

Foundation for Good Storytelling

- Factual substance is the basis of all good writing
- Writers must look for both content *and* context—both are established by factual background obtained through solid research
 - gives author more authoritative voice
- Determine what is crucial and what is basic info
 - spend time wisely—research for factual presentation or expert opinion, or anecdotal narratives in case studies
 - start with magazine focus and audience interests
- Structural elements:
 - background facts, anecdotes, quotes, examples
 - what's the human element in the story—voice (not the writer's voice, but the representative voice from whom the reader most wants to hear)
 - two perspectives: expert, and personal or anecdotal
 - expert: look for trade, social, and professional associations and organizations in Washington, DC - contact these offices and ask for press office or public affairs—explain scope of article and get a referral
 - research libraries
 - in-the-news
 - develop an “expert tree”
 - cultivate sources over time
 - look for opportunities to take the story in a new direction
 - gaining access to the reluctant voice:
 - “I want to get your side of the story/issue.”
 - “You're the only person who can help clarify issue X.”
 - “I need your help in understanding this subject.”
- Pre-interview checklist:
 - introduce yourself as a writer
 - tell them the magazine from whom you're working
 - mention other experts
 - describe the angle of the article
 - clarify whether the interview will be conducted by telephone or in person
 - request background info (resume, curriculum vitae, etc.—assistant or secretary may be a good source)

- Confirm the interview the day before
- Write out questions beforehand
- Develop five to ten question list that must be answered—but have more on hand in case the interview goes longer
- Don't waste time with questions you can either get from another source or from background documents
- Write, memorize the important questions—but let the conversation flow
- Look for body language
- Handwritten notes are important—but don't try to capture everything—focus on key phrases and ideas
- On phone interviews—keep it private. Hands free may want to use earbuds/headphones
- Use the computer sparingly—can be off-putting to interviewee
- Record
- Create environment that's comfortable for the interviewee
 - look for environmental clues about the subject to establish a positive connection
 - use communication assurances (nods, affirmative phrases, etc.)
- Always review your notes and recordings immediately after the interview
 - keep all notes and research materials in order
 - send copies of article to the source