



Article Workbook

Turn Your Passions
Into Stories You Can Sell

By Shella Gardezi

Section 2: Turn Your Topic Into a Story

Exercise 3: Identify the news value

Right now, your topic is probably too broad for a story. We can narrow it down by considering the news values. The news values are a cornerstone of journalism. They include:

1 Proximity: How close is the story to the reader? This is important when pitching local newspapers, blogs and magazines. How does your topic relate to the place where you live?

2 Timeliness: What has happened recently in this topic area? Consider new developments or trends.

3 Prominence: Who are the important people involved in this topic? This can include leaders, experts, businesspeople, etc. What important people could you interview?

4 Conflict: What are the main controversies in your topic? Are there different modes of thinking about your topic, rivalries or even disputes? What issues provoke strong feelings?

5 Impact: How important is the story to the reader or the community? Will the impact of what you are covering result in positive or negative changes? Will things be different going forward?

6 Human interest: Is this a good people story? Readers love stories about people and how they dealt with challenges and adversity. Can you get a great story from an interview?

7 Oddity: Is there anything in your topic area that would surprise readers? Consider if there is something odd or unusual that would catch the public's attention.

Exercise 4: Refine Your Idea

Narrow your focus further by asking the five W questions about the topic you are considering.

Example:

Who: Local artisan bakers

What: In-store baking classes

When: Post-pandemic

Where: Small towns

Why: Increased interest in tradition and slower living

Who: _____

What: _____

Where: _____

When: _____

Why: _____

Why is this story important right now?

What is the human interest story behind this idea? Who is affected and how?

Could you localize a national or international story?

Do you already know who you could interview on a topic?

Exercise 5: Test Your Idea

Does your idea meet some of these criteria?

Is the idea specific?

Is it unique?

Does it connect emotionally or intellectually with readers?

Will it appeal to a wide enough audience?

Does it peak curiosity?

Does it make you excited to research and write about it?

Section 3: Write an Engaging Lead

Exercise 6: Write Your Lead (Intro)

Use one of these strategies to craft a compelling opening paragraph:

Anecdote: Start with a relatable story about yourself or your subject.

Statistic: Share a surprising fact to grab attention.

Contrast: Highlight unexpected differences or contradictions.

Description: Write an evocative description of a person, place or thing.

Action: Begin in the middle of peak action or an emotional turning point.

Quote: Lead with a compelling quote from your subject or a famous quote that relates to your story..

If you're stuck, try this template:

"In [specific setting], [specific subject] is [unexpected action or outcome], showing how [key insight from your story]."

Example: "In a tiny coastal town, artisan bakers are reviving centuries-old sourdough recipes, turning a pandemic trend into a way of life."

"In _____, _____ are
_____, showing how _____."

Note: You do not need to write your lead first, and you can always come back and change it.

Section 4: Prepare to Sell Your Article

Exercise 7: Research Your Market

Note: You do not need to finish your article before you pitch it to an editor. However, this section will be helpful even if you decide to wait until it's finished before pitching it.

Find three newspapers, magazines or websites that publish similar stories:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

What types of articles do they feature?

What tone and style do they prefer?

How are the stories formatted? What is the length? What other details do you notice?

Exercise 8: Write a Brief Pitch

Subject Line: Pitch: Concise Statement of Your Idea

Salutation (Hi [Editor's Name]) _____

Lead: Attention grabbing one-sentence summary of your story. (You can use the lead you wrote earlier as long as it is clear and concise).

Hook: Explain to the editor why your story is relevant to the reader and how it satisfies the news value that you identified earlier.

Summary: Add some more details about your story. What is the angle? Who will you interview? Why is this story appropriate for the audience? Why is this story relevant now? Be brief and use short paragraphs.

About you: Add a short explanation of who you are and why you are the right person to write this story. Don't worry! You do not need formal writing or journalism credentials to publish an article.

Example: During the pandemic, sourdough bread became a global trend, and now small-town bakers like Dorothy Doolittle are turning it into a tourism dollars. My article explores how bread baking classes are now on the itinerary of tourists to Coastal Oregon and local communities are taking advantage. As a resident of Pacific City who worked her way through college as a baker's assistant, I'd love to share this unique story with Culinary Arts Magazine.

Conclusion: End with a call to action or next step. For example, "Please give me a call if you have any questions."

Signature: Consider creating a professional signature for your writer brand. This will include your name, your title such as "Freelance Writer", your phone number and any social media accounts where you post content consistent with a professional personal brand.

Section 5: Bonus Tools

Story Angle Checklist

- Does your lead grab attention?
- Is it focused on one issue within the broader topic?
- Is it practical for you given your resources?
- Will local or small publishers be interested?
- Will it impact your readers or will they find it relevant?
- Is it original and different from what is already published?

Pitch Template

Subject Line: Pitch: [Story Topic] – [Hook or Unique Angle]

Hi [Editor's Name],

A compelling lead that quickly grabs the editor's attention and gets them interested in learning more.

Angle

This piece will explore [your story angle] through [specific examples].

Relevance

This topic resonates with your audience of [target reader] by highlighting [reason it's relevant].

Planned Sources

Some of the sources I plan to consult/have consulted include:

[Source 1: Name and brief credentials]

[Source 2: Name and brief credentials]

[Relevant reports, documents, data, etc.]

Format

The piece will be a feature story of about _____ words [determine how many words they usually publish for a feature story] and include interviews [site visit, photos, sidebars, anything else you plan to include].

Why Me

While I'm newer to [specific type of writing, if applicable], I bring [unique qualifications, e.g., direct access to key sources, personal passion, or insider knowledge]. My portfolio includes [link to portfolio or relevant work, or explain unique perspective if you lack direct experience].

You can find my work on [social media platforms] at [handles/links]. Please let me know if you'd like any additional details, and I'd be happy to refine this idea to suit your needs.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts! You can reach me at [phone number] or simply reply to this email.

Warm regards,

[Your Full Name]

[Your Website or Portfolio Link]

[Social Media Links]

Note: You do not need to include subheadings in your email.

Pitch Template (Fillable)

Subject Line: Pitch: _____

Hi _____,

Lead:

Angle:

Relevance:

Planned Sources:

Some of the sources I plan to consult/have consulted include:

Format:

Why Me?

I look forward to hearing your thoughts! You can reach me at _____ or simply reply to this email.

Warm regards,

Pitch Example

Subject Line: Pitch: How Sourdough Trend is Reviving Tourism on Oregon's Coast

Hi Evelyn,

Across Oregon's scenic coastline, small towns are riding the sourdough wave by offering hands-on bread baking classes to curious tourists. Beyond the dough, these workshops foster a deeper connection to local food traditions.

I would like to offer you a story about how sourdough—an ancient craft that flourished during the pandemic—has evolved into a unique travel trend. By profiling a few standout bakeries and interviewing both bakers and tourists, this feature will highlight how these experiences enrich visitors' trips and boost small-town economies.

Some of the sources I plan to consult include:

Daniel Abbott: Owner of Hearth and Crust, a local favorite offering sourdough classes in Oceanside

Colette Moreau: The expert chef turned baker who has brought her skills to Yachats

Tourists who've turned their vacation into a "breadcation."

The Rising Dough: Economic Impacts of Culinary Tourism in Coastal Communities by Professor Elise Vanderkamp of Oregon State University

The piece will be a feature story of about 1,500 words with interviews, first-person participatory accounts from my experience taking the classes, photos and a sidebar highlighting some of the top sourdough baking classes in the Coastal Oregon region.

While I'm newer to magazine writing, I bring my insider knowledge and connections in the bakery industry. My portfolio includes the "Gone Coastal" column I wrote for the Western Scene website.

You can find my work on Instagram at [instagram.com/coastalwriter](https://www.instagram.com/coastalwriter). Please let me know if you'd like any additional details, and I'd be happy to refine this idea to suit your needs.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts! You can reach me at [phone number] or simply reply to this email.

Warm regards,

[Your Full Name]

[Your Website or Portfolio Link]

[Social Media Links]

Lead Inspiration

People will understand the angle of the piece by reading your lead. Your lead should spark curiosity and interest and keep the reader engaged. Here is some lead inspiration from around the web.

[How Soon Might the Atlantic Ocean Break? Two Sibling Scientists Found an Answer—and Shook the World](#)

This Wired article by Sandra Upson starts with a description of the Irminger Sea that relies on contrast and metaphor to guide us into a complex topic while foreshadowing what's to come by introducing "the warming hole." If you are introducing a difficult topic, how can you make it easier for the layperson without talking down to the reader?

[How AI can make history](#)

The right story can add colour to your article and captivate your audience. It can also help to introduce a character. In this opening paragraph by Josh Dzieza of the Verge, we are introduced to historian Mark Humphries through a story about his first interaction with ChatGPT. Consider if any of your interview sources have given you a great story that helps to explain their character or some other aspect of your story.

[The Strange Theft of a Priceless Churchill Portrait](#)

A common mistake of novice writers is to use flowery language in an attempt to evoke a visual in the mind of a reader. This lead by Brett Popplewell writing for the Walrus shows the benefit of using sparse language when leading with description. Another technique he employs is making us wait for resolution: If it wasn't X,Y and Z, then what was it? This helps to create tension and suspense. Is there a way you can use your lead to spark curiosity?

[Jaguar's rebrand has divided opinion. Is 'Project Roar' the road to success?](#)

In this business feature, the writers Kana Inagaki and Henry Mance start by outlining the problem before diving into how Jaguar confronted it. Many great stories start by identifying a problem. Is there something in your area that needs fixing or has been fixed? Consider interviewing people with solutions.

[The frightening truth about AI chatbots: Nobody knows exactly how they work](#)

Technology compels most of us, and yet not everyone understands how it works. This lead starts with intrigue by introducing AI chatbots as a mystery and sparks our curiosity. What unknowns can you help uncover in your work?

What's Next?

If you're inspired to make writing and journalism your career or just a fun creative outlet, check out the ebook

[How to Become a Journalist Without a Degree](#)

You'll learn feature writing, news writing and how to pitch your stories to editors so you can get published and build a professional portfolio. Buy it today or visit [how-to-become-a-journalist.com](https://www.how-to-become-a-journalist.com) to learn more.