

Skill 28

HOW TO

Write a News Story

Chinese Inventions Take the World by Storm

If you pick up your local newspaper you will see a variety of articles about important or unusual events. Although these stories relate current happenings, writing a news story about an event from history can help you learn more about the past.

News stories are based on facts. A fact is a piece of information that can be proven true. Facts include dates, times, and names of people, things, and places. Read the following facts about inventions of ancient China.

- China is separated from Europe by great deserts and mountains, making travel and communication between the two areas difficult.
- In 1271, the European traveler Marco Polo made the long journey to China. He stayed there until 1275.

- Polo wrote that he was astonished by Chinese inventiveness.
- In China he found rockets, paper money, compasses for telling directions, and many other things that were unknown in Europe.
- As a result of Polo's trip, knowledge of China's scientific and technological expertise spread to Europe.



Marco Polo arriving in China

STEPS IN Writing a News Story

You can use the steps below to help you write a news story.

1 Collect Essential Facts

- As you examine your sources, look for the essential facts first. When you are writing a news story, the essential facts are those facts that answer the six questions Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?
- To help you identify the essential facts for your news story, list the six questions on a sheet of paper. Then answer each question as briefly as you can.

Invention: The Seismograph

Who? Invented by Zhang Heng, a scientist

What? A seismograph detects earthquakes

When? A.D. 132

Where? China

Why? To improve the response to earthquakes

How? When there is a tremor, a rod in the center of the seismograph vibrates, setting off a chain reaction which reveals the direction of the earthquake.

2 Collect Additional Details

- After you have collected the essential facts, think about any additional details you need to include in your news story.
- Look for details that will be of interest to your readers and will help them understand the importance of your subject.

Design of the Seismograph

- 8 bronze dragon heads surrounded a bronze vase with a rod in its center.
- Each dragon had a small bronze ball in its mouth.
- The rod shook when there was a tremor.
- The shaking of the rod caused the dragon closest to the tremor to drop its ball.
- The ball then fell with a clang into the mouth of a bronze frog below it.

Source: Julie M. Beck, "Detecting Earthquakes in Ancient China," *Oliver* (July 2000), p. 47.

EXAMPLE OF Writing a News Story

As you read the news story below, notice how it is organized.

Headline → **DEVICE DETECTS EARTHQUAKES HUNDREDS OF MILES AWAY**

Direct quotation → "of the ball clanging," says Zhang Heng, "I know right away there has been an earthquake somewhere, even if I can feel nothing myself."

Byline → *By Joanne Bly*

Dateline → China, Friday, July 8, A.D. 132

Lead → Zhang Heng, a scientist, has just unveiled an amazing invention that can detect devastating earthquakes hundreds of miles away. When there is a tremor, a rod in the center of his device vibrates, setting off a chain reaction which reveals the direction of the earthquake.

Body → Heng's device consists of a bronze vase ringed by eight bronze dragons. Each of the dragons holds a small bronze ball in its mouth. Eight bronze frogs, with open mouths, sit around the bottom of the vase. At the center of the vase is a rod. When there is a tremor, the rod vibrates, pressing on the dragon head closest to the trembling. This causes the dragon to drop its ball into the mouth of the frog directly below, making a loud clang. "When I hear the noise

Ending → Zhang Heng's invention is bound to have a huge impact on his native land. Now government officials will know about earthquakes as soon as they happen. Food and other forms of relief can be sent immediately to affected areas. Who knows how many lives may be saved by Zhang Heng's invention?

News Story: The Chinese invented paper about 200 B.C.

Editorial: Paper was the greatest invention to come out of China.

News Story: The Chinese invented gunpowder by mixing charcoal, saltpeter, and sulfur.

Editorial: Gunpowder was the worst invention to come out of China because it made warfare deadlier.

TIP If you included direct quotes (a speaker's exact words) in your story, be sure to enclose them in quotation marks. An indirect quotation should not be enclosed in quotation marks.

5 Revise and Edit

- Check that your news story contains facts. Make sure that you did not include your own feelings, beliefs, or judgments in your story.
- Proofread your work for careless errors. Double-check the accuracy of dates and other key facts. Pay special attention to the spelling of names.
- Check capitalization, grammar, and punctuation. Make sure that you use quotation marks correctly.
- Prepare or type a final neat copy of your story.



Replica of Zhang Heng's seismograph

3 Organize and Write the Story

- Write the lead first. In the lead, clearly state the essential facts about your topic in one or two sentences. The lead should answer the six questions Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? Write the lead so that your readers will be interested in the rest of the story.
- Write the body next. In the body, state additional important facts about your story. If possible, include quotations from people who witnessed or participated in the event you are describing. Using quotations adds life and authenticity to your writing.
- Write the ending last. The ending should say something that will help your readers remember the story.

TIPS

- **Begin your news story with the most important facts. The less important facts should be placed at the end.**
- **Don't forget to give your story a headline.**

The parts of a news story:

The **headline** names the story in large type.

The **byline** tells who wrote the story.

The **dateline** tells where and when the story was written.

The **lead** gives the essential facts of the story.

The **body** provides additional details.

The **ending** leaves the reader with an idea to remember.

4 Stick to the Facts

- Remember that news stories are based on facts. As you write your story, be sure to stick to the facts.
- Do not include your opinions in a news story. Opinions are based on feelings or beliefs. Unlike facts, they cannot be proven.
- Along with news stories, newspapers and magazines often feature editorials. In contrast to news stories, editorials are meant to express opinions. An editorial reflects the feelings and beliefs of its author and often includes clue words such as *should*, *always*, *believe*, *best*, *greatest*, or *worst*.

USE THIS SKILL

Write a News Story

Choose an invention from the chart below. Then write a news story about the invention you choose.

Chinese Inventions

| INVENTION | DATE INVENTED | BRIEF DESCRIPTION |
|-------------|--------------------|--|
| Paper | About 200–100 B.C. | The first paper in China was probably made from tree bark and rags. At first it was used as cloth and not for writing. |
| Compass | About A.D. 100 | A compass is a magnetic device for telling direction. |
| Wheelbarrow | About A.D. 100–300 | The wheelbarrow, called the “wooden ox” by the Chinese, appeared in Europe a thousand years after it was first known to be used in China. Instead of having a wheel in the front, some Chinese wheelbarrows had wheels in the middle. |
| Matches | About A.D. 600 | The first matches were reportedly invented by upper-class Chinese women during a military siege. With no tinder left for starting cooking fires, they experimented with infusing sticks of wood with sulfur and created the first matches. |

TEST TIP

Some tests may ask you to write about an event from your life. Remember to tell all of the essential facts and details so that your readers understand the story.