

Front Page Activity

This activity gives participants a chance to look over a list of story and photo possibilities and decide what items they would choose if they were planning the front page of the newspaper. The activity could be used with teachers in a workshop or with students during a presentation or tour to allow them to experience the news decision-making process, use critical thinking skills, and work together as a team.

To prepare for this activity, I found a past edition of our newspaper and made a list of all of the local stories on the front page and some local stories from inside pages and a similar list of wire stories and another list of sports articles and a final list of photos. Each of these lists, called a digest, will be the main component of the activity. I also choose two stories from the paper to put on a separate “late breaking story list.” I also saved multiple copies of the newspaper I used to create the activity so participants can compare their decisions to the decisions of newspaper editors.

Activity Directions

1. Form groups of 4-8 students or teachers. Divide each group evenly into the following jobs: sports editor/s, local editor/s, wire editor/s, and photo editor/s.
2. Give each editor/s their digest of items and have them put the items in order from most to least important. (For example, the sport editor/s would get the digest of sports stories.) Then they should decide which of the items should go on the front page of their newspaper. Remind editors to base their decisions on the following news criteria: importance, timeliness, proximity, uniqueness, prominence, suspense, conflict, emotions, and progress. Tell editors that they will have to justify their choices to the rest of their small group.
3. Then, have each small group of 4-8 editors come back together for a page one meeting. *As a group*, they must decide which stories will go on the front page of their newspaper. You could also have editors layout their stories on a dummy sheet. Tell editors how many stories and photos were on the front page of the paper you used to create this activity and that they must choose the same number of items for their front page. From the stories they choose for the front page, editors should select one or two articles as the top news story or stories of the day. After letting the groups meet for a while, give each group the late breaking news stories. Now, each group must decide how these stories fit into their planning. (This can be optional.)
4. Have each group share their page one decisions and discuss their choices. Then compare the students’ front pages to what the editors at your newspaper decided on that day. Be prepared to explain their choices. Also, explain that such decision making is subjective and there really isn’t a right or wrong answer. Editors make decisions according to the news criteria mentioned above and according to what they think will interest and effect the most number of readers.

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