

V

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF JOURNALISM

4.1. 5Ws & 1H

Most common principle in journalism is the so called **5Ws** and **1H** principle. This means that your information should contain answers to the following 5 questions: **Who, What, Why, When & Where**, and also **How?**

If any of these questions remain unanswered, your information is considered incomplete.

You can look at this in a way as a recipe, which contains all the ingredients used to make a cake or a meal. If any of the ingredients is missing you cannot make the cake or the cake is partial and unfinished.



A very interesting and useful blog [Journalistics](#) provides a convenient illustration of this rule by referring to the story of *Three Little Pigs*, which, I assume, is universally known. If not, you can read this brief [story](#), or watch the famous Walt Disney 8-minutes long [cartoon](#).



The idea is that, after answering these questions, we will have all essential information about the event in question, in this case the story.

So, we should start by asking **Who was involved?** - The three little pigs and the Big Bad Wolf. So, already we know the characters and their names.

When did it happen? - Throughout the day.

Where did it take place? - Initially outside a straw house, then outside a stick house, and eventually outside the brick house.

So far, our answers were rather brief and covered only the basics.

But **what happened?** - This answer requires outlining the entire plot and is therefore more demanding.

Every pig made a house out of different materials (straw, sticks and bricks). Wolf threatened to blow over their houses and destroyed first the straw and then the stick house, Pig one and two were able to flee to the brick house. The wolf failed to blow the third house, and was burned when trying to enter it through the chimney.

Now, **why did all this happen?** - Well, because the Wolf wanted to eat the pigs. However, as the pigs fled to their houses and mocked the Wolf, he was enraged and tried to blow all their houses off.

And, finally, **how did all this happen?** - Basically, the first two pigs were rather lazy and reckless, and they built their houses without much effort and of poor material. This enabled the wolf to blow their houses off.

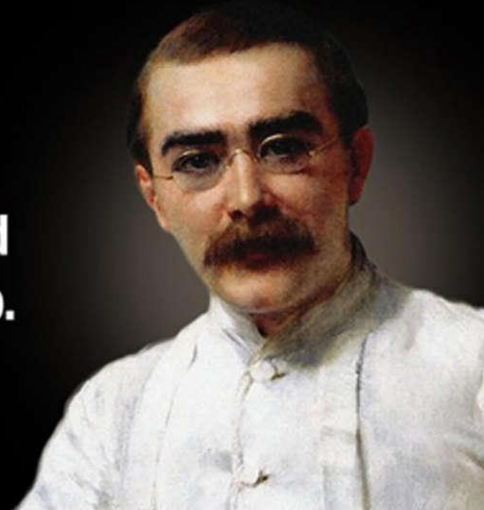
However, the brick house was solid, so the Wolf failed to blow it off too, and decided to enter it through a chimney. But the third pig anticipated it, put a pot of boiling water, and the wolf got burned.

As we can see, these questions provide not only a framework required to acquire the essential information, but also the order that this information should be delivered by.

Famous English writer Rudyard Kipling, the author of The Jungle Book and other great works, even made a cute little poem about the 5Ws and 1H.

I keep **six honest serving men**
(they taught me all i knew);
theirs names are **What and Why and**
When and How and Where and Who.

– Rudyard Kipling



This poem can be useful as a reminder, so if you tend to forget some of these 6 elements, the rimes can help you remembering them.

5.2. THE INVERTED PYRAMID

As mentioned, we should start with basic information about the characters, time and place of an event, and then proceed with more in-depth questions about the plot and the reasons or intentions of its protagonists.

This can conveniently be presented in a form of a reversed triangle or an **inverted pyramid**.

The first thing that you should expect to see as a reader/viewer, or you should provide as a producer of news, are these most important information - **5Ws** and **1H**.

The second thing in the news are important details, that are most relevant. Finally, you go to provide background information or other general things. The triangle also shows that these later things, statistically speaking, occupy most space. However, it is essential to cover adequately the basic questions first.

