Reporting for Duty

Basics for beginning reporters, journalists and other neophytes

By Bobby Hawthorne
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For *Starters*

**Be a reporter first.**

Yearbook and Newspaper need writers, but more than that, they need reporters. This means:

- Talking to people.
- Cultivating sources.
- Walking a beat.
- Opening your eyes and ears.
For Starters

WRITE JOURNALISTICALLY.

- No essays.
- No research papers.
- No computer assisted plagiarism.
- No editorials or opinion columns.
For *Starters*

DON’T STATE THE OBVIOUS.

- Tell the reader something new.
- All news questions are not created equal.
- Build your story around the unknown, the unexplained, the misunderstood.
For Starters

TALK TO PEOPLE.

- Find the right person.
- Converse.
- Be curious.
- Anticipate questions your readers will have.
- Ask “so what,” “what if,” and “for example?”
- Seek anecdotes.
For *Starters*

FIND AN ANGLE.

- Look for interesting point of view.
- Provide the unexpected.
For Starters

DECIPHER YOUR FACTS.

- Where do your facts lead you?
- Straight news?
- News-analysis?
- News-feature?
- Feature?
- Alternative copy?
- Stand-alone photo?
For **Starters**

**LEAD WITH A BANG.**

- Get to the point.
- No clichés.
- No wordy summaries.
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ORGANIZE YOUR STORY.

- Build story on direct quotes.
- Tell the story logically.
- Keep transitions short.
- Remember: quotes provide opinion, elaboration, clarification. Transitions provide fact.
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**LOOK FOR STORY.**

- The interesting character.
- The plot or dilemma.
- The setting.
- The chronology or flow.
- The climax.
- The resolution.
For **Starters**

**NO OPINION.**

- Attribute information to a source.
- No summary conclusions.
- Be fair.
- Be balanced.
For **Starter**s

**KNOW THE RULES.**

- Associated Press Stylebook.
- Basic grammar.
- Basic punctuation.
- Correct spelling.
- Precise diction.
- Remember: accuracy, accuracy, accuracy.
For *Starters*

LEAVE YOUR EGO AT THE DOOR.

- Your first draft isn’t good enough.
- Expect to be edited ruthlessly.
- Write. Re-write.
- Listen to and trust your editors.
- Re-write again.
WRITING ISN’T ENOUGH.

- Report first.
- Get the full story.
- Go beyond formula.
- Give more than people expect.
For **Starters**

**STUDY YOUR CRAFT.**

- Read a newspaper every day.
- Study good writing.
- Know what’s going on in the world.
- Practice. Practice. Practice.
For more great examples...

THE Radical Write

By BOBBY HAWTHORNE

Available from the Journalism Education Association bookstore.
www.jea.org