

Elm Tips: Reporting

Good reporting begins with good news judgment and knowing how to recognize information that is timely, interesting, and important to readers. This means identifying stories that will have impact and meaning for students, specifically, and for the college community (staff, alumni, faculty, parents of students, neighbors) as a whole.

All news stories have at least one of these basic elements:

- Timeliness. It's happening now. With a weekly paper, this means covering the events of the week as soon as possible. Sometimes we have to wait a week because of scheduling, but we try to get stories published as quickly as possible.
 - o Ex: The sprinklers go off in the dining hall the day before we print.
- Proximity. It has impact or meaning for people living our geographic area, or, in our case, people involved with the school.
 - o Ex: The plastic bag banning-ordinance that was passed last year.
- Novelty. Out-of-the-ordinary events get people talking
 - o Ex: A Mondos Subs worker who has a career as a rap music artist.
- Impact. These are stories that have consequences, such as a fee hike or adoption of a new policy on campus. Our job is to help our readers understand the impact that these news events have.
 - o Ex: Tuition increases.
- Drama. We look for stories that have mystery, suspense, emotion.
 - o Ex: RAs getting frustrated over new drinking policies.
- Prominence. In every community, certain people are minor celebrities because of their position or achievements. This is equally true on a college campus, where readers want to know if a faculty members resigns suddenly or a star athlete is arrested on drug charges.
 - o Ex: Dr. Gillin being named a nationally recognized professor.
- Conflict. Whether it's rival teams meeting on the basketball court or political factions trying to capture leadership of the SGA, students love conflict.
 - o Ex: A suggested new smoking policies raises debates between students.
- Human interest. People like stories about, well, people.
 - o Ex: A hall worker who competes in Special Olympics, for example.
- Usefulness. Readers want to know where to buy low-cost books, when to file graduation forms, how to survive all-night study sessions.
 - o Ex: What do you do if you have mold in your room?

Reporting: As you begin to report a story, ask yourself these questions:

- What is this story?
- What makes the story news?
- What do I need to know?
- What would readers want to know about this story?
- Where can I find information?
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Resources: The reporting process is about going from ignorance to knowledge. As a reporter, you may know little about a topic when a story is assigned, but by the time it's published, you will be close to an expert. A good reporter learns how to gather information from various sources, which may include:

- Directories. These include searching the washcoll.edu website and checking the staff directory, as well as online and paper directories.
- Newspaper archives. Past stories can provide invaluable background information.
- Web sites. Networking sites (facebook, twitter) are especially useful for finding students and their contact information. Some of the information online is, however, inaccurate. You should always double-check information with reliable sources later.
- People!
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Background research: Let's say you have an hour to do research before attending an interview with an expert on the George Goes Green project. Where should you start? Google is always a great starting place for background information. You might find old Elm stories about past environmental efforts on campus, or how other campuses have made efforts to go green so you can compare.