
Crafting and Editing Blog Posts

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Science vs Journalism

Science

- Talk, Talk, Talk
- Take time, cover the variables
- Fond of caveats
- Write for the field, colleagues
- Simple to complex, known to unknown

Journalism

- Listen, Listen, Listen
 - Snap Choices: Cover Y, ignore X
 - Fond of breakthroughs
 - Write for my grandmother, neighbour
 - Complex to simple, unknown to known
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The aim

- Bridge these worlds together
 - Stay true to the science and research, while also keeping things engaging and interesting
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The ABC's of journalistic writing

- **A**ccuracy: Information is rooted in facts and primary sources; based on research, expert opinions, people directly impacted
 - **B**revity: Avoiding tangents, unnecessary words; getting to the point
 - **C**larity: Focusing mainly on one clear point, which is obvious throughout the entire article
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Classic “blog post” structure

- **Lead:** A hook that leads the reader into the story
 - **Nut graph:** The main point of the story (“thesis statement”)
 - **Body:** Paragraphs that expand further on the main point of the story (evidence, research, interviews)
 - **Conclusion:** often just a sentence or two, or a quote
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Leads

- Usually 1-2 sentences; hints at the subject in a clever way without revealing the entire focus
 - **Using an anecdote:** appeal to emotion, human experience
 - **Using an analogy:** make a complex concept relatable
 - **Using a statistic:** to show the impact
 - **Posing a question:** the question should be truly impactful
 - **First person anecdote:** writer must have a clear connection
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Examples

- Is regular exercise an insurance policy against an early death? Or is longevity more the result of good genes rather than an active lifestyle? ([Mtl Gaz](#))
 - One in four Canadians does shift work, and one in five works nights, according to the Workers Health and Safety Centre. ([CBC](#))
 - One of the hardest parts about diagnosing teen depression is that the warning signs, such as oversleeping, irritability and mood swings, can look a lot like everyday adolescence. ([Mtl Gaz](#))
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Example: Anecdote/Scene

- When it appeared there was no choice but for Jeff Sankoff to discontinue life-supporting medical care for his father, he was approached by staff of the Jewish General Hospital's Medical-Surgical Intensive Care Unit (MSICU), who proposed something special: creating a memento—a heart-shaped pillow bearing the painted imprint of his father's hand.
 - Eventually, one was given to each of his father's seven grandchildren, who chose handprints in yellow, blue, pink and other colours.
 - "I knew my kids would cherish something like this," Sankoff says. "To this day, the kids hold onto their pillows."
 - **(start of nut graph)** Since 2015, the MSICU has offered these pillows to the loved ones of patients who have passed away, to help with the grieving process. ([JGH News](#))
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Nut graph

- A paragraph (sometimes two) giving the reader the main focus of your story
 - Often addresses as many of the 5 w's as possible (who, what, when, where and why)
 - Illustrates why the topic is one that people should care about (statistics can help here)
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Example

- Is regular exercise an insurance policy against an early death? Or is longevity more the result of good genes rather than an active lifestyle?
 - The debate between nature and nurture is ongoing, but a [2017 study](#) published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine comparing the health and mortality of 900 former elite athletes and their brothers sheds new light on the power of exercise and healthy habits to add years to life.
 - Several studies have reported that athletes – for endurance and team sports in particular – live longer than their sedentary peers. Less clear is whether that longevity is related to the same good genes that contributed to their athletic success or to a commitment to maintaining the healthy habits developed while competing and training...
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Endings

- A concise wrap-up of the article that should leave the reader satisfied or thinking
 - **End by telling:** telling a final new point that brings everything together
 - **End by showing:** an anecdote that shows the story's resolution
 - **End by quoting:** a source is used to give a provocative statement
 - **End with ambiguity:** end with the science as uncertain; more work to be done
 - **End with surprise:** catch the reader off guard with a kicker
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Examples

- As for all of you non-athletes out there who come from a family who spent more time around the house than on the playing field, there's still plenty of time to reap the benefits of regular exercise. Study after study has proven that committing to regular exercise, no matter your age or athletic ability and history, can add years to your life and life to your years. So while you can't choose your parents or be guaranteed the genes of a world-class athlete, there's nothing stopping you from getting moving. ([Mtl Gaz](#))
 - The painting supplies are funded by the MSICU staff. From time to time, staff bring in baked goods or other items to sell to the team, and the money raised is used to buy new materials. "It's a fun initiative for us to take part in as a staff," Ms. D'Orve says. "We hope to continue doing this for as long as possible." ([JGH News](#))
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Make it readable

- **Paragraph length:** Keep them short, 1-3 sentences each.
 - **Acronyms:** Are acronyms spelled when they are not common knowledge?
 - **Jargon:** Based on audience but generally avoided. If used, is it explained quickly and correctly?
 - **Spelling:** Keep it consistent. Favourite vs Favorite? Per cent vs %?
Consider developing a style guide.
 - **Language:** Keep it energetic, light, and relatable. Verbs should be strong.
 - **Description:** Appeal to the senses to help readers understand concepts.
Use analogies, similes, comparisons.
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Don't "hype" the science

- **Address limitations:** Be transparent about the research and its limitations; science is an ongoing process (For example: a small sample size, mice study, etc.)
 - **Include human voices:** Research isn't conducted by ghosts or robots. When possible, humanize the science. (For example: seek to quote/interview the researcher)
 - **Avoid buzzwords:** Research is rarely ever truly "groundbreaking." While words like "miracle cure" or "life-changing" can garner attention, they are misleading to your audience.
 - **Keep things in context:** What does this work add to the already existing body of literature around the topic? Does it change what we know?
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Fact-checking

Studies

- What is published in a legitimate, peer-reviewed journal?
- How was the study funded?
- Was the study ever retracted?
- Who is the first author and what is their expertise?
- Was the study cited? Positively or negatively?

Statements

- Is the statement attributed to a source? Is that source an expert on the topic?
 - If the statement is an opinion, is the writer qualified as an expert on this topic?
 - Are attributed statements linked to a primary source? (i.e., not a news outlet)
 - Is the statement new or dated?
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A Copy-Editing Activity

- bit.ly/CJAPediting
 - If you decide to open this doc on your own, make sure to only look at the first page for now!
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Some advice

- **Learn by writing.** The more you write, the more in tune you'll be with how to craft sentences and structure a piece. This will in turn make you a better editor.
 - **Learn by reading.** The more articles you read, the more familiar you'll become with writing practices.
 - **Everyone edits differently.** Though editing can be done in many ways, the aim of any editor should be to keep the essence of the writer's' voice and get their points across to the reader, while ensuring their writing is clear, accurate, but also, colourful.
 - **Be patient.** Good editing takes time and practice!
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Copy-Editing Checklist

Writing Style

- Is the lead engaging?
 - Is it clear what the focus of the story is?
 - Has the writer addressed the 5 w's?
 - Does the writer primarily use simple, accessible language?
 - Are uncommon acronyms spelled out?
 - Is jargon adequately explained?
 - Are paragraphs fairly short?
 - Does each paragraph connect/flow to the next?
 - Is grammar consistent? (whether past, present or future tense)
 - Are colourful analogies, anecdotes and descriptions used to explain the topic?
 - Have “buzzwords” been avoided as necessary?
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Copy-Editing Checklist

Fact-Checking

- Have numbers been fact-checked?
 - Have all names, places and titles been spelled correctly?
 - Is any scientific evidence described adequately supported?
 - Are limitations of the science addressed?
 - Are sources actual experts in the topic at hand?
 - Are sources primary?
 - Are you left without questions after reading?
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Resources

- The Open Notebook: <https://www.theopennotebook.com/>
 - Science Blogging Guidebook:
<https://www.theopennotebook.com/science-blogging-essential-guide/>
 - Projected Futures: <http://concordia.ca/projectedfutures>
 - Studies Verification Checklist:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nVwhKbZpwJyys5uGcENBYVPNr8vu-5aXFjPKU6vn-00/edit>
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Thank you!

Contact me:

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This PowerPoint included some files from our Projected Futures Science Journalism summer course, led by Journalism Chair Dr. David Secko.
