

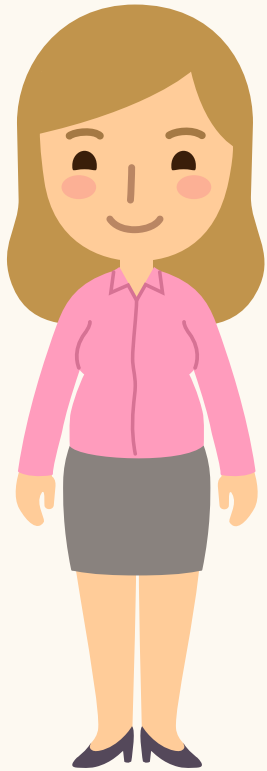
# It's Not a Five-Paragraph Essay

Writing as a journalist is different from most other writing you do for school, though of course journalism teachers do grade your work.

## Your Audience

### Writing for School

You write for a teacher, perhaps the only person who will read the essay. He grades your work, probably with a rubric. You know you have done a good job when you get a good grade.



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### Writing for Publication

As a journalist, you write for readers, viewers or listeners, both peers and adults. You know you have done a good job when people read, listen to or watch your work to the end, when they comment on it, talk about it and keep on reading, listening to or viewing your publication. A journalist's A+ comes when your audience begins looking forward to the next work you publish or broadcast.



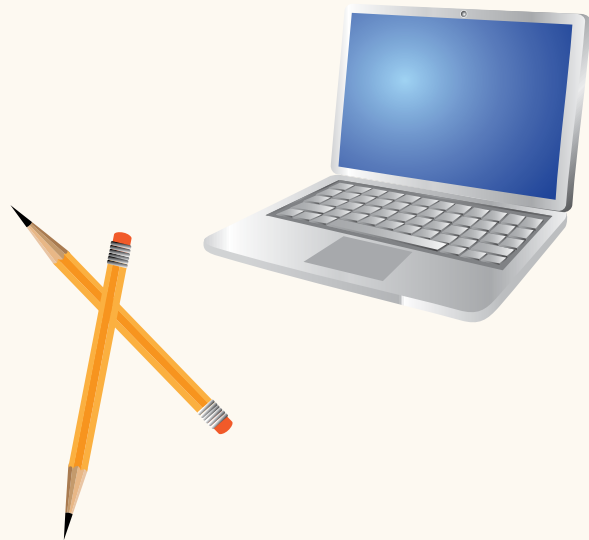
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## How You Research or Report

### For School

You are assigned a topic—an essay about how a character changes in “To Kill a Mockingbird,” for instance. You ask, “How long does it have to be?” Then you decide on a thesis: *In Harper Lee’s novel “To Kill a Mockingbird,” Scout is a clueless child who learns empathy through the events of the novel.*

You gather information to prove your thesis, some from the first section, some from the middle, some from the end. You may choose details to compare Scout to her brother Jem, but you are choosing only the information that supports your thesis and will fill up the number of pages or the number of paragraphs you have been asked to write. You ignore anything that distracts from the thesis.



### For Publication

Journalists may find or be assigned a topic, but they discover the story’s focus by reporting on it.

- Tracy Wilkinson discovered Jessica Lucero, Cruz Perez and David Mancera when she began reporting on crimes against women in Mexico state.
- Diana Marcum discovered Comanche and Morgan Austin when she went to Huntington Lake in the High Sierra.

The reporters did not start out with a thesis and then pick the supporting evidence like daisies. They went out to gather news, including news they did not expect, news that went against what they thought the story would be about. As they picked daisies, clover and nettles, they discovered the story.

Though editors may say they want 14 inches or 500 words, journalists often beg for more time, more space, more media to report on what they find.



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## How You Organize Your Writing

### For School

In school writing, the shape of the writing is in the prompt your teacher gives you:

Compare igneous rock, including both intrusive and extrusive forms, with metamorphic rock. Include how and where they are formed, how they each may be identified and where they are found. Give specific examples of each kind.

The prompt determines the outline.

- I. Formation processes
  - A. Igneous rock
    - 1. Intrusive
    - 2. Extrusive
  - B. Metamorphic rock
- II. Identification by structure
  - A. Igneous rock
  - B. Metamorphic rock
- III. Locations and examples

### For Publication

Journalists find the organization for their stories as they report. For a breaking news story, the order is controlled by what is most important (remember the inverted pyramid), but even that is not cut and dried. Editors and writers may differ on what is important. As you saw in the LL Cool J story in chapter 5, the online version immediately identified the suspect as a transient, while the print version mentioned this in the third paragraph.

For general news stories, all the material from the end of the nut graf or five W's lead to the closing can be arranged in multiple ways, including by analysis, in a narrative, as a punch list with transitions, chronologically, geographically or by sources.

## Your Vocabulary

### For School

Your teacher may tell you that you need to use a higher-level vocabulary to present yourself as an intelligent, educated writer. You may be encouraged to use long words instead of short ones.

### For Publication

Journalists choose shorter words if they will do the job as well as or better than longer ones. Shorter words are easier on the ears and take up less room on the page. The reader needs to wade through fewer words, fewer letters, to get to the important point. A journalist's job is to make the complicated clear and never to draw attention to himself.

Academic Writing	Journalism
purchase	buy
numerous	many
eliminate	cut
adjacent to	next to
at the present time	now
relocate	move
approximately	about

## Sentences

### For School

Teachers value the ability to write complex sentences (sentences with subordinate elements and multiple parallel clauses) as a sign of intellectual maturity and wide experience as a reader.

### For Publication

Journalists do need to construct sentences, especially lead sentences, with multiple ideas, multiple clauses and a great deal of information, but a journalist's job is to make the complicated clear, not the clear complicated. This is especially true of broadcast journalists.

## Paragraphs

### For School

A one-sentence paragraph invites teacher red-ink graffiti. *More! Develop this idea!* A two-sentence paragraph invites *Give examples! Use quotations to support your point! Explain this!* Academic writing asks for a paragraph with a topic sentence, an explanation and then two, three or more examples.

### For Publication

Journalists do develop ideas, give explanations and examples, and incorporate quotations. But they do not do it all in one paragraph. They may divide the material that a teacher would expect in one paragraph into several.

Journalistic paragraphs are frequently one sentence long. Two-sentence paragraphs begin to stretch out into inches, if you are publishing in narrow newspaper columns. Three sentences may seem like a rectangular block on a page if you are publishing online. Four sentences in a paragraph may have your audience reaching for the Page Down key.

## Style or Accuracy?

### For School

At school, especially on high-stakes tests, accuracy is not as important as style—writing a well-organized essay. If you quote from “Walden” to give examples of Transcendentalism, the test-graders may forgive your error if you say Rousseau wrote it.

### For Publication

Your audience will have almost no tolerance for errors, especially if they were at the scene or if you misspell their names. One mistake will destroy their trust and negate all your careful work.

**Air battle rages over Los Angeles**