

We Want Your Story: How to Pitch and Plan Your Idea

Student correspondents have the opportunity to develop their own story ideas for their section's final publication or broadcast. On Saturday, March 10, students should be prepared to pitch their story ideas to their section leaders and fellow participants. A good pitch tells an editor what the story is in a sentence or two, and it's a skill students will need develop if they are interested in journalism. For example:

So-so pitch: "I want to do a story about crime."

Better pitch: "I want to write about new student group's efforts to reduce crime at my school."

Finding Focus

1. Consider the basic characteristics of news when formulating your idea — ask yourself why the story qualifies as news.
 - Why is this a significant topic?
 - What would your readers/viewers/listeners be surprised to learn?
 - Why should your readers/viewers/listeners care?
 - Why is this worth covering now?
 - Why is this interesting to you? What drew your interest?
2. Consider what has been already written.
 - How did other news sources handle this topic?
 - What might your story add to the discussion that hasn't already been reported?
3. Identify sources you will need to interview for the story.
 - Identify data sources for statistics and public records
 - For TV and radio, start thinking of who you need for recorded interviews
 - If using a source may pose ethical issues (e.g. naming a teenager involved in criminal activity), please see your section leader for guidance on how to proceed
4. For print students, consider how to tell the story visually?
 - Photos?
 - Would a graphic or chart make sense?
5. For TV and radio students, now is the time consider what footage/audio you'll need.
 - What sounds will help tell the story (natural sound)?
 - For TV, consider wide, medium, tight and tighter shots

The Planning Process

The planning process should begin once you and your section leader have agreed on your story. Do not wait until the last week to do your interviewing, reporting, and writing.

Avoiding common pitfalls:

- Contact the people you need to interview as soon as possible. Setting up interviews early provides enough time for follow-up questions and gives you the needed wiggle room if a source suddenly cancels or you find the focus of your story has changed.
- Anticipate having to follow up with potential sources. You might not hear back from everyone after your first attempt. Often, it takes multiple attempts. Pick up the phone and call.
- If you are having trouble reaching a source, please contact your section leader for guidance as soon as possible. He or she may be able to suggest another source. Do not wait until the final week of the workshop to tell someone you're having issues.
- Talk with your section leader if you think your story has changed or if you are concerned about meeting your deadline. Should this happen, offer an alternative. Have a Plan B (and maybe Plan C) as a backup.