

Free Press 101: Middle Years

HOW DO REPORTERS AND NEWSROOMS GET THEIR STORIES?

This group of learning experiences are meant to be short, informative, and equip learners with skills to better understand topics in journalism and journalistic integrity.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- ☐ Read through this document and **How do reporters and newsrooms get their stories?** in **Free Press 101**.
- ☐ Facilitate learner access to technology as needed.

GOALS OF THESE LEARNING EXPERIENCES:

Learners will demonstrate understanding of how news tips are gathered and stories are developed.

DEFINITIONS:

News tip: a story idea from a community member directly to the newspaper.

News lead: a potential story idea that a journalist is looking into.

Pitch: a journalist's attempt to convince an editor they have a good news story.

EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES:

These learning experiences take learners through the process of developing a story from an in-person news source. There are many other ways to find and follow news leads, including:

- Conflicts
- Events
- Unusual occurrences
- Trends
- Oddities
- Pop culture
- Social media
- Government schedules and documents
- Freedom of information requests

LEARNING EXPERIENCE 1: GATHERING NEWS TIPS

1.
 - Ask learners to identify some of their favourite topics, subjects or extracurricular clubs and teams. Note their answers on the board or ask them to write them down individually.
 - Challenge the learners to recognize the differences in the room. For example, one learner may be deeply interested in video games while another is a basketball player. In this example, ask the gamer who they might talk to in order to understand what is happening in basketball. Challenge them to broaden the list of people they might talk to. Make the list of possible sources as long as possible. Keeping with the basketball example, their answers may include teachers, coaches, parents at the game, scorekeepers, players, siblings of players, school custodians and others. They could talk to players who didn't make the team, or students who play for teams outside of school. Repeat with other topics and learners.
 - Ask learners to collect news tips from the people on the list. This could be from people with similar interests to theirs, or people with different interests. Provide sample questions they could use if they feel unsure talking to people. Equip them with any safety concerns they may require if talking to people outside of the school community. Use the "Tip collector" worksheet (page three, or as a separate [PDF here](#)) to provide learners with a way to organize their ideas.
 - Encourage students to have ongoing communication with their sources, to build trust, and to keep contact with them in future. Ensure the sources know they can contact the learner if other news tips occur to them.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE 2: FOLLOWING A LEAD

2.
 - Ask learners to share their news tips with one another. Their task is now to help each other explore which news tips could turn into viable leads, and how they might pursue the lead.
 - Some guiding questions for the learners to ask one another:
 1. Which of these tips do you think is strongest?
 2. What other information will you need to turn this tip into a story? Where will you get it?
 3. What makes a particular news tip interesting to you?
 4. Which of these news tips is most interesting to you?
 5. What do you hope some of these news tips could teach people?
 6. What further story ideas do these news tips make you think of?
 7. Can you suggest other sources of information that might help present a different perspective?
 - Learners should now pick one news tip that they want to follow up on and gather more information from sources in order to get a more complete and balanced understanding of their story idea. They can now work out a short pitch, or persuasive argument, that their story is important and should be included in the news.
 - If needed, the learners can use the "Pitch creator" worksheet (page four, or as a separate [PDF here](#)).

LEARNING EXPERIENCE 3: PITCHING A STORY

3.
 - For this experience, learners will role play as journalist and editors, where the journalist is the one making the pitch, and the editors are everyone else.
 - In turn, each "journalist" makes their pitch to the group, and the "editors" advise on newsworthiness and ask questions to address any gaps in the information collected. Guiding questions for "editors" are below.
 1. Is the story sufficiently interesting? Significant? New?
 2. Will the story appeal to a group of people? Which group?
 3. How long should this story be? What photo could help tell the story?
 4. What questions arise from this story? Can they be answered in the story? Do they need to be?

The Tip Collector

Use the sheet below to collect some ideas for news stories. Make sure you write down who you spoke to AND what their role is in the story. An example is below.

Example:

I spoke to Mr. Wall, Grade 7 Basketball coach about Basketball.

Two news ideas they suggested were:

1. The team just got new jerseys.
2. The gym floor is getting fixed, so they've been practicing at a different school.

1.

I spoke to _____, _____ about _____.

Two news ideas they suggested were:

1. _____.
2. _____.

2.

I spoke to _____, _____ about _____.

Two news ideas they suggested were:

1. _____.
2. _____.

3.

I spoke to _____, _____ about _____.

Two news ideas they suggested were:

1. _____.
2. _____.

The Pitch Generator

1. Use the sheet below to refine your story idea.

1.	News tip I'm going to follow up on:
2.	Information I still need, and where I'm going to try to find it:
3.	Why I think this news tip will be interesting for people to know about:
4.	Some ideas for other related stories I could follow up on:
5.	Other people affected by this story, and questions I could ask them:

2. Write two short paragraphs or practice a short speech that pitches your story, using the answers to your questions above. Complete the following two sentences to create your paragraphs or speech:

My story is about...

This story is important because...
