



Story Guidelines

1. Don't talk to the reader. Don't start your story with "Have you ever ...?" or "Did you know ...?" Just tell them. "There are more than 200 breeds of dogs ..." Or make them curious: "The first time Dave Jones saw a llama in his backyard, he was surprised. But now he sees them every morning."

2. Write about the story, not about the reporter. Except in a review, you shouldn't use the words "I" and "me" very often. Maybe not at all. If you are interviewing the President, you don't have to tell us "I had the wonderful chance to interview the President!" because we'll figure that out. And don't write about how excited you were. If you do a good job, we'll be excited, too!

3. What is this story about? Don't forget to tell the reader what you're talking about. If you're writing about a national park, where is it? Tell them what is there, including things you didn't get to try out. If you're writing about a club, who can join? How? If you write about the Molly Brown House, don't forget to briefly tell who Molly Brown was.

4. Quotes matter. Getting quotes into your story helps give it personality and brings it to life.

5. You're a reporter, not a salesperson. Unless you are reviewing a movie or book, don't tell readers they should buy something. It is okay, at the end of your story, to say, "for more information" and give a web address. (*But if there's a length problem, that will probably be the first thing cut.*)

6. Read Colorado Kids. Keep a copy of your original story and compare it to how it turned out in print. *Learn* from the changes, and don't be afraid to ask about ones you don't understand.

7. You belong here. Now get to work. You're probably used to being the best writer in the room. Here, you're a good writer in a crowd of good writers. But you know what? Some of the people here are not ever going to get around to actually writing anything. Be one of the people who digs in and gets to work, and you'll already be one of the best, even among this group!

8. When in doubt, ask. It's easier for us to answer a question than to repair a mistake!

Story length: Most stories in CK are between 250 and 350 words. A book or movie report could be a little shorter. Your best bet is to write the story first, and worry about the length later. If it stops by itself after 150 words, read it again and try to see what you might have left out. If it goes beyond 350 words, read it again and figure out what you can cut to make it fit.

How does it sound to you?

A good last step is to read your story aloud. It's a good way to spot missing words or grammatical errors, and to tell if you used the same word too many times. It can also help you notice short choppy sentences or sentences that ramble on forever.