

Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Media and news literacy skills are at the heart of both the English and Media Studies curriculum. These foundational skills help young people to sift through and interpret the range of information they encounter on a daily basis. They enable young people to view, understand, and critically assess the content, purpose, and point of view of various forms of media. In English, it helps them understand different text types. It equips them to analyse the effects of language choices. It teaches them to write for various purposes and audiences. In Media Studies, media and news literacy forms the base that enables students to interpret media messages, understand how different forms of media are produced, and understand how media can shape public opinion and culture.

The Behind the Headlines programme has a suite of downloadable resources designed to support teachers in teaching these skills. These resources include a range of activities that can be integrated into lessons to help students develop an understanding of how news and media are constructed and presented. This guide is designed to support teachers in planning activities using these resources in line with the national curriculum for both subjects.

Curriculum Links

Media literacy skills are related to the following curricular targets. Further subject specific links can be found in each subject section within this guide.

English Curriculum Links

- Pupils should be able to summarise and organise material, and supporting ideas and arguments with any necessary factual detail.
- Plan, draft, edit and proof-read through: considering how their writing reflects the audiences and purposes for which it was intended.
- Selecting and organising ideas, facts and key points, and citing evidence, details and quotation effectively and pertinently for support and emphasis.

Media Studies Curriculum Links

- Demonstrate skills of enquiry, critical thinking, decision-making and analysis.
- Develop appreciation and critical understanding of the media and their role both historically and currently in society, culture and politics
- Develop practical skills by providing opportunities for creative media production.

[Click here to find out more about our programme and workshops for schools.](#)



Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

English

Teaching news and media literacy skills in English are vital. It aligns with key curriculum goals which aim to develop students' abilities to analyse, interpret, and critique texts. Media literacy helps them to: recognise biases, understand how language influences audiences, and assess source credibility. These skills are vital for understanding both classic literature and modern media.



English KS3-5 Curriculum Links

KS3

- Understand increasingly challenging texts through: knowing the purpose, audience for and context of the writing and drawing on this knowledge to support comprehension and checking their understanding to make sure that what they have read makes sense.
- Pupils should be able to summarise and organise material, and supporting ideas and arguments with any necessary factual detail.
- Plan, draft, edit and proof-read through: considering how their writing reflects the audiences and purposes for which it was intended, amending the vocabulary, grammar and structure of their writing to improve its coherence and overall effectiveness, paying attention to accurate grammar, punctuation and spelling.

KS4

- Read and appreciate the depth and power of the English literary heritage through: reading a wide range of high-quality, challenging, classic literature and extended literary non-fiction, such as essays, reviews and journalism.
- Write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through: adapting their writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences: to describe, narrate, explain, instruct, give and respond to information, and argue.
- Selecting and organising ideas, facts and key points, and citing evidence, details and quotation effectively and pertinently for support and emphasis.
- Revise, edit and proof-read through: reflecting on whether their draft achieves the intended impact restructuring their writing, and amending its grammar and vocabulary to improve coherence, consistency, clarity and overall effectiveness.

KS5

- Apply critical and creative skills in close reading, description, evaluation, analysis, interpretation and production of texts and discourses.

Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Annotated Front Pages

Curriculum Link

Language analysis and textual analysis:

This resource aligns with the curriculum requirement to explore how texts create meaning and how layout, headlines, images, and language contribute to the purpose and impact of media texts.

The annotated front pages can be used in class to examine how newspaper front pages and articles are constructed. They can be used in lessons focused on analysing how different text features (such as headlines, images, and captions) contribute to the overall message and tone of a news article. This is particularly useful for preparing students for tasks involving the analysis of non-fiction texts, which is a core component of English exams.

Teaching ideas:

- Give students copies of the Guardian and Observer annotated front pages. Ask students to compare the layout, image choice, and placement of stories. They should consider questions like: How does the choice of images influence the reader's emotional response? How does the placement of stories suggest importance?
- Using the annotated front pages, ask students to identify which stories are given the most prominence and why. Discuss the factors that might influence these decisions, such as the importance of the story and the target audience.

Useful links:

- [Annotated Guardian front page](#)
- [Annotated Observer front page](#)
- [History of the Observer](#)



Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Newspaper Writing and Design

Curriculum Link

Writing for purpose and audience:

These resources support the English curriculum's focus on writing non-fiction - which requires students to produce articles, reports, and other media. It can help teach language use for different genres and purposes.

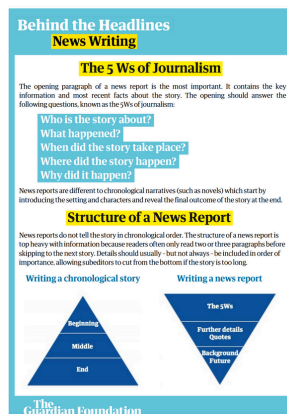
These resources can be integrated into lessons, helping students understand the structure of news articles, the importance of the 5Ws (Who, What, When, Where, Why), and how to craft engaging introductions. They can be used in tasks that require students to write persuasively or informatively, ensuring they meet the curriculum's standards for clarity, coherence, and appropriateness of style.

Teaching idea:

- Divide the class into small teams or "desks". Each desk will cover a different section of a fictional class newspaper, such as news, sports, or entertainment. Using the "Newspaper Writing and Design" and "Picture Choices" resources, students will write articles, design layouts, and select images for their sections. Encourage students to consider their audience whilst working on their articles and sections. and to experiment with different writing styles based on their section.

Useful links:

- [News writing](#)
- [5W's and inverted pyramid poster](#)
- [Picture choices](#)



Behind the Headlines
News Writing

The 5Ws of Journalism

The opening paragraph of a news report is the most important. It contains the key information and most recent facts about the story. The opening should answer the following questions, known as the 5Ws of journalism.

Who is the story about?
What happened?
When did the story take place?
Where did the story happen?
Why did it happen?

News reports are different to chronological narratives (such as novels) which start by introducing the setting and characters and reveal the final outcome of the story at the end.

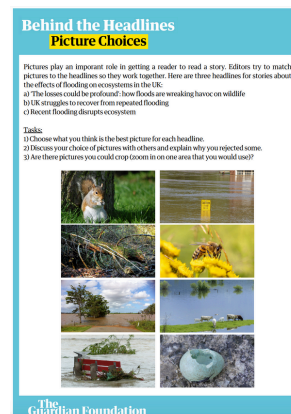
Structure of a News Report

News reports do not tell the story in chronological order. The structure of a news report is top heavy with information because readers often only read two or three paragraphs before skipping to the next story. Details should usually, but not always, be included in order of importance, allowing subeditors to cut from the bottom if the story is too long.

Writing a chronological story Writing a news report

Beginning The 5Ws
Middle Further details
End Quotes
 Background
 Pictures

The Guardian Foundation



Behind the Headlines
Picture Choices

Pictures play an important role in getting a reader to read a story. Editors try to match pictures to the headlines so they work together. Here are three headlines for news about the effects of flooding on ecosystems in the UK:

A) The losses could be profound: how floods are wreaking havoc on wildlife
B) UK struggles to recover from repeated flooding
C) Recent flooding disrupts ecosystem

Tasks:

1) Choose what you think is the best picture for each headline.
2) Discuss your choice of pictures with others and explain why you rejected some.
3) Are there pictures you could crop (zoom) in on one area that you would use?

The Guardian Foundation

Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Feature and Opinion Writing

Curriculum Link

Creative and persuasive writing:

These resources can support you to meet the curriculum's requirements of students being able to express their viewpoints effectively, using appropriate writing techniques and devices. They can support learning objectives related to constructing arguments, using persuasive techniques, and understanding the distinctions between different types of non-fiction writing.

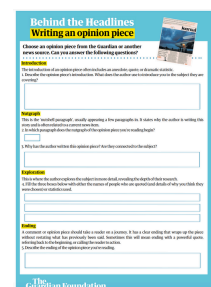
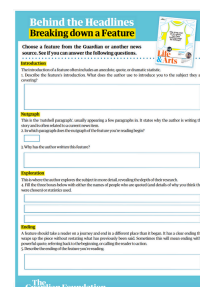
These resources can be useful for lessons on writing features and opinion pieces, which are often required in English assessments. By breaking down feature and opinion writing from across the Guardian and Observer, it helps students understand how to structure their writing, develop arguments, and use stylistic features to engage their audience. The tips for writing section can be used to guide students through the process of drafting, revising, and improving their own opinion articles.

Teaching ideas:

- Provide students with a selection of opinion and feature articles from the Guardian and Observer. Ask them to read and annotate these articles, focusing on how the authors use different techniques to engage the reader. In groups, pupils can use the worksheets to breakdown each article.
- Ask students to choose a current social issue that interests them, such as climate change or fake news. Using the resources, guide them through the process of writing a feature article. Encourage pupils to focus on the importance of thorough research, multiple perspectives, and narrative elements like personal stories to make the issue relatable and engaging.

Useful links:

- [Tips for feature and opinion writing](#)
- [Breaking down an opinion piece](#)
- [Breaking down a feature](#)



News Media Vocabulary

Curriculum Link

Vocabulary development and terminology:

This resource can support you to meet the curriculum's requirements for students to expand their vocabulary, particularly in understanding and using subject-specific terminology accurately in their writing.

These fact files can be used to reinforce students' understanding of key media terms, which is essential for both their analytical work and their own writing. These resources can be particularly useful for revision sessions, ensuring students are familiar with the terminology they need to use confidently in English.

Teaching ideas:

- Ask students to write a short story, script, or dialogue that incorporates as many of the key terms from the fact files as possible. For example, they might write a story about a character who works in a newsroom, using as many terms as possible to describe their experiences.
- Create a quiz using definitions and examples from the different fact files. The quiz can include multiple-choice questions, matching terms with definitions, or short-answer questions where students use the terms in sentences.
- Set up a classroom simulation where students take on different roles within a newsroom, such as editors, reporters, sub-editors, and so on. Provide them with a breaking news story and ask them to use the "Newspaper Roles" fact file to guide their decision-making process and decide what their role would do in that scenario. For example, editors might discuss the "editorial stance" to take, reporters might consider what angle to focus on when reporting, and sub-editors would ensure the accuracy of information and copy before publication.

Useful links:

- [Newspaper terminology](#)
- [Types of stories](#)
- [Editorial newspaper roles](#)



Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Media Studies

News and media literacy skills are essential in Media Studies. They help students to critically evaluate and interpret the various media forms they will encounter while studying the subject. Students are expected to consume and engage with diverse media forms and narratives. Developing these skills are crucial for doing well in the classroom as well as fostering critical thinking, and active participation in a media-driven world.

Media Studies KS4-5 Curriculum Links

KS4

- Develop appreciation and critical understanding of the media and their role both historically and currently in society, culture and politics.
- Develop practical skills by providing opportunities for creative media production.
- Develop and apply their understanding of the media through both analysing and producing media products.
- Understand how choice (selection, combination and exclusion) of elements of media language influences meaning in media products, including to create narratives, to portray aspects of reality, to construct points of view, and to represent the world in ways that convey messages and values.

KS5

- Study age appropriate examples of the media from a range of media forms including newspapers.
- Analyse and compare how media products construct and communicate meanings through the interaction of media language and audience response.
- Independently create media and apply knowledge and understanding of media language, representation, media industries and audiences to a media production based on one media form.
- Study the processes which lead media producers to make choices about how to represent events, issues, individuals and social groups.
- Study how media producers target, attract, reach, address and potentially construct audiences.
- Explore how how media industries target audiences through the content and appeal of media products and through the ways in which they are marketed, distributed and circulated.



Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Annotated Front Pages

Curriculum Link

Media representations and media audiences:

These resources align closely with the Media Studies curriculum. They provide practical annotated examples for analysing media texts. They support the study of media language and representations as students can explore how different news stories are framed and the impact of headlines, choice of images, and layout.

These annotated front pages can be used to teach students to analyse media products focusing on how the Guardian and Observer choose to represent events and engage its audience.

Teaching ideas:

- Give students copies of the Guardian and Observer annotated front pages. Ask students to compare the layout, image choice and placement of stories. After reviewing the front pages, challenge students to create a new front page that covers the same content but with a different editorial stance. They should consider how to change the headline, standfirst, images and layout to reflect a new angle. Students can then present their new front pages to the rest of the class, explaining the choices they made and what impact these would have on the audience.
- Using the annotated front pages, ask students to identify which stories are given the most prominence and why. Discuss the factors that might influence these decisions, such as the importance of the story and the target audience.

Useful links:

- [Annotated Guardian front page](#)
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News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Newspaper Writing and Design

Curriculum Link

Media production processes:

These resources help fulfil the curriculum's requirements for understanding media production processes. They cover the basics of news writing, article structure, and print media design.

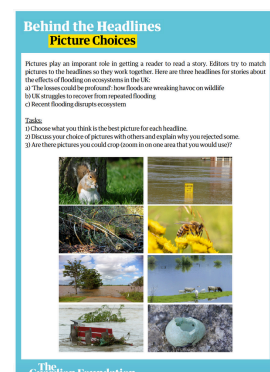
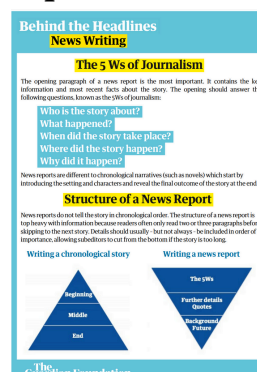
These resources can be used to guide students through the process of creating their own newspaper content. The writing guide can be used to support pupils to understand practical aspects of media production including editorial decisions. The picture choices resource is designed to emphasise the importance of visual design.

Teaching ideas:

- Provide students with the facts of a breaking news story, and ask them to write a short news report within a strict time limit (e.g., 30 minutes). Pupils should focus on covering the "5 Ws" (Who, What, When, Where, Why) and key background detail. Students can then peer-review each other's work, focusing on whether or not key information was covered, and how closely they followed the structure of a news report.
- Using a range of newspaper examples, ask pupils to analyse the layout design, typography, and image placement. Pupils should then design simplified versions of these layouts. They should discuss how changes in design, like moving the headline or changing the image/image size, might affect readers' perceptions of the front page and its news. This task will allow them to explore how content and design work together in the production of news.

Links:

- [News writing](#)
- [5W's and inverted pyramid poster](#)
- [Picture choices](#)



Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Feature and Opinion Writing

Curriculum Link

Media writing and commentary:

These resources support pupils to explore different journalistic writing styles and are key to the Media Studies curriculum. They help students distinguish between feature articles and opinion pieces. This is crucial for understanding varied approaches to reporting and commentary.

These resources can help students write their own feature or opinion pieces and apply their knowledge of both to practical writing tasks.

Teaching ideas:

- Provide students with examples of feature and opinion writing from the Guardian. Using the resources, ask pupils to analyse and break down one feature article and one opinion piece on a similar topic (e.g., climate change, politics). Ask pupils to focus on comparing how each article approaches the subject, including the tone, use of facts, structure, and intended audience. Pupils can then write a paragraph or two summarising the key differences between both.
- After studying examples of both types of writing, use the tips for feature and opinion writing resource to support pupils to practice writing both.

Links:

- [Tips for feature and opinion writing](#)
- [Breaking down an opinion piece](#)
- [Breaking down a feature](#)

Behind the Headlines
Breaking down a Feature

Choose a feature from the Guardian or another news source. See if you can answer the following questions.

Introduction
The introduction of a feature often includes an anecdote, quote or dramatic statistic.
1. Describe the feature's introduction. What does the author use to introduce you to the subject they are covering?

Paragraph
This is the 'hooked' paragraph: usually appearing a few paragraphs in, it states why the author is writing this story and what makes it relevant to current news items.
2. In which paragraph does the paragraph of the feature you're reading begin?
3. Why has the author written this feature?

Ending
This is where the author explores the subject in more detail, avoiding the depth of their research.
4. Will the story have been written with either the names of people who are quoted (and details of why you think they were chosen) or statistics used?

Ending
A feature should take reader on a journey and end in a different place than it began. It has a clear ending that wraps up the piece without repeating what has previously been said. Sometimes this will occur ending with a powerful quote, returning back to the beginning, or calling the reader to action.
5. Describe the ending of the feature you're reading.

The Guardian Foundation

Behind the Headlines
Writing an opinion piece

Choose an opinion piece from the Guardian or another news source. Can you answer the following questions?

Introduction
The introduction of an opinion piece often includes an anecdote, quote or dramatic statistic.
1. Describe the opinion piece's introduction. What does the author use to introduce you to the subject they are covering?

Paragraph
This is the 'hooked' paragraph: usually appearing a few paragraphs in, it states why the author is writing this story and what makes it relevant to current news items.
2. In which paragraph does the paragraph of the opinion piece you're reading begin?
3. Why has the author written this opinion piece? Are they connected to the subject?

Ending
This is where the author explores the subject in more detail, avoiding the depth of their research.
4. Will the story have been written with either the names of people who are quoted (and details of why you think they were chosen) or statistics used?

Ending
A comment or opinion piece should take a reader on a journey. It has a clear ending that wraps up the piece without repeating what has previously been said. Sometimes this will occur ending with a powerful quote, returning back to the beginning, or calling the reader to action.
5. Describe the ending of the opinion piece you're reading.

The Guardian Foundation

Behind the Headlines

News and Media Literacy Skills in English and Media

Reporting News Before the Internet

Curriculum Link

Historical media production:

This resource helps students understand the historical context of media production, which is a key element of the Media Studies curriculum. It provides insight into how news was gathered, produced, and distributed before the digital era.

It can help pupils compare modern and historical media practices. This will give them a broader view of the media industry's evolution and technology's impact on news production.

Teaching idea:

- Once pupils have learnt about the role of an archivist, task pupils with researching how journalists gathered news, conducted interviews and fact-checked in the pre-digital age. They can then compare this to how modern journalists use social media and digital tools in their role. Students can then write a report comparing the difference between the two and how the production of news and media has changed.

Links:

- [Read about the project](#)
- [Downloadable lesson plan](#)

