

JOURNALISTICS

A nifty little blog about public relations, journalism and digital marketing topics



Five Ws and One H: The Secret to Complete News Stories

🕒 August 5, 2010 by [Jeremy Porter](#)

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If you ever sat through [Journalism 101](#), you know all about the **Five Ws and one H**. For the rest of you, you may find this concept helpful when preparing interview questions or writing factual news stories. This concept may help you write better news releases too, considering they *should* contain news.

What are the Five Ws and One H? They are **Who, What, Why, When, Where** and **How**. Why are the Five Ws and One H important? Journalism purists will argue your story isn't complete until you answer all six questions. It's hard to argue this point, since missing any of these questions leaves a hole in your story. Even if you're not reporting on the news of the day, this concept could be useful in many professional writing scenarios.

In case it's not obvious what information you would be looking to gather from each of the six questions, let's look at what information you might want to gather with the Five Ws and One H if you were reporting on [The Three Little Pigs](#):



- **Who was involved?** The three little pigs (the first pig, the second pig and the third pig) and The Big Bad Wolf (a.k.a. Wolf).
- **What happened?** Each pig constructed a house out of different materials (straw, sticks and bricks). Wolf (allegedly)

threatened to blow over their houses and is believed to have destroyed both the straw and stick homes at this time. Pig one and two were able to flee to the brick house, where they remain at the moment. We're still waiting to hear from local authorities, but it looks like the Wolf may have been injured while attempting to enter the brick house.

- **Where did it take place?** Outside a straw house, a stick house and a brick house.
- **When did it take place?** At various times throughout the day.
- **Why did it happen?** Apparently the Big Bad Wolf was trying to eat the pigs. Several eyewitnesses recall the Wolf taunting the pigs before he destroyed the straw and stick homes by chanting, "Little pigs, little pigs, let me in." The pigs apparently scoffed at the Wolf's idle treats, saying "Not by the hair of our chinny, chin chins." It's believed this angered the Wolf and led to him blowing the houses down.
- **How did it happen?** It would appear the first two homes were not built to withstand the Wolf's powerful breath. The incident inside the brick house is still being investigated, but early indications suggest the Wolf fell into a boiling pot of water when trying to enter the house through the chimney.

It's a silly example, but you can see how getting answers to these six questions can really help you get all the information needed to write an accurate report. Next time you are preparing interview questions or outlining a story, consider walking through the Five Ws and One H to see if you left anything out.

Did you read all the way to the end of this post? As a special treat for your dedication, here's a fantastic Five Ws quote from Rudyard Kipling (courtesy of [Five Ws - Wikipedia](#)):

*"I keep six honest serving-men, (They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When, And How and Where and Who" -
Rudyard Kipling*

(Image Credit: [Amazon.com](#))

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About Jeremy Porter

Jeremy Porter has spent the better part of the past 16 years in startup, agency and corporate marketing leadership roles, serving as a strategic advisor for more than 100 B2B and B2C organizations, the leader of numerous award-winning digital marketing and PR campaigns, and an established thought-leader on communications and marketing strategy.

Porter is a graduate of Utica College of Syracuse University, where he earned his B.S. degree in Public Relations & Journalism. At Utica College, Porter served as president of Utica College's Raymond Simon Chapter of the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) and was a Captain of the Utica College Lacrosse Team.

Porter currently serves as VP of Strategy for blacQube, an Atlanta-based digital marketing agency serving a global client base of luxury and performance brands. Porter resides in the Metro Atlanta suburbs with his wife and four young children. When he isn't working, playing with his kids or trying to run a faster 5K, Porter can be found on the lacrosse field - introducing a new generation to the sport he loves.

Comments



BRIAN NEWSOME
AUGUST 5, 2010 AT 8:48 PM

Sadly, with cutbacks and the rush to post news online, many reporters are forgetting this rule.

REPLY



JEREMY PORTER
AUGUST 5, 2010 AT 9:08 PM

I don't see "why" or "how" they could forget.

REPLY



AMANDA LAIRD
AUGUST 6, 2010 AT 5:33 PM

As a PR/corporate communications professional I employ these six questions often, plus one more: who cares. That's the clincher for deciding if your news release truly is news worthy.

REPLY



Blake
SEPTEMBER 23, 2012 AT 4:43 PM

Its easy, just focus on the Five W's What, When, Where, Who, Why. Memorize those and its a good tool to have...

REPLY



hobbes21

SEPTEMBER 24, 2012 AT 9:44 AM

May I use your blog (with credit given) for my students?

Keith

REPLY



JEREMY PORTER

SEPTEMBER 26, 2012 AT 9:11 PM

I would be honored if you used my blog as a resource for your students. Please tell me more about what you teach and where.

Cheers!

REPLY



hobbes21

SEPTEMBER 28, 2012 AT 9:10 AM

Jeremy,

I teach grades 4-6 in a Montessori school in Michigan, USA. Your blog so succinctly summarizes the journalistic process, I could not have said it better myself! I will be passing out your blog today, and we're going to start working on a class newspaper. If you check in, I'll let you know how it goes!

Keith

REPLY

Fredrick Malowa



FEBRUARY 1, 2016 AT 7:40 AM

Essential components of journalism

REPLY



Andy Mitchell

JULY 16, 2015 AT 7:22 AM

Hi,

My name is Andy Mitchell and I am an undergraduate student at London Metropolitan University.

I saw this post and thought it would be an excellent way to discuss the 5Ws and one H in an academic book I am helping with on study skills and critical thinking.

If we acknowledge and reference you could we get permission to use the Three little pigs example in the 4th edition of Essential Study Skills by Sandra Sinfield and Tom Burns?

Thanks

Andy

REPLY



JEREMY PORTER

SEPTEMBER 29, 2015 AT 12:04 AM

Thanks for your interest Andy. Sorry I didn't reply sooner – your comment was mixed in with hundreds of spam comments I

received over the summer. I'm sure you've wrapped up your book by now, but please keep us in mind for future work you do.

REPLY

Trackbacks

Give up already. Marketing Perfection, Thy Name is Illusion | Marketing, Public Relations and Social Media Blog | Atlanta, GA

August 31, 2010 at 4:59 pm

[...] Focus on what matters most: The Ws. Make that FRONT page and blog the best outfit you can, then worry about the right accessories like [...]

Inverted Pyramids and Press Releases

October 5, 2010 at 12:31 pm

[...] school. If that's not an option, brush up on the basics of newswriting, such as the five 'Ws' and one 'H' and the inverted pyramid style. As the journo-nerds who read this blog have already figured out, my [...]

7 Tips that will Immediately Improve Your News Releases « "PR & New Media Today" | www.RobertBurnsII.com

February 17, 2011 at 1:02 pm

[...] especially journalists, don't have the time these days to read novels. You need to explain the "who, what, where, when and why" in the very first paragraph, if you want your press release to be taken seriously. Get right to the [...]

Citizen Journalism 101: Creating content people want to read « Ben Franklin Journalism

March 20, 2011 at 3:49 am

[...] And, as you conduct your interview, always remember to ask questions that start with the "Five W's and H": Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. By asking questions this way you avoid asking questions that [...]

Is the Press Release Dead? | The WM Freelance Writers Connection

May 8, 2011 at 5:15 pm

[...] Fast W's – Your opening paragraph should answer the five W's – Who, What, Where, When, Why. Get clear on the answers to these before you start writing the [...]

Linda Stephens - blog

May 10, 2011 at 3:24 am

[...] Fast W's – The opening paragraph should answer the five W's – Who, What, Where, When, Why. Get clear on the answers to these before you start writing [...]

Exclusive Summer Event Hosted By Target! | PetalsNBelles

June 28, 2011 at 9:51 pm

[...] Are you wondering why I chose the above format to tell you about this event. It's called the 5 w's: Who, What, When, Why, Where. In journalism, the FIVE W's is a writing and research concept that allows you to get the basic/necessary information to provide a great and complete story. For those of you interested in journalism as a major or just LOVE to write, learn more here. [...]

5+1=A Story « Wrestling The Hyperbole

July 17, 2011 at 7:29 pm

[...] a silence in all of us that allows us to know the 5 W's and 1 H; who, what, when where, why, and how. In my undergraduate studies in Journalism this was the [...]

Vizual, Inc. » Northern Virginia Branding Firm » Brand Strategy | Brand Development | Brand Management

September 16, 2011 at 7:06 pm

[...] world is that many of them are fluff. The purpose of a release is to give your audience the who, what, when, where, why and how information in a short, concise manner. Companies posting releases in their newsrooms need to keep [...]

Thill Logisitcs

October 27, 2011 at 6:57 pm

[...] final method we would look at is called the "Five W's and How". This is the old journalism technique, where you must

ask, “Who, What, When, Where, Why, and [...]

MFM on a Bridge | A Thrift Store

February 20, 2012 at 9:40 am

[...] is my boyfriend John and one of the most interesting things he does (to me) is go at the world like an investigative journalist*. I remember when we first started dating it made me all uppity: No, I didn't know how long [...]

Five Ws and One H: The Secret to Complete News Stories | Karen Ebbert: The Business of Being Social

March 4, 2012 at 8:48 pm

[...] reblogged from: [http://blog.journalistics.com/2010/five-
ws-one-h/](http://blog.journalistics.com/2010/five-ws-one-h/) [...]

Freelance Writing: Using the 5 Ws (and How) of Journalism

June 20, 2012 at 10:27 am

[...] It's really not too hard to master this concept. Before you submit your work, or hit “Publish,” read through what you've written and make sure that it answers the following questions:
[...]

Online Education: Five Ws and One H « The Holding Tank

August 7, 2012 at 5:52 pm

[...] about the purpose and rationale of ‘going online’ in the first place. A useful framework is the Five Ws and One H model, commonly used in journalism to map out a scenario in a news story. Applying that model to online [...]

Getting the Judge to Yes By: Ron Burdge «

September 21, 2012 at 2:54 pm

[...] an old newspaper rule that can help you and it says that the first paragraph of any story should tell the reader who, [...]

Useful tips help you to be a professional in covering disasters | Multimedia Communication

September 24, 2012 at 3:41 pm

[...] procedure to some extent. Just treating it as your only target, you need to consider: How to make the five W's and the

H to contribute to your own story? Guided by it, you can start your implement which is made up of [...]

Four Teaching Strategies: Reading Teachers | Concordia Masters of Education

October 24, 2012 at 11:10 am

[...] strategies like this ensure that students not only understand the text, but also learn to ask the Five W and One H questions whenever they're reading: "who," "what," [...]

Telling a compelling story | Murnahan Public Relations, Inc.

October 26, 2012 at 5:56 am

[...] Consider who will be interested, how will it affect them, what is the story about, where the news occur, why is it news and when did it happen. The 5 W's and H in Journalism. [...]

The Five Ws and One H of Moving to China « Jamie Fleishman 范捷明

November 1, 2012 at 12:12 pm

[...] about the five Ws and one H: Who, What, Why, When, Where and How. As Jeremy Porter says in his Journalistics blog, "Journalism purists will argue your story isn't complete until you answer all six [...]"

Q&A with Scott Butterworth, editorial copy chief at The Washington Post | The Editor's Desk

November 8, 2012 at 7:03 am

[...] A. It requires us to get to the point quickly – to be direct and descriptive – with our online heads. Often, nuance goes by the boards. Web audiences are hungry for smart, well-founded opinion and analysis, but they do gravitate toward starkly worded headlines, full of superlatives and usually beginning with one of the five W's or the H. [...]

» Helicopter down

January 23, 2013 at 7:13 am

[...] A newsroom, when a story breaks, looks a lot like the trading floor of a stock exchange. But slowly a pattern in the chaos emerges. People do know what to do and who to call. We all follow the old creed of the 5 Ws (and the H): [...]

Note to journalists: Ignorance is not bliss when reporting on gender identity | Chelsie Field's Intro to Multimedia Blog

February 25, 2013 at 11:57 pm

[...] The basic format of any news story consists of the 5 W's and H: What,Who,When,Where, Why and How of the story.

[...]

Reporting Skills for the Modern Convergent Journalist | Chitown ENT

April 15, 2013 at 1:44 am

[...] have to be able to gather information from many different sources such as the Internet, in person reporting, and archive research, and build a story from these different streams. They have to manage this [...]

Good Enough Is Not Good Enough « eewei.com

May 3, 2013 at 3:13 am

[...] <http://blog.journalistics.com/2010/five-ws-one-h/> [...]

Five W's and... – Patricia C. Wrede's Blog

June 16, 2013 at 7:36 am

[...] Jeremy Porter has a charming post on this subject. It's supposedly aimed at journalists, but the example he uses to illustrate the [...]

Conspiracy Theorist vs Researcher Part 1

July 12, 2013 at 6:27 pm

[...] It's common in conspiracy theories to hear things explained in rough terms and broad concepts, with few supporting details. While this is how almost any investigation into a possible conspiracy begins, it tends to be the final destination for the Conspiracy Theorist. Researchers, however, will try to prove the conspiracy real or false by moving beyond the broad concepts and into the specifics of who, where, when, etc. [...]

The five Ws and one H of audit compliance – Auphsite Consulting

July 25, 2013 at 2:22 pm

[...] good journalist knows that a well-written story isn't complete without the Five Ws and One H. When it comes to

your financial records and audit compliance, what you don't know can hurt [...]

Freelance Writing: Using the 5 Ws (and How) of Journalism - Miranda Marquit

July 31, 2013 at 1:09 am

[...] It's really not too hard to master this concept. Before you submit your work, or hit "Publish," read through what you've written and make sure that it answers the following questions:
[...]

Leading You to the Simple Facts | NATALIE MAHONEY

September 14, 2013 at 3:12 pm

[...] or interesting parts of the story. Cut to the chase and tell your audience the facts using the 5W's and an H. Answering these questions will help you get your point across and it'll show your readers [...]

The Five W's of Life | Motivational Moments

October 31, 2013 at 10:55 pm

[...] asked by journalists to provide the necessary details about a news story or event. I came across an example that shows how you would use the five W's to gather information if you were reporting on The [...]

The Five W's & How: Applying them to an individual fact - John Kroll Digital

November 14, 2013 at 11:45 am

[...] and How are journalism's double trinity. They're generally applied to whole stories, as Jeremy Porter notes on the Journalistics blog. But they're also a key to fact-checking, especially when you're reporting on [...]

Digital Literacy – web researching | iMaturestudent

November 23, 2013 at 6:49 pm

[...] J. (Aug 5th, 2010) Five Ws and One H: The secret to complete news stories. <http://blog.journalistics.com/2010/five-ws-one-h/> Accessed: [...]

Responsive Web, Inverted Pyramids and Door County, Wisconsin | Adunate Word & Design

February 6, 2014 at 9:19 pm

[...] web design, it's a 4-day weekend in the boondocks. Think about it: If you've got the who, what, where, when and why right in front of you, you're pretty much good to go no matter where you happen to [...]

Press Releases 101 - Getting Smart by Jennifer Aalgaard - edleaders, EdTech, education, Innovation, learning, technology | Getting Smart
May 15, 2014 at 5:13 pm

[...] headline passes the first step and is opened, a quick read of the first paragraph needs to give the 5W's and one H in 3-5 sentences. TIP: Watch out for run-on and fragmented [...]

Seems Reasonable | Broadsheet.ie
November 17, 2014 at 1:14 pm

[...] put aside your pointless pontificating, go back to your basic journalistic training and ask the five Ws and one H that we all learned on our first day in [...]

What bloggers can learn from kids' homework | Natalie Smithson
March 31, 2015 at 12:45 pm

[...] what and why to uncover them. A story as simple as the Three Little Pigs is used as an example here of how to do [...]

The Definitive Guide on How To Write a Blog Post with more than 50 Writing Formulas and Examples. - JustinMcCullough.com
April 11, 2015 at 8:17 pm

[...] <http://blog.journalistics.com/2010/five-ws-one-h/> [...]

News Article Analysis Worksheet | Teaching Roots and Wings
May 19, 2015 at 5:40 pm

[...] element of journalism that we focus on is the five Ws and the H that must be included in the story. The Five Ws and One H: the Secret to the Complete News Story is a great online article that explains why this information is vital to news articles. Students [...]

Weekly Schedule and Resources | eccjournalismcamp2015
June 13, 2015 at 3:25 pm

[...] Five W's and an H [...]

The Camp: June 15 – 18 | Journalism Camp @ ECC

June 17, 2015 at 11:39 am

[...] Five W's and an H [...]

Press Releases 101 | PRGalJen

June 17, 2015 at 4:14 pm

[...] the first step and your release is opened, a quick read of the first paragraph needs to give the 5 W's and 1 H in 3-5 sentences. TIP: Watch out for run-on and fragmented [...]

Is it worth reading? The value of questions - Hmm... Interesting

February 29, 2016 at 3:37 pm

[...] to write. Journalists who want to be good journalists of course. A post by Jeremy Porter about the Five Ws and One H: The Secret to Complete News Stories really resonated with me. The basic questions an article should answer [...]

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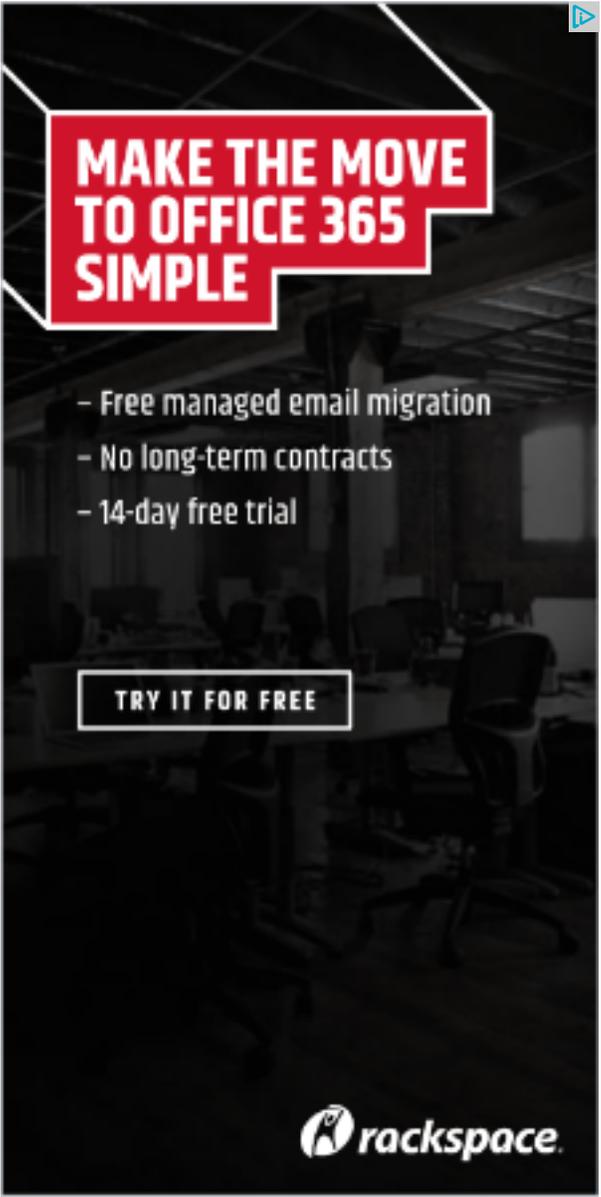
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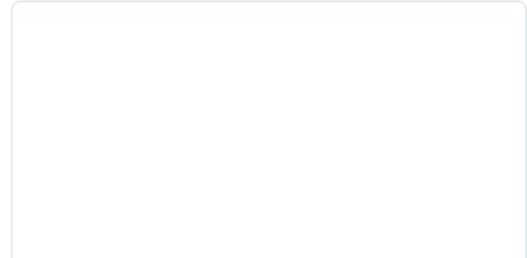
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'The media is a food chain which would fall apart without local newspapers' bit.ly/2aB3Dus. Great stuff from @iamjohnolliver.



John Oliver: 'The media is a food chain...

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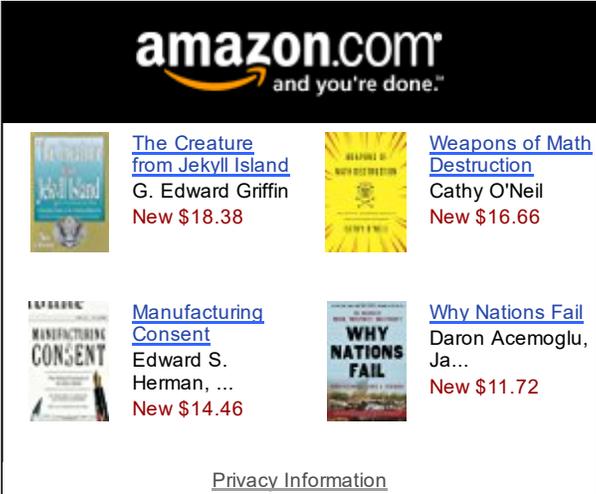
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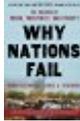
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