

HOW TO MAKE AN “A” ON YOUR STORY ASSIGNMENTS

Everyone in this class will have to do story assignments. The assignment sheets will include a point person to contact (sometimes more than one). Then it will be your job to use problem solving and critical thinking skills to determine whom else will need to be included in those interviews to cover your assignment thoroughly.

A word of warning: Even on the issues where you did not get an assignment that requires interviews – pay attention to the process anyway. Sooner or later you will, and pleading ignorance will not save you. More importantly, the newspaper is produced as a staff. Every one of you is responsible for the paper’s content in its entirety – so, during staff meetings, do not tune in when it’s your turn and tune out while we discuss everyone else’s assignment. Everyone on staff is charged with the responsibility of knowledge for what’s going into each and every issue – not just your part. So pay attention and participate in the staff meetings.

GATHERING INFORMATION

An example to show you how to go from point person to getting the rest of the story

Let’s say you are given the assignment of covering an event on campus. A guest speaker is coming to campus next Wednesday to discuss job projections for the next five years. The event is being sponsored by the Office of Alumni Relations, so you are given the name of Dion Mcinnis as your point person because he is the director for that department. Where do you go from here?!

FOR A “C” GRADE

1. Contact Dion Mcinnis and find out the name of the guest speaker and his/her contact information.
2. Before you automatically start trying to interview Dion Mcinnis, find out if he is the person in charge of coordinating this event or if he has assigned the task to someone else in his department whom you should be interviewing instead . . . or in addition to him.
3. Ask the obvious questions for the Office of Alumni Relations (OAR):
 - a. Why did OAR decide to bring this event to campus? (Why is it important?)
 - b. Why did OAR pick this particular speaker? What is his/her expertise?
(NOTE: The guest speaker can’t very well brag about his/her own credentials without coming off as conceited, so you’ll need the OAR representative to tell our readers why this person is so wonderful that they should attend the event.)
4. Attend the event so you can report on what took place and interview the guest speaker (if you haven’t already done so in advance).

OK, you have now met your two source minimum: the person hosting the event and the guest speaker. Providing you write the article well enough, you’ve gathered enough sources/info. For a “C” grade.

FOR A “B” GRADE

1. To raise your grade to a “B,” look for additional campus resources you can use to gather information – The Career and Counseling Center for example.
2. Look for professors who teach in a related field who can help shed light on the speaker’s topic – Economic professors from the School of Business for example.
3. Stay after the event and catch attendees before they leave to get their reaction, especially students since we are a student paper.

FOR AN “A” GRADE

Look outside the university for nationally or even internationally recognized experts. For example:

1. The Department of Labor (good resource for stats on job projections broken down by fields/jobs).
2. A professional headhunter, even Monster.com or other online job resources
3. A Human Resource executive from a major company, especially one representing a growing field.
4. Professional organization(s) affiliated with top professions. For example, for the field of communication the Society of Journalism would represent a professional organization in our field.
5. Economic Development Councils

EXERCISE FOR THIS EXAMPLE

Finding out the Who, What, Why, When, Where and How

WHO: Guest speaker coming to campus (will need name and title)

WHAT: The guest speaker is coming to campus to discuss job projections for the next five years.

WHY: Remember, this was to be your first question to Dion Mcinnis or someone from his office. Why is this speaker being brought to campus?

WHEN: Next Wednesday (what’s the date and time?)

WHERE: Find out the location where the event is being held on campus.

HOW: The event is being sponsored by the Office of Alumni Relations

And don’t forget to find out,

SO WHAT: This is the heart of any story – so what? Why do we care?
In this case, students pay a lot of money to go to college to make a decent living after graduating. Knowing where the jobs are going to be after graduation would be important to our students/readership.

SLIDESHOWS/VIDEOS

These same principles apply; slideshows and videos tell a visual story. They should include an introduction, beginning, middle, end and closing credits. Slideshows and videos should include a voiceover and/or live interviews as well as captions (especially names and titles). Both can also include music as part of the background, but it is not mandatory (may depend on project). Pictures should be in focus. Audio should be clear and easy to hear; watch out for distracting background noises. Captions should be free of typos using proper grammar, spelling and punctuation.

BROADCAST REPORTING

Again, these same principles apply. When interviewing in front of a camera, put sources at ease – be conversational. Do not read from the script – rehearse – practice in front of a mirror; watch for body language. Speakers will need to be introduced with names and titles or the video will need to include captions identifying speakers. Make sure the interview can be heard clearly above any distracting background noise (wind, crowds, air conditioning vent, etc.)

GRADING PROCESS

Articles – you will receive a grade for your first draft and a new grade for your rewrite. Your final grade for the article will be the medium of the two grades. EX: First draft = “D” and Rewrite = “B”, then your final grade for the article will be a “C.”

All other projects are graded once, after production night.