**How to write a story**

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Have you ever heard or read a story where the writer or story teller left out some information? If you heard the story, chances are you asked the story teller questions. If you were reading a story, you probably did not have a chance to ask, so you may have been left wondering.

Journalists use a technique they sometimes call the 5 Ws and an H. Most people who hear a story want to know basic information. If a writer gathers and includes this basic information, they’ll answer most questions the reader will have. Questions such as:

Who? (Who is the story about?)

What? (What happened?)

Where? (Where did it happen?)

Why? Why is this story significant or unique?)

When? (When did it happen?)

How? (How did it happen?)

The actual questions may vary depending on the story itself. And by varying the questions we can delve deeper. For example: Who was affected by these events? What will happen now? How did the person feel?

Now that you have information, you need to organize it into a story. To get information out as quickly as possible, journalists are taught to put the most important information first and the least important last. If we follow the lead of the journalists, we’ll put the most interesting information first to catch a reader’s attention.

Remember that your goal is to get this story to as many people as you can. So, use language people can understand. This isn’t a doctoral thesis. Would you have read this article if my first sentence had been something like this: “The fundamentals of recounting mission activities to motivate laypeople continues to challenge church leadership at varying levels of our denominational hierarchy?” (probably not) So use simple language and simple words. You may have a doctorate, but if you write at the level you make your story difficult if not impossible for the majority of people to read.

Now that you’re thinking like a writer, let’s start thinking like a reader. Next time you pick up a magazine or newspaper, think about which articles you start to read and why. Did you read the entire article? Why or why not? Something must have caught your attention, and, if you read the entire article, must have held your attention. So when you’re writing, think about who’s going to be reading your article. Why are you writing the article? What do you want the reader to know? What do you want them to do? What do you want them to feel?

Once you have written your story/article, you may find it published in the Outlook (for example). You may also discover that it is not exactly the way you wrote the story. There could be many reasons for this. It may not have been the right length. Their audience, the readers, might be different from the readers you were envisioning when you wrote the article. There are editors for every publication and they know their audience and what will impact their readers. Remember that your goal was to share the story of mission with as many people as possible. To see it in print, even if altered, is a success!

**Structure of Your Short Story**

Novice writers are often given this advice on how to structure their short stories:

* Put a man up a tree
* Throw stones at him
* Get him down

When you come to think of it, it’s good advice for any writer. So follow the steps in the plan below to start writing great short stories.

**Short Story Plan**

Start with a situation – a problem to be resolved for your protagonist (the man up the tree). Then present the problems that can occur (throw some stones):

* Misunderstandings / mistaken identity / lost opportunities etc.

The final step is to show how you can solve the problem – get the man down from his leafy perch – safely.

* Love triumphs / good conquers evil / honesty is the best policy / united we stand…

When you’ve finished writing, always proof-read your work to check your spelling, punctuation and grammar. Don’t spoil all your hard work by presenting an unprofessional image to your readers.

Put this simple plan into action with your next piece of writing.