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# TELLING THE STORY

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## 1. PICK YOUR BEAT

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Picking the right topic or area of focus is the most important first step in telling your story. You want to choose something that you are passionate about. This could be reporting on civic leaders and innovative ideas, local government activities, community meetings, nonprofit organizations, youth and educational programs, or even certain public policy issues. To earn media credibility and build an audience, you want to make sure you pick a beat and publishing schedule that will hold your interest so that you will have the drive to continue.

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## 2. GRAB YOUR READER

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- ✓ **Start with a compelling “lead” that will hook your audience.** In today’s fast-paced, social media-dominated world most people will just read the first sentence and then decide if they want to keep on going.
- ✓ **Use the most eye-catching information:** shocking statistics, dramatic budget increases, number of people impacted by an issue, etc.
- ✓ **Make it Personal:** Be an “everyman” and connect to readers common interests.

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## 3. KEEP IT FACT-BASED

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- ✓ **OPRA is your friend, use it!**
- ✓ **Double check all your facts and figures.** One major typo can ruin your credibility with readers and other media.
- ✓ **Use authentic, verifiable sources.** You may love your mom, but she isn’t necessarily the go-to expert on public safety best practices. When citing sources you want to make sure they have the credibility and evidence to back up their statements and reports.

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## 4. REMEMBER THE FIVE W’s & HOW

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Before filing your story, make sure you cover these basic questions:

- ✓ **WHO:** The people, organizations, or officials involved
- ✓ **WHAT:** The evidence-based solutions, events, initiatives, city-based issues, etc.
- ✓ **WHERE:** This could be a specific location (i.e. City, County, State), or a government meeting (i.e. council meeting, school board meeting; or a neighborhood impacted by an issue.)
- ✓ **WHEN:** When did or when will an event occur.
- ✓ **WHY:** Why is the story or issue relevant & important to your audience?
- ✓ **HOW:** What steps are being taken or will be taken to implement certain solutions.

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## 5. GET PUBLISHED!

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- ✓ **Online News Sites:** A great place to start is finding a hyperlocal news site dedicated to your city, or the website of your daily or weekly newspapers. These media outlets are often looking for quality content.
- ✓ **Bloggng:** Don’t have a local media outlet to turn to? You can start your own news site using a free blogging platform like WordPress, Blogger or Tumblr.
- ✓ **Social Media:** Create a news feed by creating a Facebook page or Twitter.

