

STARTING A SCHOOL NEWSPAPER:

TEACHER CHECKLIST: MIDDLE YEARS

Use this guide to get started inspiring student journalists. You can also visit [**Getting Started with the Student Press**](#) for tutorial videos and other resources. Though this guide implies the creation of a student newspaper, the ideas and skills in this startup guide can be used to demonstrate student learning in a variety of forms, including other forms of journalism such as a podcast or newscast.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- ☐ Secure permission of your principal or other administration as needed.
- ☐ Find consistent and appropriate space and equipment for students to meet. That may mean ensuring access to technology or booking the library learning space, or using another classroom or equipment.
- ☐ Familiarize yourself with the **Student Press site**. Set up an account and try out **PressKid**, the newspaper template app.
- ☐ Make decisions about student privacy, such as implications of publishing student author names and photographs of students. Strategize with your principal as needed.
- ☐ Review Divisional/school policy, complete and submit necessary documents (permits, permission forms).

PLANNING FOR YOUR NEWSROOM

- ☐ Read through the rest of this document and decide how you can make it work for your group. This plan gives you step-by-step instructions for getting your school newspaper up and running.
- ☐ Announce and set up an initial planning meeting with interested students.

CREATING STUDENT JOURNALISM

- ☐ Facilitate the activities using this plan with your students.
- ☐ Print and celebrate your first publication.
- ☐ Continue helping your journalists grow their skills with the mini-lessons found in **Free Press 101**.

NOTES

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STARTING A SCHOOL NEWSPAPER: MIDDLE YEARS

FIRST MEETING TO FIRST PUBLICATION:

This plan will take you through structuring the first meeting of your student journalists through to the publication of your first edition of a school newspaper. The time it takes to get through this plan will vary with the grade level, number, and experience of the student journalists and the frequency and length of the meetings together.

GOALS OF THIS PLAN:

1. Learners will demonstrate understanding of newspaper products and structure.
2. Learners will explore the importance of news and reporting, concepts of "newsworthiness" and how editorial decisions are made.
3. Learners will envision their role in discovering, crafting and communicating news that is important to their school community.
4. Learners will work together to demonstrate their learning, critical thinking and cooperation by producing a school newspaper.

LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Learning experience 1: Getting to know the newspaper

This is a simple discussion template to get learners thinking about what a newspaper is and how it communicates the importance of the issues it covers. Take your time. This is the best time to get to know the students and what motivates them.

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| 1. | Welcome the learners and facilitate an informal discussion about their reasons for wanting to create a school newspaper. Encourage and celebrate each answer. Other discussion-starters might be: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where do you read news stories?• What do you know about newspapers?• Do you read a newspaper? Which one?• What makes you care about the news? |
| 2. | Ask the learners to gather while you lay out the Free Press on a desk or table. Ask them to make observations based on how the paper is organized: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is the most important news today?• How do you know it's the most important? |
| 3. | Separate the paper into its sections (City, Sports, Arts, etc.). Ask the learners: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Why do you think the paper is organized like this?• How do you think people agree on what goes into each section?• How do you think they find out what's going on to report on it? |

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

1. Read through the teacher checklist
2. Read through this plan
3. Make enough copies of activity sheets for your group
4. Pick up a physical copy of the Free Press to share with the class.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Page 1

Getting to know the newspaper

Page 2

Newsworthiness and editorial decision-making

Page 6

Roles and responsibilities within newsrooms

Page 9

The first publication

Learning experience 2: Newsworthiness and editorial decisions

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Learners may complete this activity in pairs, small groups, or as a class. This activity also works as an icebreaker to get students talking and working together. Print enough copies of the headlines below so that each group gets a full set. A PDF version of the headlines below is [here](#). Hand out one page per group and ask the learners to cut the headlines into strips (or do this in advance for them).

Challenge & discussion 1:

*Note: **Newsworthiness** can be defined as a measure of how interesting a particular story will be to the audience of the paper. Learners will need to consider not only their personal feelings of how important a story is, but also the feelings of other readers and how the story will entice new readers. Prompting learners to describe and define who they hope will read the paper may help them make decisions during this activity.*

- Ask the learners to work together in pairs/small groups to rank the stories from most newsworthy to least newsworthy.
- Encourage discussion and sharing within groups as they make their choices.
- When complete, ask learners to share their final choices one group at a time.
- Ask individuals and groups to defend their choices and explain their assumptions about the newsworthiness of their stories. Encourage groups to challenge one another's choices.
- For additional learning and activities on these topics, check out [Free Press 101: How do reporters and newsrooms get their stories?](#) and [What's in a Headline?](#)

Headlines:

Classes cancelled yesterday due to power outage

New pets coming home for several school families

Ask the principal: what's up with the dress code?

Ms. Wong retiring after 34 years with our school

New water bottle filling station installed in gym

Prime Minister to visit our city next week

Learning experience 2: Newsworthiness and editorial decisions con't

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2.	Challenge & discussion 2: • Ask the learners to form new groups and this time, and arrange the headlines into themes. These themes do not need to emulate the sections in the Free Press, but they may. • Ask individuals and groups to explain their choices about the themes they made, and how the stories fit into the themes. • Ask learners to defend their choices. One way to do this is to suggest they attempt to change the minds of another group or student.
3.	Challenge & discussion 3: <i>Retrieve your copy of the Free Press and ask learners to apply their learning through the following prompts and questions. Encourage debate and challenge students to defend their opinions as they practiced.</i> • Looking at the front page, which story did the editorial team decide was the most important? Why do you think they made this choice? • Notice how newsworthiness is communicated by placement, font size, photos and other design choices.
4.	Challenge & discussion 4: • Using the template on page 6 (PDF here) and the headline strips from page 3 (PDF here), ask learners to individually pick their top headlines and write them into the worksheet. Learners do not need to write an entire story, but only demonstrate understanding of news hierarchy. • Learners can also sketch a picture in place of photos, making decisions about perspective, scale and mood of photos. For further learning about photojournalism, visit What is your policy on photo editing? from the Free Press 101 site. • When done, ask learners to discuss and defend their choices. Learners should be able to define how the audience influenced their choices, why they chose the particular stories they did, and why they omitted other stories.

There are many other [Free Press 101](#) resources and activities that you may wish to include as your journalists grow in skill and experience. Free Press 101 resources are comprised of bite-sized lessons in journalism and media literacy on a range of topics, meant to be mixed and matched, and used as needed to help learners develop their journalistic skills and understandings. One way to use them is to introduce one concept each time your group meets, giving them opportunities to challenge themselves with each issue of their paper.

Starting a School Newspaper: Middle Years – First Meeting to First Publication

Design your front page:

- Using the headline strips, **choose** your top three stories and write the headlines into the worksheet on the next page.
- Sketch** a picture in place of a photo (grey box) to help illustrate the story.
- When done, you'll be asked to **share** your choices.

The template shows a newspaper layout with the following sections and labels:

- Name your paper:** Points to the top header area.
- Sketch a photo idea for your top story:** Points to a large grey rectangular box on the left side.
- Write your top story headline here:** Points to the headline area of the top story.
- Write your next story headline here:** Points to the headline area of the middle story.
- Third story headline here:** Points to the headline area of the bottom story.

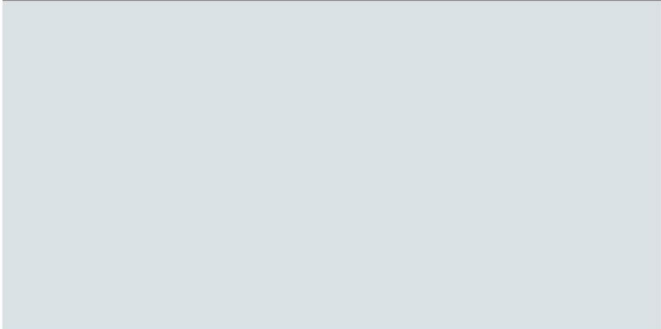
The template includes placeholder text in Latin for the stories and author names.

Headlines:

Classes cancelled yesterday due to power outage	Prime Minister to visit our city next week
New pets coming home for several school families	Ask the principal: what's up with the dress code?
Ms. Wong retiring after 34 years with our school	New water bottle filling station installed in gym

Learning experiences 2: Newsworthiness and editorial decisions: Design your front page

Use the instructions on the previous page to make informed decisions about your front page.



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Learning experience 3: Roles and responsibilities within newsrooms

It takes many people working together to produce a newspaper. Use this activity to help learners learn about these responsibilities and decide how they can each fulfill those roles themselves. Learner handouts are on the following two pages or in a single [PDF here](#).

1.	Challenge & discussion 1: - Hand out "How many people does it take to put a story together" (page 8 or PDF here) or direct learners to the link on our Free Press 101 site. - Ask learners to identify and define the roles or responsibilities they find in the document. This can be done in any number of ways. Students could highlight the roles on hard copies of the document, they could discuss roles as they find them, write roles on a whiteboard, or use an app such as Padlet to collaborate on a co-created list of roles.
2.	Challenge & discussion 2: - Retrieve your copy of the Free Press - Ask learners to find an example in the paper of each role's work. For example, knowing that a pagemaker would have been responsible for shading a particular block of text, or a graphic artist would have been responsible for a chart or map. - This challenge can be done in several ways. Choose an approach that works for your group. Learners could each be assigned a particular role and then find and share their impact on the current edition of the paper. Learners could work through the full list of roles in pairs or small groups, annotating the paper with role titles as they work. You may use an app to collect and display student ideas in real time. - Ask learners to share and compare, discuss and defend their findings. - Have the learners self-assess for which roles they feel they could fulfil most readily, given their individual skills, competencies, experiences or community. - Notice which roles aren't being chosen by the learners. Decide how these roles will be fulfilled by the group during the next activity.
3.	Challenge & discussion 3: - Using the instructions on the handout "Roles at a newspaper" (page 9 or pdf here), work with your learners to decide upon which individuals will fill each role. - Roles may be combined, omitted, or shared, depending on the characteristics of your group of students. - You may need to fill some roles yourself and/or facilitate students' rotations through various roles.

Roles discussed in this activity:

Below are some of the possible roles discussed during this activity. Students should debate, combine, share or delete roles as they feel necessary to make their paper successful and fulfil the vision they have for it.

Editor(s)	Journalist(s)	Photographer(s)
Page maker(s)	Press worker(s)	Delivery people
Web designer(s)	Freelancer(s)	Graphic designer(s)

Learning experience 3a: How many people does it take to put a story together?

Adapted from **Free Press 101** - Edited for length and literacy level

How many people does it take to put a story together?

NADYA PANKIW – Winnipeg Free Press Multimedia Producer



Learning experience 3b: Roles at a newspaper

Editors

Editor-in-Chief	Desk Editor	Copy Editor
Decides the main values and strategy of the paper. Supervises all other editorial staff.	Responsible for a particular portion of the paper, such as Sports, Arts, or Local news.	Edits for style, grammar, spelling, and length. Writes headlines and captions.

Journalists

Reporter	Columnist	Photojournalist
Acts on news tips, finds information, interviews people, writes stories.	Writes opinion or commentary on current events, topics or news.	Captures photographs that give information about stories.

Other roles

Page-maker	Web Design	Freelancer
Responsible for the layout and look of each page of the paper.	Responsible for the newspaper's website.	Someone who isn't employed directly by the paper but sells their journalism to them from time to time.
Delivery people	Press Worker	Graphic designer
Ensures the paper is delivered on time to the correct people.	Ensures the copies of the paper are made on time and good quality.	Produces original graphic art for the newspaper.

Ensuring we're printing the truth is essential to everything we do. Visit "[How do we ensure accuracy in our reporting?](#)" for further learning on this topic.

For deeper additional learning and activities on these topics, visit [Free Press 101: What do copy editors do?](#) and [How do reporters gather and use quotes?](#)

WHAT TO DO

1. Read through the roles on these two pages.
2. Decide which roles and responsibilities are essential for your newspaper to be successful, and which roles can be filled only occasionally.
3. Based on the learners in your group, decide who will take on each role.
4. Decide whether people will stay in their roles or switch roles from time to time.
5. Combine or share roles among learners as needed.
6. Remember, teachers may need to take roles too!

Learning experience 4: The first publication

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Before you begin, make copies of the Storybuilder (page 11 or [PDF here](#)) and retrieve your copy of the Free Press.

1.	Challenge & discussion 1: <i>Working with the Storybuilder (p. 11 or PDF here) on a single story</i> • Ask learners to suggest some story ideas from within their school. • Collect the ideas and have the learners come to consensus on one story they'll work on together. • Model how the "Storybuilder" can be used to build up the necessary elements of a news story by walking through it with the selected story, having students contribute to the decision-making process. Encourage them to explain their decisions, and ask for conflicting choices to enable discussion about why particular decisions are being made.
2.	Challenge & discussion 2: • Retrieve your copy of the Free Press • In small groups, ask learners to analyze a story in the paper, identifying the components from the Storybuilder. They can write their findings into a copy of the Storybuilder sheet. • For example, their answer to "Who do you need to talk to to get more information?" would be the names of any sources that are quoted or referenced in the article they've chosen. How do reporters gather and use quotes? from Free Press 101 will be useful to help them develop the answers to these questions. • Circulate and help learners begin to understand a reporter's process for deciding what to include in a story and how to tell it.
3.	Challenge & discussion 3: • Work with the learners to select another story from their initial suggestions. • This time, in small groups, learners should make their own decisions about how the story will be covered, using the Storybuilder. Learners should all be working on the same story for this part of the activity. • Learners can now write a brief story (perhaps 100-200 words), using the decisions made with the Storybuilder as their guide. They should print the finished story. • Have learners display their finished story alongside their completed storybuilder. Ask them to move throughout the room, reading one another's work. • Use the discussion guide (page 12 or PDF here) to debrief this activity.
4.	Challenge & discussion 4: • Decide upon learner and teacher roles and responsibilities for the first issue of your newspaper. • Decide upon the length of the paper, the proposed format, and whether or not you'll be using PressKid, our newspaper building app. • Decide on deadlines for the first issue. Review roles and responsibilities to estimate how much time will be needed for the work. You may wish to plot this on a timeline with the learners, so they can visualize their own involvement and responsibilities. • Decide on the stories that will be covered in the first issue. Discuss length, placement and any photos that will be needed. • Learners can now begin working, according to the roles and deadlines they've agreed upon.

Learning experience 4: Storybuilder

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This page will help you navigate the decisions you need to make in covering your story.

1.	One sentence that describes your story idea.
2.	Who do you need to talk to to get more information? What questions could you ask?
3.	What other research is needed? Where will you find it? How will you make sure it's factual?
4.	Who does this impact? How might they react?
5.	Who is your audience? Who will think this is an important story?
6.	What kind of opening will your story have? An anecdote? A fact? Write your first sentence here.
7.	Would a photo help enhance your story? If so, what would it be?
8.	How can you balance your story? What are some other perspectives that may need to be represented?

Learning experience 4: Discussion guide

Below are some sample questions you may want to use to encourage critical conversations around newsmaking. Learners should be able to critically assess the impact their decisions have on how a story is told, and be able to identify opportunities to influence the outcome. Look for consensus and dissonance on ideas and processes, and encourage students to recognize the different ways people make decisions and solve problems.

1.	Which version of the story did you think was the best? What is it about that version that makes you feel that way?
2.	Are you happy with your version? Why or why not?
3.	How did the choices you made in the Storybuilder appear in your finished story? Were some more difficult to integrate than others? Did you need to leave any out?
4.	Did any part of the writing process surprise you? For example, did a source lead you in an unexpected direction, or did your research shift the story focus?
5.	What's one decision another group made that you wish your group had thought of? Why?
6.	Compare your sources or quotes with another group's. How did their choices affect the tone or credibility of the story?
7.	What kinds of openings did different groups use? Which were more effective at grabbing your attention? Why?
8.	Look at the balance of perspectives in each story. Which stories felt more balanced or fair? How did the writers achieve that?
9.	Did any groups include elements like a photo idea or headline that made their story stand out? What impact did those decisions have?
10.	Were there any common patterns or themes that showed up across different versions? What are they?