something not considered good journalism by purists as 'news' is supposed to be kept clearly separate from 'opinion'.

embargo A time or date before which information or material on a press release is not allowed to be released by the news media. A story might be embargoed until a certain time or date by the organisation which released it to the press.

exclusive Also sometimes known as a 'scoop', this is a story which appears in only one newspaper. This exclusivity can be highly prized if the story is important or has considerable public interest.

extra An extra edition of a paper, usually produced because a very large and dramatic story is happening at the time; the extra edition carries updates.

F

feature (1) An article that is not simply a news report but might or might not be related to current news. A feature could cover a topic, an interest, a place, etc. (2) To give particular prominence to a story or a particular angle of a story.

file To send a story to the newspaper from a distance, usually by 'wire'.

filler A small item such as an advert or information story used to fill spaces. Newspaper companies keep a stock of fillers to use if they have space left over in an edition.

first day story A story about something that has just happened and is being published for the first time (not a 'follow-up' story).

five Ws and an H The who, where, what, when, why and how of a story. These are usually answered in a story's lead sentences. This is an important point for young reporters to remember!

flag The name (in its distinctive font) and logo of a newspaper that appear at the top of the front page.

flush Aligned with the column margin. Type that is set 'flush' has no paragraph indentation.

folio The newspaper's name, date and page number which is shown on each page.

follow-up A story which gives up to date details of a story already run – the opposite of a 'first day story'.

G

general assignment A reporter on general assignment covers a variety of stories, unlike a specialist reporter (or specialist 'correspondent') who covers specific things such as courts, royalty, economics, business, drama, etc.

H

headline/header/head A word or series of words in larger, bolder type, used partly for display effect and partly to draw the news consumer into reading the article. They are positioned prominently to draw attention to important stories and help make a clear separation between stories on a page.

hold A story that is held back from publication until the editor releases it.

holding editing options The technique, used during writing or editing, of storing portions of text at the bottom of the screen before cutting and pasting these words, phrases and quotes back up into the main text as the writing or editing progresses. It is especially useful during the deconstruction and rewriting or updating of a story and it ensures that no useful facts or quotes are forgotten during the process.

hook The way in which a writer draws a reader into his story – a technique used both in newspaper stories (where it is usually the lead of the story) and in fiction.

hot An important story or a 'tip' leading to one. It usually refers to a breaking story.

house style See entry for 'style'.

human interest A slightly vague journalistic term usually describing a story which has emotional content rather than 'straight news', although most reporters also search for 'human interest' in a straight news story to add 'colour'. Natural disaster stories, for instance, usually blend hard facts with human interest.

I

insert Any supplement, magazine, leaflet or flyer inserted into a newspaper after printing.

inverted pyramid The industry training equivalent of what I call 'the pyramid'. The inverted pyramid is meant to symbolise the structure of a news story but I feel a pyramid (with a cloud or flag above for the headline) portrays the form more effectively and fits more aspects. In tests, nearly all young writers intuitively choose a pyramid as the geometric shape best describing news fact sequencing.

issue All of the copies of a particular newspaper title that are published or 'issued' in a day.

J

jump Material continued from one page to another (see also 'break'). Sometimes also referred to as 'runover'.

K

kicker A small headline above and set to the left of a main headline that 'kicks' a reader into the bigger headline. It is usually in italics and often underlined.

kill A term meaning to drop all or part of a story.

L

layout (1) A plan showing where every article, picture, advertisement and headline will appear, or (2) a spread of stories and pictures about one theme.

lead (1) The first few (usually one to three) sentences of a story that answer most of the five Ws and an H. (2) A useful tip that might lead to a story.

lead (Pronounced 'led'.) A term that means the space between lines of type and comes from the old way of printing using cast lead metal.

letters to the editor Opinion expressed publicly by readers, which normally appears opposite or soon after the editorial page(s). Columnists' work appears before or after these, keeping all opinion in the main paper in one area, separate from (factual) news.

libel The publishing of material that wrongly injures, or 'defames' the character or reputation of a person or organisation. This could be in any print or broadcasting formats. 'Slander' is the spoken equivalent.

library A newspaper's library is an organised collection of news clippings, files, etc. It contains previous articles, background and things such as regularly updated obituaries of famous people who aren't yet dead! News organisations sometimes have a separate photo library for similar purposes, and TV and internet companies also hold video libraries.

linotype A computer printer that creates one line at a time. Prior to modern printing methods, the term used to mean the large machines that cast lines of text in hot lead.

localise To stress the local angle in a non-local story, such as a local or regional paper writing about a person from their locality killed in a disaster or war abroad.

logo A shortened version of 'logotype' which is the particular form and design in which a company's name is written.

lower case Small letters, rather than capital letters.

M

make-over Changing a paper's page or section around to allow for new copy or to create an improved stylistic look.

mark up To annotate (onto copy or other material that is to be published) editing or composing instructions.

masthead This normally appears on the editorial page and contains the paper's name, logo and key information such as where it's published and the names of top personnel such as senior editors, etc.

MIAIF My own acronym for the most significant facts in a story. These '**m**ost **i**mportant **a**nd **i**nteresting **f**acts' appear in the 'lead' of a news story.

more This word, when placed at the bottom of a page of copy, means that there is more of the story still to come.

morgue The place in the newspaper office or computer system in which old back issues, clippings, pictures, etc. are stored (usually part of the 'library').

N

nameplate The section of a newspaper at the top of the front page containing the distinctive name-logo and any other logo of the paper. The nameplate is sometimes altered and added to for special occasions, and other 'teasers', etc. are sometimes combined with it. The nameplate is often confused with the 'masthead' or 'flag' which appears on the top of the editorial page.

news hole The space left over for news after adverts, pre-produced features and newspaper graphics have been positioned on a page.

newsprint The type and general grade of paper on which newspapers are printed.

news services Agencies, such as UPI, Reuters, AP, etc., with correspondents around the world, that gather and distribute news to subscribing news media (see also 'wire services').

O

obit or obituary A short biography of a dead person who was famous or prominent in his or her field. Often prepared in advance and kept in the newspaper or other media company's 'library'.

off the record Information given to a reporter which is not to be published or cannot be attributed to its source. Journalists need 'off the record' information and 'tips' to function, but sometimes try to get such information put 'on the record' by a 'contact' or organisation if they can't get open confirmation of it from other sources.

op-ed A term for the 'comment' page opposite the editorial page, used for letters to the editor and/or columnists slots, etc.

overline A caption that appears above a picture.

P

pad or pad out To make a story longer by using more words than are required. Usually a sign of weak writing, but occasionally done to make a story fit a particular space better.

page one Usually the front page of a newspaper, hence the term 'page one news', meaning very important news or news that is perhaps suitable for the front page.

Photoshop The brand name of the ubiquitous computer program for cropping, altering and 'improving' photographs and other graphics.

pix An abbreviation for the word 'pictures'. 'Collect pix' means an assignment in which a reporter has to collect pictures such as family photographs that might be linked to a story.

play How strongly a piece of news is treated by the news organisation. A story might be 'played down' or 'played up'. Some papers play up a story and keep it running as part of a 'campaign'.

press conference A meeting organised for the purpose of providing information to the news media.

press release A piece of material or a statement given to the media, which is also referred to as a 'handout'. Sometimes this information is genuine 'news' and sometimes it is more advertising or 'PR' than news.

proof (1) To check or 'proofread' items means to look them over and mark up changes or errors before publication. A 'proofreader' does this job professionally. (2) A page on which newly set copy is reproduced in order to make the correction of errors possible.

public relations The business of attempting to develop a good image or goodwill between an individual or organisation and the public at large. Public relations (or 'PR') people often send 'press releases' to news media.

publisher The owner/chief executive of any publishing company that packages and disseminates news, information, entertainment, etc.

puff A complimentary statement inserted into a news story.

put to bed A newspaper term that means all of an edition's pages are completed so the print run can start.

pyramid The pictogram representing the form of a newspaper story that I use in training young journalists. It shows the compressed nature of significant facts in the lead sentences (the top of the pyramid) and the wider, 'looser' part below which flesh out these facts and add more detail and colour in the form of additional information, background and quotes. This pictogram is the reverse of the 'inverted pyramid' commonly used in journalist training, but is more intuitive for young and old alike, and better demonstrates aspects of a story's structure.

Q

quotes Spoken statements that appear in stories as direct quotations within quotation marks. To 'get a quote' can mean to 'get a statement' from someone on a specific topic or news event.

R

relevancy title A shortened and/or general title or description initially given to a person, company or location in the early part of a news story in order to make the section catchier and tighter. This title is usually fleshed out further as the story progresses below the lead section (i.e. 'a top show jumper claimed . . .' might expand to 'US and Olympic Show Jumping Champion, Matt Horzfase, told reporters . . .' further down the story).

review A critical evaluation in the media of an artistic or entertainment event, often written by a critic (or 'crit') who is a specialist in that field.

rewrite People who 'rewrite' on newspapers do a variety of writing jobs from making stories out of press releases or information phoned in to them by a reporter, or rewriting a story into a different length or with a different emphasis.

rolling news coverage A term describing the way 'instant' news media, such as 24-hour TV news or some internet news services work.

run A story is 'run' when it is printed. A 'press run' is the printing of an edition of the newspaper. In other media, a story is 'run' when it is displayed to consumers.

run-around Type placed around a picture or illustration.

running story One that develops over a period and is reported on a daily basis.

runover The portion of a story that is continued on another page (see 'jump').

S

schedule An editorial department's list of assignments and which journalists have to cover them.

scoop A story that is exclusive to one news provider and published before it appears via other news providers.

second front page The first page of a second section of a newspaper.

sectional story A large or important story which has parts or 'sections' under different headlines. A 'mother and daughter story' describes a sectional story which has a main story and at least one subsidiary story.

series A sequence of stories that are run on successive publication dates.

set To type into a publishing computer file. Originally to 'set type' was a physical job which involved setting metal letters one by one into lines while reading upside down letters from left to right.

sidebar A small secondary story that extends or helps explain a major story and is usually printed at the side of it.

skyline A long 'banner' headline above the 'nameplate' at the top of a newspaper's front page.

slant The angle or emphasis put on a news story by the writer, and sometimes because the paper has a certain political policy or agenda. The slant might be created by featuring selected facts more strongly than others.

soft copy Written material viewed on a computer screen, as opposed to printed 'hard copy'.

source A person or document that supplies information to a journalist.

spot news News obtained, often by chance, while a journalist is 'on the spot' at the scene of an event.

spread The way a large or important story is presented on a page, often with pictures and related stories. A 'double-page spread' runs across two facing pages.

standing heads Those headlines in a paper that don't change, such as section heads, etc.

story A journalists' term for any article written by a reporter and applicable to any print or broadcast media.

straight news A news story written in a straight-forward form, based on news facts and not 'coloured' in any way.

streamer Another term for a long, banner-type headline, but not necessarily one that reaches right across the page.

stringer A non-regular correspondent for a newspaper or other news organisation, who usually lives in and covers a certain area of the world. A stringer is often part of a local paper or other local news organization in that area.

style and style book The 'house style' of a newspaper is usually laid down in its style book. Its purpose is to make all its material uniform in areas such as type faces used, capitalisation, spelling, punctuation, abbreviations, when to display numbers as digits or words, etc.

sub-head/sub-heading A small headline of usually one line which is dropped into the body of the text to break up the column of type and make it easier and more pleasant to read. It often copies a word or phrase in the section of text following it.

Syndicate An agency or organisation that sells features items such as horoscopes, gossip columns, cartoon strips, puzzles, etc.

T

tabloid This term can mean either (1) a newspaper of a smallish size (half the size of a 'broadsheet' paper when positioned sideways), or (2) a newspaper which has a generally sensationalist approach and a higher content of space devoted to lurid crime stories, celebrity, scandal, sports etc., than a 'quality' newspaper. As the term 'tabloid' has become synonymous with lower quality newspapers, some higher quality newspapers which print in the same size now call themselves 'compact' papers instead.

teaser Any short text and/or graphic which 'teases' readers to make them want to read a story elsewhere in the publication. The term is most commonly used for intriguing text,

graphics or small photos appearing on the top, side or bottom of the paper's front page (or principal section of the paper) which relate to stories or photo spreads inside that, or future, editions.

U

UC Upper case (capital letters).

upstyle A style using a lot of capital letters (see also 'downstyle').

W

widow A single word or short line at the end of a paragraph (especially at the top or bottom of a page or column). This is undesirable because it sometimes looks unattractive.

wire copy Material supplied from outside sources, traditionally by teletype down the telephone 'wire'.

wire service An agency such as Reuters, AP, UPI, etc., which gathers and distributes news to newspapers and other news media companies that pay for the service (also see 'news services').