

DO NOT DISTRIBUTE TO STUDENTS BEFORE OR DURING THE CONTEST!

INVITATIONAL B • 2020

NEWS WRITING CONTEST TIPS AND SAMPLE STORY

Contest Director: Give one copy to each judge to use during critique/judging. Also, staple one copy of the contest and one copy of the contest tips to each student's returned entry. The purpose of the tips is to provide immediate feedback to students. However, it is not meant to replace written comments from the judge.

1. Open with a future lead under the present circumstances. In this instance, the story comes out before parents can sign up for the counselor conferences.

Because of low turnout at counselor conferences for freshman students and parents, Principal Brayden Johnson will permit the meetings to be scheduled outside of school hours for the last week of March to accommodate working parents. Parents can sign up for the new spots on the counselors' website starting tomorrow.

2. Use direct quotes and get those quotes early in the story. After you introduce quotes, use the transition/quote formula. Be sure you attribute after the quote. An attribution should be: subject of attribution followed by the verb of attribution ("Stuess said," not "said Stuess.") Avoid stacking quotes. Avoid putting two or more quotes from different people together without placing a transition between them. Also, make sure transitions provide information to help the action of the story and the quote does not repeat information revealed in the transition.

transition

Of the 335 freshman students, only 90 have had their 30-minute meeting so far, and 40 have scheduled one for later in the month. Last year, the five counselors were able to meet with 95% of the freshman class.

direct quote

"I want parents to understand how important these meetings are," Che said. "We work with the student and parent to plan the graduation path and the student's path after high school."

transition

Initially, Johnson said he made the decision to offer conferences only during school hours because he thought it was unfair to ask counselors to work overtime without pay.

direct quote

"I understand it's hard for parents to take off from work, but if we don't limit the number of before school and after school appointments, our counselors will work 14-hour days for almost an entire month," Johnson said. "That's too much to ask."

3. Use third person. Don't say "our students" or "our counselor Sue Che" or "Some of our students..." Also, do not editorialize. For instance, you should not say "The counselors are so smart..." without attributing that quote to someone or "The school should ..." These statements are personal opinions and cannot be made in a news story.

4. Note how in the earlier example of transition/quote, each quote is its own paragraph. Don't be afraid to use one and two-sentence paragraphs. Journalistic writing consists mostly of one and two-sentence paragraphs.

SAMPLE STORY

Because of low turnout at counselor conferences for freshman students and parents, Principal Brayden Johnson will permit the meetings to be scheduled outside of school hours for the last week of March to accommodate working parents. Parents can sign up for the new spots on the counselors' website starting tomorrow.

"Those early morning and after-school conference appointments will go quickly," counselor Sue Che said. "Parents need to log into our website as soon as possible on Friday to pick their appointment."

Of the 335 freshman students, only 90 have had their 30-minute meeting so far, and 40 have scheduled one for later in the month. Last year, the five counselors were able to meet with 95% of the freshman class.

"I want parents to understand how important these meetings are," Che said. "We work with the student and parent to plan the graduation path and the student's path after high school."

Initially, Johnson said he made the decision to offer conferences only during school hours because he thought it was unfair to ask counselors to work overtime without pay.

"I understand it's hard for parents to take off from work, but if we don't limit the number of before-school and after-school appointments, our counselors will work 14-hour days for almost an entire month," Johnson said. "That's too much to ask."

The before-school and after-school conferences will be limited to 15 minutes.

"I encourage as many parents as possible to meet with the counselors during the school day," Johnson said.

Johnson agreed to add these time slots after a request from the Parent Teacher Association.

"We are grateful that Mr. Johnson was responsive to parents' needs," PTA president Mariana Marisol said. "To make life a little easier for our counselors, the PTA is going to provide them with breakfast and dinner during that week of early morning and evening conferences."

Freshman Hayden Lucas said his mom is a single mom and is unable to take time off from work because she used her sick and vacation time to care for his grandmother when she had a stroke.

"Before the new schedule was announced, I asked the counselor if I could do the conference by myself, but parents are required," Lucas said. "My mom will be able to make an early morning conference. We are scheduling as soon as we can on Friday."

Parent Chrissy Tieger said she is also unable to take time off from work and is grateful for the new options.

"We definitely will sign up this Friday," Tieger said. "I know the conferences are important."