

# Reporting

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# *for Duty*

Basics for beginning reporters,  
journalists and other neophytes

By Bobby Hawthorne  
Austin, TX 2007

For *Starters*

**Be a reporter first.**

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**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.**

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## WRITE JOURNALISTICALLY.

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

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## DON'T STATE THE OBVIOUS.

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

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## TALK TO PEOPLE.

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

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## FIND AN ANGLE.

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

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## DECIPHER YOUR FACTS.

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

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## LEAD WITH A BANG.

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- **Get to the point.**
- **No clichés.**
- **No wordy summaries.**



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## ORGANIZE YOUR STORY.

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- 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.

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

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**NO OPINION.**

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

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## KNOW THE RULES.

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

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## LEAVE YOUR EGO AT THE DOOR.

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- Your first draft isn't good enough .
- Expect to be edited ruthlessly.
- Write. Re-write.
- Listen to and trust your editors.
- Re-write again.

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## WRITING ISN'T ENOUGH.

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

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## STUDY YOUR CRAFT.

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- Read a newspaper every day.
- Study good writing.
- Know what's going on in the world.
- Practice. Practice. Practice.

**For more great examples...**

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THE *Radical Write*

By BOBBY HAWTHORNE

Available from the  
Journalism Education Association bookstore.  
[www.jea.org](http://www.jea.org)