



cSw Process for Writers (2017/18)

Step 1: Choose your topic.

By now, you will have selected your topic from the approved list and are ready to begin. Your assignment as a science journalist is to research and write a clear and compelling story that will engage a general audience. According to Bill Gates, cofounder of Microsoft: *"If you can't explain something simply, you don't really understand it."* So you will really need to understand the science behind the headlines in order to make your story accessible to the average 8th grader. And we don't mean your kid brother or sister!

Step 2: Research your topic.

Devote time to gathering information to get a good sense of "what is out there." You can start by googling your topic, and you should look at a wide variety of original sources. If you find startling statistics, make sure they are current and be mindful of the source. Stats can be used for many purposes including fund-raising and to capture public attention. Read as much as you can and think about your topic from different angles. For example, try seeing your subject from the perspective of the scientist, a patient, a physician, a public health educator, or a non-profit disease advocacy group. Remember, being knowledgeable about your topic is key to writing a compelling story.

Step 3: Find & interview your Science Star.

Look for names of scientists associated with your topic. Identify someone who can serve as an expert source to answer your questions and give you a better understanding of the research and its potential impact. While interviewing this "Science Star", you may discover that this expert source is so fascinating that you want to make him or her the focus of your story. Be open to all the possibilities!

Step 4: Find your hook.

As you research your topic and interview your Science Star, find some sure-fire aspect to hook your readers and make them want to learn more.

Step 5. Select a format.

Remember, you are not writing a paper for AP bio. You need to make your topic appealing and easily understood by readers, who may not be very interested in science. Consider which of these three formats best fits your story: a straight news story, a blog, or the highly popular Q&A. The same information can be conveyed in different ways, depending on the format you pick. The most appropriate format may emerge after your interview.



Step 6. Consult with your Comms Mentor & Team before starting to write.

Set up a Google doc to begin sharing story ideas and approaches with your Comms Mentor and Team. Invite them all to share in the discussion. Try out different LEDES and possible HOOKS. If necessary, set up a time to talk on the phone to work through any concerns with your Comms Mentor. Remember: do not begin writing until you get feedback on your approach from your Comms Mentor, Editor and Team.

Step 7. Write your first draft; then step away & let it steep.

Come back to your story after a few days and read it as if for the first time. Be critical. Do you use jargon? Do you get lost in the science? Is your style appropriate for the format you've selected?

Step 8. Get lots of feedback.

Ask friends, family members and lots of different people to read and comment on your story. Encourage them to be honest. Be open to constructive criticism. Rewrite as often as necessary until you have eliminated every unnecessary word, found every typo and grammatical error, and are satisfied that your story is both clear and compelling.

Do you connect with your readers?

Do you make your readers care?

Do your readers want to know about your topic?

Step 9. Complete the Writer's Checklist and submit final draft to your Team Editor no later than Friday, August 18.

Step 10. Work with your Team Editor to polish your story.

Your draft may be almost ready for publication, or you may be asked to rewrite your story. Your Editor will create a Google doc for your story where your Comms Mentor and team can provide input, and make edits, corrections and suggestions to improve your story. The Creative Team will share ideas for graphics (with captions). You must approve changes so your story can be finalized. You may discuss edits/changes, etc., but the Editor has the final say.

After publication, check your story for comments and questions and respond in a timely way. Share your story with friends and family. Encourage them to comment, "like" the story on FB, and share it widely to help enlarge the cSw reading audience.