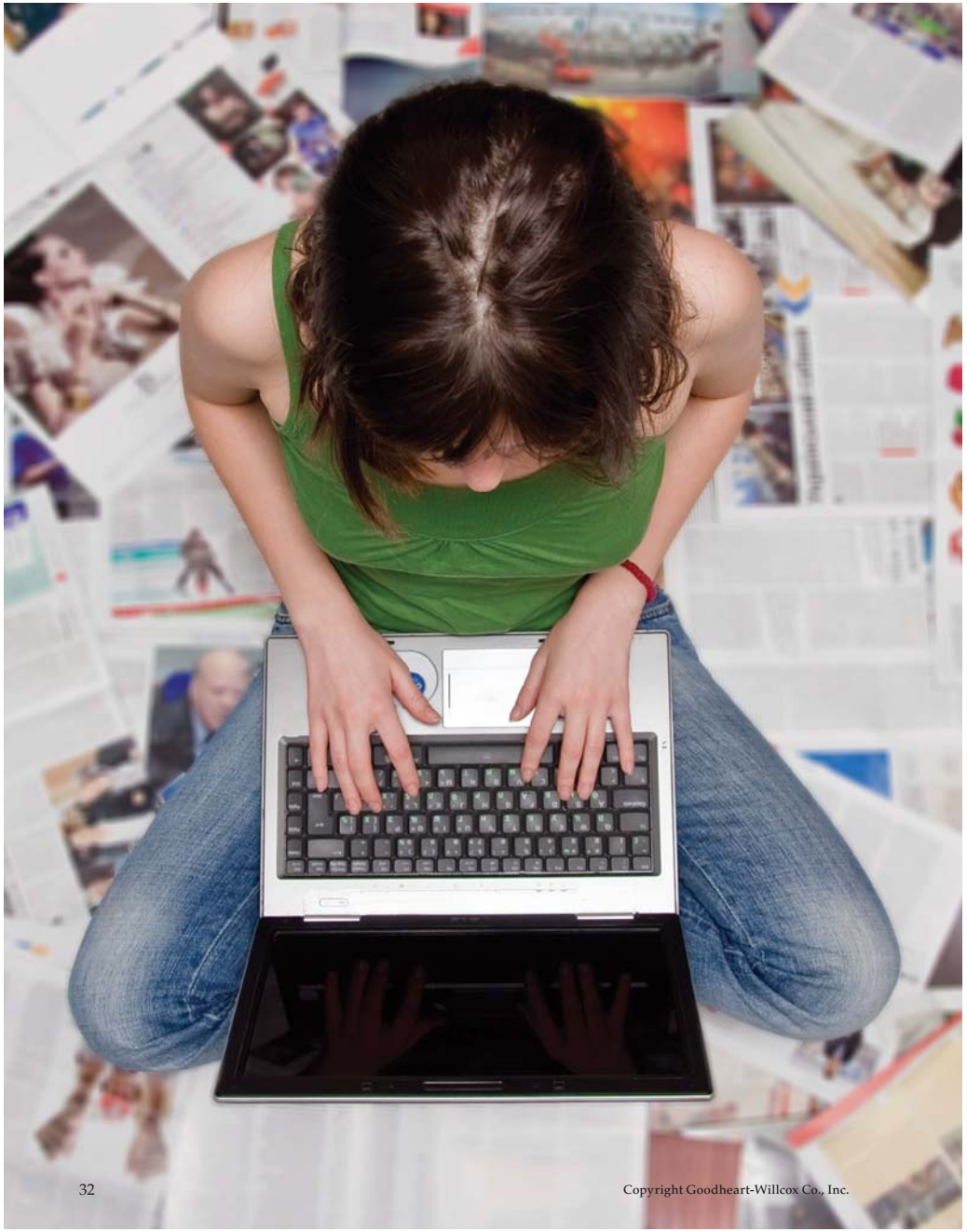


Chapter Two

News Values and Story Ideas

What do we cover?

Chapter Objectives

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- List the seven news values that help you identify strong story ideas for your audience.
- Give examples of how a journalist can incorporate news values into a story to make it stronger.
- Find story ideas through beat reporting.
- Find story ideas from the professional press.
- Find story ideas through direct observation.
- Develop story ideas.
- Pitch story ideas to your producer or editor.

Key Terms

Build Vocab

across the wire
beat
conflict
deadline
dominant story
enterprise stories
human interest
impact
lead story
local angle
news aggregator
news cycle
news peg
news value
oddity
pitch
prominence
proximity
put to bed
scoop
spike
stale
timeliness

G-WLEARNING.com

While studying, look for the activity icon to:

- **Build** vocabulary terms with e-flash cards and matching activities.
- **Extend** learning with further discussion of relevant topics.
- **Reinforce** what you learn by completing style exercises, worksheets and end-of-chapter questions.

Visit the Journalism website: www.g-wlearning.com/journalism

Introduction

"What you see is news, what you know is background, what you feel is opinion."

–Lester Markel, journalist

"What do you want to write about?"
"I dunno. Interesting stuff never happens around here."
"We've got 20 more minutes to fill.
Anything interesting in the announcements?"

Nothing is more important to a broadcast or publication than strong, relevant and interesting stories—stories that inform and engage the audience. The noted sports writer Bill Plaschke said that the most important concepts in journalism are

- ideas,
- ideas,
- ideas,
- reporting, and
- writing.

This is true whether you work for an online publication that streams school games live, a daily paper that reports the results of yesterday's school funding vote, a news show that is broadcast weekly, or a newsmagazine that comes out once a month. No matter what your media or your timing, strong stories make strong publications.

How do you find great story ideas for your broadcast or publication? The seven news values that you will learn about in the following paragraphs will guide you. Later in this chapter you will learn three ways to locate strong story ideas.

News Values

Whose job is it to come up with the story ideas? While it is possible for the editors to assign all the stories the staff reports, that is rarely the best way to produce a quality publication or broadcast.

Seeing What Others Miss

An experienced journalist could walk out of your classroom and locate three or four solid story ideas in less time than it takes you to get through the lunch line. Indeed, Bill Plaschke made that claim to a journalism class at the University of Southern California Annenberg School for Communication.

"They all laughed. Then two days later, I wrote a story about a 5-foot-4 poor, disabled kid from East L.A. who took two buses for two hours every day to come to football practice to carry water for the football team. It turns out, the coaches fed him and the equipment guys clothed him and they all cheered for him, made him their unofficial mascot. I wrote this story about a great team reaching down to help one of society's weaker members, and the USC writers came up to me later, all mad, and said, 'Man, we just thought he was some weird kid who kept showing up.'"

More often, a strong newsroom is a cooperative community, with everyone—from the editor-in-chief to the newest staff reporter—bringing story ideas to staff meetings. At staff meetings, story ideas are developed and then evaluated for their news values and their value to the particular audience.

What is it that makes a strong story? Your high school is like no other, so your high school publication or broadcast should be like no other. The news values help you choose from among the almost infinite number of possible stories you could cover, so that you find the right ones for your audience.

Seven News Values

What are the **news values**? Many journalists identify seven values: proximity, timeliness, impact, prominence, oddity, conflict and human interest. Most strong stories have at least two or three of these values.

Not only do these values help you determine whether or not a story is strong, they also influence which is the **dominant story**, or which story should receive the best position on the page, website or broadcast (Figure 2.1). The stronger the story, the more time or space it should receive. The values also influence how you start the story, how you tell the story and the tone, or manner of expression, of the story.

Proximity

How near is the story to your school? An unexpected power outage at noon on your campus is much more newsworthy than one at a nearby school or one in another state, even if the out-of-state outage covers a wider area and lasts longer, or if a transformer fire starts it. The story on


WE ARE THE SOCIAL MEDIA GENERATION
In-Depth pgs. 6-7
SOCCER PREPARES FOR NAPERVILLE NORTH INVITE
Sports pg. 12
FRIDAY MAY 2, 2014
EVANSTONIAN
EVANSTON TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL
Students to show artwork at YEA festival
Thoroughly Modern Madhouse
60 cast members make *Millie* memorable
Thoroughly Modern Millie plays tonight and closes tomorrow.

Courtesy of The Evanstonian, Evanston Township High School

Figure 2.1 The dominant photo catches the reader's eye first. This front page begins several stories. *Is it difficult to tell which is intended to be the most important story?*

your campus has the greater news value because it has **proximity**, which means the event occurred close to your geographic location.

On occasion you can make distant stories local by finding a **local angle**, which is something about the story that is of interest primarily to your audience. When an earthquake and tsunami hit Japan in 2011, The Broadview, a publication from the Convent of the Sacred Heart in San Francisco, found the local angle by writing about the disaster's effects on one of its seven sister schools in Japan. An international story became local (Figure 2.2).

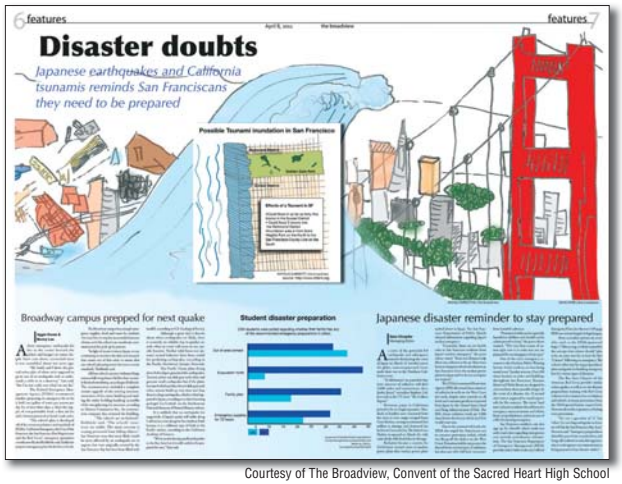
Caution: If you cannot find or develop a local angle, do not repackage what is already widely available from other sources. You are not a **news aggregator**—a person, agency or website that collects news stories for wide distribution but does no reporting and does not create original content. Without a new and local perspective, such aggregates or summaries make for very weak journalism.

Timeliness

Strong stories are about to happen, just happened, or are happening as you publish, broadcast or stream; they have **timeliness**. How recent is the event? Is the event in the very near future? The closer it is to the date or time you publish or broadcast, the more timely it is and the more prominence it should be given. Your **news cycle** (the period between editions, broadcasts or digital posting of stories) will control what is timely for your publication.

If you publish online, an earthquake report may be timely, as was this report in The Paly Voice, which was published before the professional press (Figure 2.3). If your publication does not come out for two more

Figure 2.2 A story that takes place somewhere far away can be made relevant for your publication by finding a local angle. In this case, a distant disaster was used to remind the audience of disaster preparedness at home—just one way of giving the story proximity.



Courtesy of The Broadview, Convent of the Sacred Heart High School

weeks, however, the same earthquake story may be **stale** (out of date) unless you find a timely angle. If the gym lights fell in the earthquake and the gyms are closed until the school board votes next week on funding to retrofit all the lights, the earthquake story is still timely.

Reporting and writing quickly will allow you to keep your publication or broadcast strong. The afternoon La Nueva Voz, a monthly newspaper, was being **put to bed** (being sent to the printer), a naval helicopter experienced technical difficulties and landed on the school's football field. Because the paper came out the next day, the picture and explanation were a **lead story** (the more dominant story) on the front page. If the paper had been published two days later, the story would have become stale and been pushed to an inside page, if it was published at all.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Magnitude 5.6 earthquake hits Bay Area

by THE PALY VOICE
Published October 30, 2007

Tweet

A magnitude 5.6 earthquake struck the Bay Area today at 8:04 p.m. tonight. The earthquakes epicenter was about fives miles north of San Jose's Alum Rock according to US Geological Survey Earthquakes Hazards Program. So far, three aftershocks have occurred between 8:12 and 8:13, going from magnitudes 1.4 at 8:12:23, 1.3 at 8:12:48, and 1.5 at 8:12:55. The earthquake has been felt from as far away as the Santa Cruz Mountains to Stockton.

Tremors from this earthquake were felt in Palo Alto, bringing with it a warning of the need to be prepared for such events.

Many Paly students felt the tremor.

Tamar Ben-Shachar, a junior at Palo Alto High School was one such student.

"It caught me by surprise. I was doing my homework, and I so I ran to the doorframe. My little siblings screamed because they had never felt an earthquake before," Ben-Shachar said.

According to Barbara Cimino, manager of the Office of Emergency Services for Palo Alto, there are currently no reports of damages or injuries, and they are advising people to contact 911 only if there are problems.

Sophomore Abby LaPier was at Policy Debate in Room 220 at Paly when the earthquake occurred.

Courtesy of The Paly Voice, Palo Alto High School

Figure 2.3 Online publications, such as the one above, are often more able than print publications to publish timely stories. The news cycle is usually shorter for the online publications. *What are the news cycles for the various publications and broadcasts at your school?*

Impact

"So what?" If you can answer that question, you have defined the **impact** of your story. How does the story affect the lives of your audience? The strength of the story's effect or impression on your audience determines its impact.

Almost everyone will want to know if spring break is being eliminated because of extra snow days or if graduation and the end of the school year are being postponed because of flooding. These stories impact everyone in your school, and so they have news value, even if the snow has long melted and the water has receded before you publish.

How many students does the theme of the senior prom affect? Think about it: your audience may include seniors who have been planning their prom night for months and will spend hundreds of dollars on the evening, as well as freshmen and sophomores who are looking forward to their own senior prom. Your audience will also include many students from all four classes who simply do not care about the prom. You must know your audience to decide whether prom is your lead story. In the same issue, you may also cover the closure of a nearby skate park and a summer job fair. Which story will impact more of your audience? The story with the most impact should be your lead story.

Journalists recognize the impact of a story on their audience and report it in such a way that the audience understands the impact. Few students follow what goes on at your state capital; but when actions at the capital affect your community, it is a journalist's job not only to bring the news to the audience but also to help the audience understand the story's impact on their lives. The state budget may force your district to

For the Record

Deadlines, Spikes and Being Put to Bed

Historically, morning newspapers had a long news cycle—staffers had a full day to gather news and write stories before the paper was published. They "put the paper to bed" sometime around midnight. Everything had to be finalized and sent to the typesetters and then to the printing presses by 12:00 if the paper was to be on the customers' doorsteps or in the newsstands by 6:00 a.m. Any story received after midnight would go into the following edition or be **spiked**—literally impaled on a spike—if it was not fit to print or if it would be stale by the following day. A **deadline** was really a deadline, a term that comes from an Andersonville prison camp during the Civil War. If a man crossed a marked boundary—the deadline—he was shot dead. That is how journalists regard deadlines.

Afternoon papers in large cities could have much shorter news cycles, especially when several papers competed for the penny a New Yorker paid for each paper in the 19th and early 20th centuries. You may have seen old movies that show newsboys on city streets calling out the latest headlines. Each paper wanted to be first with the news, as an important story developed, a new edition of the front page would be written and a new plate made in the composing room to print it. This was sometimes done as often as every 20 minutes. Papers could go through five or six editions when a developing story was on the front page.

Radio news broadcasts also may have short news cycles. All-news stations ("all news, all the time") may have two news cycles in an hour. Several boast "You give us 22 minutes, we'll give you the world." Other stations broadcast news at the "top of the hour"—every hour on the hour. These stations can rewrite their lead stories for each broadcast as soon as they receive new information, and they break into their other programming when something important comes **across the wire**—from the wire services. Though news stations may employ reporters, especially for local coverage, many stories come from one of the wire services, such as Reuters, Associated Press (AP) or United Press International (UPI). The wire was originally a telegraph wire. Now it is the Internet.

Internet-based news sites and microblogging sites make the news cycle so short it is almost instantaneous, with several reports a minute coming in from scenes of natural disasters, war zones, political conventions, the Olympics or the Oscars or Emmys.

shorten the school year, or requirements for work permits may be changed. How would these events affect your campus? How does college tuition going up (it almost never goes down), affect recent alumni and seniors (Figure 2.4)? If immunization requirements are changed for the fall, how does the requirement to have the whooping cough vaccine affect your audience?

School board meetings may not seem as exciting as football games, but if the school board changes graduation requirements or considers a change in the district's cellphone policy, your publication or broadcast needs to tell your audience about it.


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LATEST Study abroad open house at 4 p.m. on Dec. 18 in the small gym

Falcons protest UC tuition increase

by Ima Journalist
Published 11/24/2014 5:50 PST

Tweet

Three recent Ocean Vista alumni joined walkouts at University of California campuses Monday protesting proposed tuition hikes while seniors express worry.

Suzanne Jacobian helped occupy UC Berkeley's Wheeler Hall, while Sunny Huynh and Charlie Washington demonstrated at UC Riverside and UC Santa Barbara. All three students graduated in 2014.

The UC Board of Regents voted Wednesday to raise tuition by 5 percent each year for the next five years. Students who applied this fall expecting to pay $12,192 a year in tuition would pay $15,564 by 2019 under the plan.

Jacobean, 2013–14 ASB president, tweeted, "Tuition hike is insane. We're taken hostage by the Regents."

Huynh, who entered UC Riverside as a sophomore because of AP credits, posted Instagram photos of herself among other students flashing the three-finger Hunger Games salute, while Washington, last June's Ocean Vista co-valedictorian, reports chalking protest messages and art on the UCSB sidewalk.

OV seniors also reacted negatively to the Regent's decisions. Ana Sanchez-Morales and her twin brother Hugo both applied to UC schools. "My parents are teachers. How could they afford $31,000 in tuition for us, plus books, fees and living expenses?

"The UC's were supposed to provied a world class education for students who prepared themselves. We kept our part of the bargain. We want the UC system to do the same."

Figure 2.4 A distant story becomes a strong local one when you understand its impact on your audience and include the news value of prominence.

Prominence

If the people involved in the story are prominent (well-known), then the story is more newsworthy. **Prominence** is the quality of standing out, being conspicuous or being widely known. If the starting defensive lineman for the varsity football team is taking a course in American Sign Language at a community college, the story is more newsworthy than if a less well-known student is doing the same thing.

An article on the childhood of a local physician may not have great news value, unless he happens to be the son of author Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., whose "Cat's Cradle" is read by sophomores at your school and whose "Slaughterhouse-Five" is read by the seniors. Dr. Vonnegut's prominence makes a story about a local physician newsworthy (Figure 2.5).

If a popular student who graduated last year wins the Young Entrepreneur of the Year award for your city, his prominence probably makes for a good story. If, however, the award is won by a less well-known student who graduated four years ago, he probably does not have enough prominence to make the story worthwhile. If a high school senior runs for a seat on your school board, his prominence on your campus makes the story newsworthy, even though you may not choose to regularly comment on school board candidates (Figure 2.6 on the next page).

Figure 2.5 A story becomes more prominent if a well-known individual is involved.


the Villager

Team raises MS funds page 8

Volume 25, Number 09 Thursday, April 16, 2015

Town Crier

Sports

Other

Courtesy of The Villager, Westport High School

Figure 2.6 If your students are involved in cleaning up a distant disaster, the far away story becomes local.

Oddity

Oddity, the quality of being unusual, can by itself make something newsworthy. If you have many immigrant students in your community, a feature story on a brother and sister from Nicaragua would not have great news value. If, however, your community has few immigrants, a story about the close relationship between a newly arrived brother and sister would have news value because of the oddity. A student who rides a unicycle to school may make a good story because of both oddity and proximity.

Oddity may allow journalists to use a humorous tone, such as this article from National Public Radio. The "Morning Edition" show begins each day with a slightly odd story, a feature called *Diversions*.

> *"A school in Ashland, Montana is looking for lunch. It seems to have wandered off. The school maintains a herd of bison. They provide meat for student lunches, but the animals are gone. The school's executive director says they may have run through a fence during the Memorial Day weekend thunderstorm. People in the area should be on the lookout for shaggy brown creatures with horns that taste great on a bun with ketchup and mustard."*

Figure 2.7 Sports events provide a source of conflict, which can attract readers' attention, to any story. *What conflicts at your school might you write about? How many sides are involved in the conflict?*

Conflict

Humans are interested in all kinds of **conflicts**—disagreements, arguments, contests, fights and rivalries. Suppose the school board is debating whether the auditorium tower should be torn down or repaired. People feel very strongly about the tower, but the budget is already stretched thin. Or suppose twin brothers wrestle each other on the junior varsity team. The conflicts make these stories newsworthy.

Sports stories in particular have built-in conflicts and so capture our attention with words such as *rivalry*, *contest*, *battle* and *victory* (Figure 2.7). After sports, politics probably provides the most opportunities to portray conflicts, both polite and vicious.

While every conflict has at least two sides, many have more than two sides. Even seemingly trivial matters assume greater news value when journalists report the

position of all sides involved. The empty planters in front of your school may not have much news value, but if one group wants to take them out because they are ugly, another wants to fill them in with concrete to use as benches, but still another thinks that would only attract skateboarders looking for a place to grind, you have a major conflict or controversy. What if yet another group wants to replant them with white roses, but others want drought-resistant plants to conserve water? If those empty planters are a source of controversy or conflict, they have news value.

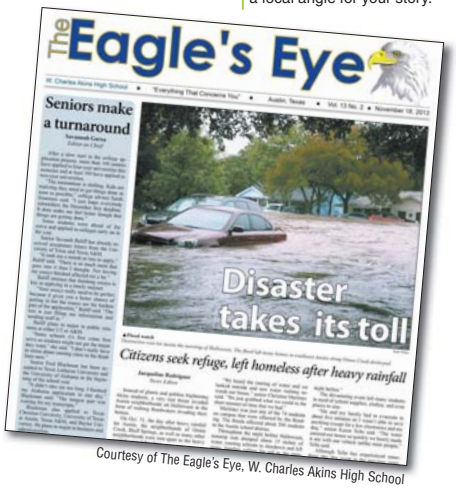
The news value of a story is stronger if your audience can express its opinion on the controversy. Provide links to an online survey where registered users of your site may vote, post comments or write to the editor. Even though the vote probably is not binding, asking people their opinions will engage your audience and strengthen your publication.

Human Interest

News stories with strong **human interest** cover people—usually ordinary people but almost always members of your community—and their problems, concerns, interests, backgrounds and achievements so that the reader's interest and perhaps emotion become involved. A human interest story may cover the student whose ballet career is threatened by a knee injury or the junior who runs his own computer repair business after school and on weekends. It could be about the senior arrested for protesting cruelty to lab animals, the sophomore who hopes his mother will soon be allowed to immigrate to this country after a 10-year separation from her son or the freshman who posts YouTube videos demonstrating dance moves.

Every member of your community has a story, probably more than one. Good reporting and good writing create strong human interest stories, which often give a human face to news events (Figure 2.8).

Figure 2.8 Human interest stories provide insight into your community and create a local angle for your story.



Courtesy of The Eagle's Eye, W. Charles Akins High School

YOUR TURN

1. Locate and then print out, summarize or clip seven stories from a variety of sections in the professional press. Each story should illustrate at least one of the seven news values. Identify the news value(s) in each story.
2. **Going Deeper.** Identify the major news values in four stories from one edition of any of your local or student media.

Incorporating News Values into Stories

A good journalist and a strong staff, working as a community, often discover ways to incorporate more than one news value into a story. Finding those additional news values is a skill that grows with practice.

If a power outage took place a week before you publish (so the story lacks timeliness) or it took place at a neighboring school (so it lacks proximity), the incident can still provide a **news peg** (a connection to a timely event that justifies a feature or soft news story) for a human interest story. For example, you might be able to do a story about a classmate from the Middle East whose first eight years of school took place in a village with no electricity for 23 hours each day: "When the October 23 power outage plunged parts of Puente Vista into darkness, Panthers wondered if learning would stop, but for Ali Mohammet, who arrived here in September from Iraq, learning in the dark seems natural."

You could also add impact to the power outage story by researching what would happen to cellphone towers if your area experienced a widespread power outage. Your audience might be surprised to know that their cellphones may not work during such a power outage (Figure 2.9).

You may discover you have ham radio operators on your campus who could provide disaster communication in the event of a power outage. That would add human interest or perhaps oddity to your new story. If a student was recently elected president of the campus ham radio club, that news story with very little impact could be "pegged" to the power-outage story and become a story with a high news value.

Figure 2.9 A cellphone tower may not be very interesting, but if it is damaged and the students at your school are unable to use their cellphones, you may have a story. *Why?*

If the National Collegiate Athletic Association is debating changes to the courses it considers college preparatory, you could find a local student whose eligibility to play college ball may be altered by the decision. If a story has impact, a good journalist can find and develop a local angle. World War II correspondent Ernie Pyle is reported to have said, "If you want to tell the story of a war, tell the story of one soldier."

If the citizens who want to preserve the auditorium tower include the governor's wife, you can add the element of prominence to the story. If the group includes four generations of a family, the youngest of which still attends your school, you may be able to add the element of oddity.

The student running his own computer business will experience conflict as he tries to balance time for homework and a social life. Perhaps a school requirement for fifteen hours of public service conflicts with the needs of his business. His story may become timelier if the

county announces changes in its work permit policy. If he discovers the networking problem at a local church was caused by mice nesting in the server, you can add the element of oddity. How will the tone of the story change if you emphasize the oddity of the story? Would you use a pun on the two meanings of *mouse*? Mention church mice?

A word of caution: If you cannot identify one or more strong news values in your story, consider carefully whether the story idea is a good one.

Courtesy of the Los Angeles Times

Meet the Professionals: Bill Plaschke

"Only in journalism can our words mean so much. Only in journalism can we use those words to change the world," Bill Plaschke told 3,000 student journalists at a Journalism Education Association convention.

Bill Plaschke, a sports columnist at the Los Angeles Times since 1996 and a regular panelist on the ESPN daily talk show "Around the Horn," has been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize and chosen as the Associated Press's National Sports Columnist of the Year three times. He has authored five books.

Plaschke says journalism is "one of the toughest businesses in the world, but one of the coolest businesses in the world, a business that still makes millions of dollars and reaches zillions of people."

Here's Bill talking about how he got started in journalism:

"Growing up in Louisville, Ky., I went from a tiny Catholic grade school to this giant public high school called Ballard. My parents weren't rich, I didn't know anybody, and I stuttered. My first three months, every day I would run home after school and sleep for two hours, I was so scared and depressed.

"I was sure of only two things in the entire world. I loved to write, and I loved sports. But what good was that? I didn't figure it out until one day at a basketball game, I noticed everyone in the stands chanting for the worst guy on the team to play. His name was Earl. 'We Want Earl!' Well, Earl was one of my first friends, one of the only people at school who would talk to me. I thought, 'This is fascinating, people cheering for the worst guy on the team, what was that like?' So I asked him. And then I wrote a story about it and turned it in to the school newspaper.

"And here came that miracle. Two days later, people were holding the paper and pointing at me as I walked the halls. Teachers were patting my back. Even the jocks were suddenly talking to me. And I realized this was not because of my background or athletic skill or coolness. I couldn't even talk without stuttering, remember? This was all because of my words. I thought, I can have this much effect on my world with just words? Wow.

"My words brought me through another tough situation, at my college, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. It was, at the time, a small school with few facilities. I went there because we had just moved to Illinois and it was cheap. I lived in a church basement. I had no money, no connections, I had only my words.

"We had no gym at school, no football team and a basketball team that played in a local high school. Besides soccer, we didn't really have any big-time sports. So I didn't write about games. I wrote about people. The school's only competitive pool player, doing his homework in smoky taverns. The school's long-distance runner, trying to qualify for a marathon by running through cow pastures. I didn't write stars, because we had no stars. I wrote humans. That's how I learned of the simple power in their stories. That's why I still do that today."

For instance, if a staff writer wants to cover immigration, ask how many of the news values—proximity, timeliness, impact, prominence, oddity, conflict and human interest—this story has. Is there a local angle to give the story proximity? Has a recent change—or an impending change—made the story timely? Does it have impact on a significant number of people in your audience? Can you report on a local conflict or find a human interest angle, such as the teacher whose parents were undocumented Russian immigrants? Can you find a prominence or oddity angle? Though a writer's passion for a topic may help her to find great stories, passion is not a substitute for news values.

Great gizmos also are not a substitute for news values. Suppose someone is dying to use an interactive map on your website, voice-changing software on your broadcast or pictures inside of outline letters in the paper. Do not let the gizmo control the story. Use the tools that tell the story best and save those great gizmos for the right story.

Story Ideas

Are you developing a "nose for news"? If so, you may have already found many ideas for stories as you studied your audience in Chapter 1 and completed the Writers' Workshops associated with that chapter. Indeed, if you know your audience well and observe well, you will rarely have trouble finding stories.

Finding Story Ideas

Most strong student publications or broadcasts use a mix of three methods—beat reporting, information from the professional press and information from direct observation—to be sure they cover their community and inform and engage their audience.

Story Ideas from the Beat System

Beat reporters are journalists who regularly cover the same topics or news areas, such as the school board or track, which are called **beats** (Figure 2.10). Beat reporters know

- the people to talk to and how to reach them by phone, in person or electronically;
- when interesting events are scheduled to happen or when they might happen;
- the history of the beat;
- the big picture of the beat, as well as the details;
- the controversies or conflicts involved in the beat;
- the abbreviations, initials and slang of the beat; and
- where to go for clarification when they are confused about an aspect of their beat.

Beat reporters talk with people on their beat regularly, often once every news cycle.

Figure 2.10 Beat reporters become specialists and know who to talk to about testing, service projects, politics that impact schools, or surveillance and security. *Which beats need to be covered in your publication or broadcast?*

Warning! Beat reporting leads to dull stories, or no stories at all, if you assume your contacts (the people you usually talk with on your beat) will recognize strong story ideas and tell you about them. It is your job to recognize news, not theirs.

When you physically attend your beat's activities and meetings, you will discover story ideas. In addition, if your contacts know you and know you are interested in them, they will be more willing to talk to you. This is especially valuable when a conflict develops.

Beat reporters risk returning empty-handed if they only talk to the adults on the beat: the athletic director, club adviser, special education teacher or drama teacher. Cultivate student contacts: the athletes, members of the club, students enrolled in special education and cast members or student directors of a play. Talk to and listen to everyone on your beat. Your publication should be full of student voices, student names, student faces and student interests and concerns.

Beat reporting allows a good reporter to discover untold stories that do not necessarily come from breaking news events. These are called **enterprise stories**, or stories a reporter develops in addition to those assigned by an editor. In addition, a reporter who knows her sources may also learn of something before anyone else and **scoop**, or get ahead of, her competition, even in the professional media.

What beats should you have? Every school and every publication will have different beats. Here are some traditional beats:

- school site council
- school board and superintendent
- physical facilities
- security, crime and punishment
- school calendar
- academic counseling, scheduling and testing
- student government
- clubs and service organizations
- principal
- teachers union
- religion
- campus arts
- fall sports, winter sports, spring sports (It is best to have a reporter for each sport during the season.)

Your Turn

Based on the articles described below, what do you think the reporter's beat is?

1. Cable News Network's Alan Duke wrote these stories:
   - LA Police: 'Primary aggressor' suspect arrested in Giants fan's beating
   - Lindsay Lohan to be in court Monday for hearing
   - Man says he was kidnapped to give up Shaq sex tape
2. ABC TV's Jonathan Karl wrote these stories:
   - Leading GOP budget hawk at odds with Republican leaders
   - Senator Sherrod Brown: 'We need to wrap up in Afghanistan'
3. Fox Sports reporter Jon Paul Morosi wrote these stories:
   - A-Rod preceded LeBron as most-hated athlete
   - 2011 is not year of the Cubs
   - Red Sox not as good as we thought
   - What's behind all the extra-inning baseball games?
4. The Hollywood Reporter's Philiana Ng wrote these stories:
   - Exclusive: Blair Underwood to make Broadway debut in 'A Streetcar Named Desire'
   - 'Pretty Little Liars' creator teases 10 things you should keep an eye on in season 2
   - FX acquires 'Super 8'
   - 'Judy Moody and the Not Bummer Summer': What the critics say

(Continued)

Your Turn *(Continued)*

5. St. Petersburg Times and tampabay.com's Carole Liparoto wrote these stories:
   - SoundCheck: Brad Paisley, The Maine, Goo Goo Dolls, Train, Baby
   - My Bonnaroo 2011 checklist: Must-see bands, must-eat foods and other can't-miss experiences
   - This week in Tampa: Barry Manilow, Linkin Park, Drive-By Truckers and more
6. The New York Times' Hilary Howard wrote these stories:
   - Books about beauty
   - New sunscreens: Beauty spots
   - New lipsticks for summer
   - Tattoos
   - Here come the braids

A strong publication will include many of these traditional beats but also will look beyond this list. In Chapter 1 you identified members of your audience whose interests and activities have not been covered well in your publication in the past. These groups, which are potential beats, may include a minority ethnic group or minority religious group, a population learning English, a population with disabilities (see Chapter 4 for guidelines on covering issues of disability), students in foster care, rock climbers, belly dancers or students with after-school jobs.

Any population whose interests, lifestyles, situations, commitments or talents may cause them to become invisible to the rest of your community may deserve a beat. Strong beat reporting will not only cover a group's activities but also increase the group members' interest in your publication or broadcast.

Remember: Your publication should include the names of many students, and not the same ones over and over.

Story Ideas from Professional Media

Journalists are great readers. Why is reading so important when we have many ways to get news and many ways to tell a story?

At its heart, almost every form of journalism relies on strong writing, so you will need to read strong writing. Even if you plan to produce broadcast or visual media, you still need to read text-rich media such as newspapers and journalistic websites every day.

As you read professional media (and occasionally other high school publications), look for story ideas for your publication. Any story that catches your interest or the interest of your classmates may be a story idea for your publication. Summarize the stories and keep notes of the story ideas you find. The ability to summarize quickly, accurately and thoroughly will help you often in journalism. Journalists frequently need

Dead Beat or Lively Beat? It's What You Make It

Beats will be as interesting or as dull as you make them. Here is an example of what an enterprising reporter can do with a new beat, in this case the school's physical plant.

1. The new reporter talks to the person who had the beat before her. He says it is a boring beat, but he does tell her which assistant principal is in charge of the physical facilities, the name of the head of the physical plant and the location of his office and the name of the lead custodian.
2. She introduces herself to each contact, but more importantly, she spends time with the contacts. In the first two months of the beat, she writes these notes in her reporter's notebook.

- The dance studio in the PE building is being turned into a science room. Do we still have a dance class? If not, when did it go away and why? Check counseling office and old yearbooks? Does this connect to larger issues such as physical fitness and obesity?
- The Asian custodian, a soft-spoken man about five feet tall, was a colonel in the Vietnamese army. He probably didn't pick up trash in Vietnam. What's his story? Who else around campus has a military background? Veterans Day is in November. Personality feature?
- Is anyone recycling the cans and bottles in the trash? Why/why not? Who gets the money?
- When does the custodian's day start? Use audio recorder. Sound of custodian opening the gate at 5:25, grating sounds, quiet campus, rain, ducks in the quad, cafeteria ladies laughing as they cook and the first students arriving. Why do they come so early?
- Toured and videotaped the crawlspace above the stage as the custodian changes the lights. Visited the "crouch space" under the stage, the furnace room, pool filtration room, loading docks, roofs, places students rarely go. Halloween story?
- Taped early Monday morning graffiti cleanup and vandalism repair. Rival high school's colors were spray painted on walls. Assistant principals came out and photographed the graffiti. What for?
  - If we run the story, are we giving the vandals what they want?
  - Will there be police action? How can I find out about it?
  - What is the difference between pranks and acts of vandalism?
- Many trucks come through the campus entrance by the weight room: Pepsi, Coke, Frito-Lay, a restaurant supplier, Sysco (what's that?). It would make a cool video to shoot 5 seconds of the side of each truck coming past the weight room. Or shoot all the stuff being off-loaded at the cafeteria and student store and then drop out every other frame and speed up the tape like an old-fashioned movie.
- How many bags of chips and bottles of Gatorade do we consume each week? How do I find out?

While her predecessor thought this was "a really boring beat," this journalist found a great beat with multiple strong story ideas.

to summarize events, information and ideas. Summarizing is also a good way to be sure you understood what you read or viewed.

At first it may be difficult to see how the stories from other media outlets can be developed into stories for your broadcast or publication, but you will develop that skill with practice. Do not be afraid to clip anything that interests you, that might interest others on your campus or that seems to relate to your audience. Note possible local angles as they occur to you (Figure 2.11).

Figure 2.11 The more you read, the more you are exposed to story ideas. *How did "Ima Journalista" translate a Freemont Courier story into a story idea for her school publication?*

Weekly Story Ideas

If you don't read it, you cannot write it

Worksheets

Name	Ima Journalista
Date submitted	Friday, January 25, 2014
Title and source of article (name of publication, section, date)	"Family hopes genome test will help cure girl's mystery disease" Los Angeles Times First (A) Section, Monday, January 20, 2014
Summary in 3-5 sentences; include info after the jump	Lilly Grossman has an unnamed muscular weakness that requires she uses a wheelchair. She was junior class homecoming princess, has written a novel and blogs. In her novel, her heroine takes a pill and becomes "normal" and exacts revenge on all her tormenters. She hopes to attend UC Berkeley, which has an all-accessible campus, unlike her high school where an aide needs to open doors. She's had her genome sequenced but has not found a "cure."
Pitch your story to your editors. Be as specific as possible, , including angle, [illegible] and subject	1. Is our campus accessible? What is it like to navigate RAHS in a wheelchair? Follow (name) the football player with the damaged knee in his wheelchair? **[Prominence, timely]** Or

YOUR TURN

1. Find story ideas from other publications or broadcasts that contain kernels of ideas for your publication or broadcast. Clip or print out the stories and summarize them in three or four sentences. Your summaries should reveal your intelligent reading of the stories.
2. **Going Deeper.** Suggest possible local stories derived from the professional stories. The more specific the suggestions, the better. Save your suggestions for a "Your Turn" exercise later in this chapter.

Story Ideas from Direct Observation

Your school publication or broadcast is by and about the students at your school. A stranger should be able to see, hear and "taste" your school as she views your broadcast or reads your publication. Your journalistic efforts, regardless of your media, should reflect what the students are talking about and worried about, what makes them excited and what makes them mad. The paper, post or broadcast should cover what students are buying, what they are listening to and what they are driving.

A school is made up of individuals, however, often several thousand individuals, and no two are talking and worrying about the same issues. So every member of the staff is needed, no matter what his or her job title, whether it is the business manager, graphics editor, staff writer or copy editor.

You all are the eyes and ears of the news organization. You should listen, especially to students you do not know well or who are different from you and your friends. Listen in the lunch line. Listen before the bell rings for your classes. Listen in the locker room and the restrooms.

As you listen, use your reporter's notebook to write down what people are talking about, even if you do not hear the whole conversation. Note who is talking or describe the people who are talking. Do you see any signs of emotion? Note actual phrases and any details you hear.

Not all of your observations will turn out to be kernels of great stories, but some will.

YOUR TURN

1. Make at least three entries in your reporter's notebook observing what students are talking about, are concerned about and are planning.
2. **Going Deeper.** Write the story ideas your observations suggest. Save your story ideas for another "Your Turn" exercise later in this chapter.

Kernels of Story Ideas from a Reporter's Notebook

- Two sophomore boys in game jerseys were so jittery about their game that they didn't get any work done in math fifth period. Story idea: game day jitters.
- Girls are carrying these great big purses, but they won't put them on the floor. If a girl isn't really thin, there isn't room to hold the purse on her lap. Besides, teachers think you are texting if you have something on your lap. Story idea on the big purses? Ways students text in class?
- How come some teachers allow us to eat in their classrooms and others don't? Story on why it is a good or bad idea.
- What's with all the dangles hanging from backpacks? Feature on what the dangles say about you?
- Why do only seniors get to go off campus for lunch?
- I heard two girls saying that a guy—John Lee, maybe—was going to make his date's dress for the Winter Formal. Who else sews? Any other guys?
- Quarter grades came out and three guys are off the frosh football team. Some guys on the team were saying that's why we lost. Story on grades and athletics?

Developing Your Story Ideas

Not all of your observations or all of your articles from other publications can be turned into strong stories for your publication, but many of them hold more promise than you may realize. Staff meetings provide an opportunity to work as a community to develop story ideas (Figure 2.12 on the next page).

Those observations and articles can provoke fruitful discussions like this:

One reporter observed two sophomore football players on a game day, revved up and unable to concentrate in class.

Another staff member adds, "Yeah, there was a guy in my fifth period too who…"

Another says, "I heard the girls team members always braid each other's hair. It's like a good-luck thing."

"We could do a feature on pregame jitters and include the frosh-soph and JV players. We don't cover them enough."

"How about other traditions? Or superstitions?"

Figure 2.12 The staff of a publication or broadcast often meet to discuss story ideas. *What talents and attitudes can make these meetings productive?*

A staff member says, "I printed out an article that says there may be millions of planets roaming free, but my science book says stars with planets may be rare and doesn't say anything about planets roaming free of stars. Are there other things in our books that just aren't true or may be out of date?"

"How about global warming? The AP bio text doesn't even mention it."

"My English teacher said our textbook left out a great deal about the Japanese relocation camps in its background to the poem 'Internment.'"

"My math teacher says there are mistakes in the text."

"Can we do a feature on 'Lies our textbooks tell us'?"

Another staffer heard someone was pregnant and going to drop out of school.

"Can we do a story on that?"

"How about a feature on a girl who leaves this campus for the School-Aged Mothers Program and one who stays on campus?"

"Does she have to take PE?"

"Do you know anyone who'd let you write about her?"

"Wouldn't that be giving her attention for doing something that is wrong?"

A first-year student reports a student thought a friend's Curious George purse is "so cute." Others mention a Winnie the Pooh backpack, a Spiderman lunch box used as a purse, Ninja Turtles shoelaces, a Barbie pencil case and a pencil case that looks like a stuffed animal giraffe. Someone suggests that "we are returning to childhood treasures." Someone notes most freshmen rarely risk being seen with such items.

A student clipped a story about a neo-Nazi being killed by his 10-year-old son. The parents had loaded guns in the house.

"Do we have neo-Nazis around here?"

"Or at school?"

"Do we have people with loaded guns in their homes? That seems more likely."

"What are the laws?"

"Is it different for a hunting rifle than for a handgun?"

"What do people here think about guns? Would they have them in their own homes?"

"There's a kid in my sixth period whose dad teaches gun safety classes for the National Rifle Association. I think he has earned some shooting medals."

Another student mentions the freshmen who spend hours grooming themselves before school, while seniors wander in at 7:59 in pajama bottoms and flip-flops or Ugg boots with a bed-head.

Story ideas from this discussion might include the following:

- a feature spread on students' childlike belongings with short interviews and photos
- an opinion column suggesting that the campus needs swing sets, so students can unwind
- an article on what is cool for freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors
- a spread on hair by class, freshmen, sophomores and so on
- a sports feature on the award-winning marksman
- an investigation of out-of-date textbooks and curriculum

These conversations do more than help new writers find story angles. They also build the writing community, raise ethical and legal issues that need to be discussed, develop a sense of the publication's audience and create a powerful bank of possible stories. While no idea is dismissed as worthless, the newer writers learn from their peers and the adviser about the paper's mission and audience. Good journalists keep notes of these ideas.

Your Turn

1. Listed below are possible story ideas resulting from the imaginary brainstorming session that you just read. Choose one or two of these ideas and develop a local angle for an upcoming broadcast or publication.
   - students' childlike belongings
   - opinion column advocating campus swing sets
   - how does "what's cool" change from class to class
   - sports feature on award-winning marksman
   - report on out-of-date and inaccurate textbooks
2. **Going Deeper.** What news values could each story have? List and explain the news values.

Pitching Your Story Ideas

The editors, who will have taken notes during the story idea discussions, choose which stories to develop based on the news values of proximity, timeliness, impact, prominence, oddity, conflict and human interest. They may then assign stories to the writers they believe will do the best job covering each particular story. Sometimes, but not always, the writer chosen to cover the story will be the person who originally suggested the idea for that story.

An enterprising journalist may not be content with just the stories he is assigned. In addition to the assigned story, he may want to work on an idea he has for a different story. After a little background work to be sure of the news values, he will need to **pitch** (describe in a persuasive way) his story to an editor. If the editor likes the idea, she may give him the time, the resources—such as cameras and microphones—and the support to pursue the story. In addition, she may meet with him periodically to help him focus his story. If the story is strong, she will give him time in the broadcast or space in the edition (Figure 2.13).

So how do you pitch a story so that your editor will accept it? You begin with preparation.

1. Read your source article thoroughly if you are pitching a story from the professional media. Do not go to your editor and say, "Hey, I found this neat article about Lap-Band surgery being approved for kids as young as 14. I want to write about it!" Rather, show your understanding of the article; for instance, "The LA Times wrote an article about Lap-Band surgery being considered for marketing to teens as young as 14, but many people think this is not a good idea."

Figure 2.13 Pitch your story idea to your editors if you think the story will be interesting, relevant, and newsworthy for your publication.

2. Develop a specific local angle. "One-third of teens are overweight, and the PE department has weight records for students here. We could see if we are above or below the national average. Also, I know two students who have lost a great deal of weight in the last year. I'd like to interview them about how they did it. I know a couple of local adults who have had the Lap-Band surgery. The article questions whether the Lap Band should be marketed to teens. If parents approve, teens can get the surgery now, but the new law will allow the company to market the surgery to teens. Perhaps we could do a survey to see if teens think it is a good idea to market a surgery to teenagers."
3. Be prepared to talk about the news values. For example:
   - Point out the local angle, the proximity: "I know people here involved in weight loss."
   - Mention the conflict: "Should this be marketed to teens?"
   - Show your editor the timeliness: "The Food and Drug Administration will be hearing arguments about it shortly."
   - Talk about impact: "If a third or more of teens here are obese, this must affect many of the families in our community."
   - Ask: "Could we do a human interest story on one of the people who lost weight? One person was willing to be interviewed and has 'before' pictures."

   The only two news values not mentioned here are oddity and prominence. The editor may tell you to go ahead with the story or tell you, "No, we covered the topic last spring." She is likely to suggest the angle she would like you to research.

Your Turn

Be enterprising! Choose one of the stories mentioned in this chapter or a story idea you came up with in a previous "Your Turn" exercise. Prepare to pitch this story idea to an editor. Include a thorough reading of the article if the idea comes from the professional press.

- Suggest specific angles. "We could write about girls who skateboard" is not very specific. Instead, you could say, "I know at least three girls who skate at the ramps and rails at the Quaker church on Magnolia."
- Be prepared to talk about the *specific* news values of the story idea. "We could do a human interest piece, or we could focus in on the conflicts between the male and female skaters. They are not always welcomed there. And there is a little oddity angle. I wonder if any of them compete?"

Chapter Two

Review and Assessment

Recall

Assess

1. Name the seven news values.
2. Explain proximity.
3. Explain timeliness.
4. Which news value is reflected in a story about the rivalry between two sports teams?
5. What are three main methods of obtaining story ideas for student publications and broadcasts?

Critical Thinking

1. Why is it important to consider news values when choosing stories to include in your publication or broadcast?
2. Search publications other than those from your own school to identify three stories that may have been developed by beat reporting. Identify the beat and explain why you think the stories were the result of beat reporting.
3. List beats that you think your publication or broadcast should have. Use the list in this chapter as your starting point, but add at least five more.
4. If you cover your beat well, which news values will be especially strong in your stories?
5. Examine the coverage in one local publication, preferably a news website, news broadcast, student publication or local newspaper. Using a table like the one shown below, identify the news values in six stories. In the first column, list the story's headline or write a *slug*—a one- or two-word description of the story. Place a + in the appropriate columns to identify the news values contained in each story. Is one news value more intense than the others? Highlight that one. Be prepared to explain your choices to your classmates.

Story	Proximity	Timeliness	Impact	Prominence	Oddity	Conflict	Human Interest
School security	+	+	+				

6. Using media from two different geographic areas, such as two online newspapers, compare the ways in which a national or regional story has been localized (given proximity).
7. Look at three or four editions of your publication (or another school's) and evaluate the stories in each to determine which of the traditional beats have been covered well and which ones have been neglected in each publication.

Application

1. Find three stories from the professional media that could become strong stories for your publication. Clip or print out the stories and accurately summarize each. Explain how you would adapt the stories for your publication. Access the *Journalism* website for a template like the one shown on page 49.
2. Carry your reporter's notebook (or a digital substitute) for 24 hours on a school day and record observations. Create three strong story ideas from your observations. Include the news values, your pitch to an editor and the source material from your reporter's notebook.
3. In a small group, read—either individually or aloud—four interesting articles you have chosen from the professional press. Brainstorm possible local angles for each one. Identify the news values in each localized story. Rank the story ideas for each example from the professional press according to how strong you feel the story idea is.
4. Imagine you are an editor and the other members of your group are reporters who are pitching their story ideas from their beats, direct observation or the professional press. Explain to your group members why their pitch is strong or weak. Then switch roles; you will pitch your story ideas and others will react as if they are the editor.

Chapter Two

Journalism Style

Look It Up!

Do you need hyphens in your review of a *cloak and dagger* movie? Do you call the female teacher who heads the English department the *chairman*? *Chairwoman*? If your Winter Formal theme is "Paris at Night," what do you capitalize in *the city of light*? If your debate team will compete at Fordham University, how many capitals do you need in *new york city*? If the ski team competed in the Catskills, how many capitals do you need in *new york state*?

Journalists don't guess, yet very few are walking databases of this kind of information. They look up what they are not absolutely sure of. Student journalists need to do the same thing—look it up.

Where do you look it up? That depends on your publication or broadcast's media and style. The most-used stylebook in journalism is *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*, available in print and online.

If you publish a news magazine, your staff leadership may have adopted *The Chicago Manual of Style*. If you publish online, you may use *The Yahoo! Style Guide: The Ultimate Sourcebook for Writing, Editing, and Creating Content for the Digital World*. If you are mainly a broadcast staff, you may use *Broadcast News and Writing Stylebook*. Other publications base their style on other resources that fit with their school's mission.

In addition to your stylebook, you should have copies of *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. All stylebooks and dictionaries should be the most recent edition possible.

Your publication should also have a stylebook that overrides the official, printed stylebook your staff adopted. For instance, the AP Stylebook allows the use of *chairwoman* and *chairman*, but your staff may have decided that your publication will use the gender-free *chair*, as in "The competition will be organized by the English department chair, Marlys Nelson." A publication's stylebook addresses issues that arise often in school life and carves out exceptions to the adopted stylebook.

In the next column is a short quiz to help you assess your knowledge of the correct usage, help you become familiar with AP style resources, and develop the "look it up" habit.

Journalism Style Quiz

Directions: On your own paper, number 1 through 28. Next to each number on your paper write any needed corrections for the line below with the corresponding number. If no corrections are needed, write "correct" next to the number.

1 Four fighting Irish forensics team
2 members, Seniors David Cassel and
3 Hector Martinez and Juniors Aisha
4 Chopra and Karen Carlyle, will
5 advance to the US Speech and
6 Debate Tournament in Dallas May 4—5.

7 Cassel, Martinez, Chopra, and
8 Carlyle were propeled to the national
9 competition when the fourensics team
10 brought home 5 gold medals from the
11 New York State forensic league state
12 championship tournament in Mineola,
13 NY, Apr. 12.

14 Sophamore Kanye Jackson's gold
15 added to the total

16 Senior David Cassel, a four year
17 veteran of John F Kennedy High
18 School forensics competitions
19 gathered a gold medal for his ten
20 minute original speach on the
21 importance of intrapersonal
22 communication in a society obsessed
23 with technology.

24 Senior, Hector Martinez captured
25 a gold metal with his policy debate
26 titled The Importance of Space
27 Exploration in an Age of National
28 Debt.

Chapter Two

Writers' Workshop

In this Writers' Workshop you will:

- Use participial phrases to enrich sentences.
- Experiment with the wording and placement of participial phrases.
- Use triplets to add impact to your writing.

Workshop 2.1

The "ing" That Describes

Mini-Lesson: Using Present Participial Phrases to Modify

A present participle is the "ing" form of a verb: drip/*dripping*, pound/*pounding*, dance/*dancing*. When you use a present participle with the *to be* form of a verb, you create the progressive form of the verb: He is *dripping*. Her heart *will be pounding*. They *have been dancing*. Without the *to be* verb, the participle becomes an adjective, which is the participle form we will be using in this workshop.

Participial phrases such as *hair dripping*, *heart pounding* or *feet dancing* can be used to modify the noun or pronoun that is the subject or object of a sentence or clause. They can make an active sentence even more active.

Start with a strong verb—in this case, *kicks*. Create a simple Subject/Verb/Object (SVO) sentence. Use the simple present or simple past tense of the verb. Your sentence should look something like this: *The soccer player kicks the ball toward the goal*.

Participial phrases can be inserted at several places in the sentence, but put them between the subject and the verb for now. Your sentence should look something like this: *The soccer player, hair dripping, heart pounding, feet dancing, kicks the ball toward the goal.*

Apply It!

Follow the step-by-step instructions below to enrich your own sentence.

1. Think of an active verb that you can picture. Write an SVO sentence using that verb.
2. Now list at least four participial phases to describe the subject of your sentence.
3. Read your phrases aloud, but to yourself.
4. Choose your three best phrases and insert them between the subject and the verb.
5. **Collaboration and Editing**. Read your sentence aloud to a partner. Do you and your partner agree about the order of the participial phrases in the sentence? Where do you want to put your strongest, freshest, most interesting participial phrase?

Mini-Lesson: Where to Put the Participial Phrases

Experiment by moving the participial phrases to different places in your sentence. Try them at the beginning of the sentence, before the subject: *His hair dripping, his heart pounding, his feet dancing, the soccer player kicks the ball toward the goal*. The reader's attention will now focus on the dripping hair because it is the opening element of a sentence. Is this where you want the reader's attention?

Beginning your sentence with a participial phrase lengthens the time it takes your reader to get to the *who* and the *what* of the sentence. Participial phrases create a left-branching sentence when placed before the subject. Left-branching sentences often slow down your reader. Journalists use them very sparingly.

Now try the participial phrases at the end of the sentence: *The soccer player kicks the ball toward the goal, his hair dripping, his heart pounding, his feet dancing*.

The last element of the sentence lingers in the reader's mind. It is the second most important part of the sentence. Do you like the idea of the dancing feet remaining in the reader's mind?

Apply It!

Follow these step-by-step instructions to experiment with participial phrases.

1. Pick one of the nouns below and add a strong action verb and an object, making an SVO sentence.

   airplane

   boat

   horse

   car

   sword (or *knife*)

   wolf (or other animal)

Example: Using the noun *needle*, you could write: *The needle hemmed the dress.*

2. Now improve the two nouns in your sentence a little. Make them more specific by modifying them: *Her flashing needle hemmed my prom dress.*
3. Create at least four participles or participial phrases to modify the subject of your sentence.

Examples:

darting in and out of the crisp satin

puncturing the cloth

drawing closed the sutures

pulling the scarlet thread

4. Choose the three best phrases from the four or more phrases you created. Write several versions of your sentence with these participial phrases. Experiment with the order of the phrases and their location. For instance, try it this way: *Her flashing needle, puncturing the cloth, drawing closed the sutures, pulling the scarlet thread, hemmed my prom dress*. Or: *Her flashing needle hemmed my prom dress, puncturing the cloth, pulling the scarlet thread, drawing closed the sutures.*

The core SVO sentence remains the same, but the participial phrases foreshadow the possibility that this will be a bloody prom night. Is there a vampire in the audience?

Workshop 2.2

Congratulations! It's Triplets!

Mini-Lesson: Using Three Specifics or Three Modifiers

There is something about three. Three little pigs. Three wishes. Three chances to spin straw into gold.

We write with threes: "… one nation
under God,
indivisible,
with liberty and justice for all."

Abraham Lincoln described America at Gettysburg as "government
of the people,
by the people,
for the people…"

In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson's prose talks about
"life,
liberty and
the pursuit of happiness."

President Barack Obama used this principle of three when he wanted Americans to remember the 9/11 attacks as he announced the death of Osama bin Laden. He said, "On that day,
no matter where we came from,
what God we prayed to,
or what race or ethnicity we were,
we were united as one American family."

Apply It!

Almost every part of speech can be used effectively as triplets. Try triplet prepositional phrases, using this as your sentence: *We played hide-and-go-seek.*

Now describe where you played the game.

Example:

in the basement

in the attic and

in the garage

Mini-Lesson: Triplet Verbs

Triplet verbs have a long and dignified history. In 47 B.C.E. when Julius Caesar had conquered the city of Zela (now Zile, in Turkey), he is reported to have penned this perfect *tricolon*, a form of triplet, using three verbs: "Veni, vidi, vici—I came, I saw, I conquered."

A less dignified verb triplet might be: *He danced, sang and generally made a fool of himself.*

Notice that the triplet verbs can be parallel, as in the example above, but they can also zoom, create a sequence, or ascend or descend in importance or gravity.

Zooming: *He located where the mosquito had bitten him, clawed at it with his nails and did not stop until pink-white plasma tinted with blood oozed from the sore.*

Sequential: *He grabbed the gallon jug of milk from the fridge, twisted off the cap and began to gulp.*

Ascending: *We pledge our lives, our liberty and our sacred honor.*

Descending: *We live to learn, love and die.*

Apply It!

Use the sentence frame below to answer the question "What do you live for?"

Example: *I live to complain, criticize and correct.*

I live to _____, _____ and _____.

Extend Your Knowledge

Extend

Visit the *Journalism* website for additional examples and practice.