

Ten Tips for Story Editors

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1. Brainstorm story options

Help find a focus early in the process so reporting is deeper and more efficient, writing is faster and more cohesive.

Test the story early and often: Why are we doing this story?

Why are we doing this story *now*?

What do we *need* to know?

What do we *want* to know?

2. Take care of necessary business (but don't make it the **only** business)

Be clear with reporter about expectations and needs.

Be open to reporter's problems, challenges and concerns.

Be flexible.

Be an honest two-way broker.

3. Invest in the story

Discuss the story in question language. Use your curiosity to generate enthusiasm for the idea and to help guide the reporter's curiosity and questions. Don't block creativity or curiosity with statement language.

Provide tools to help focus the reporting/writing process:

Budget lines

Lede options

Working nut grafs

Story forms

4. Turn the reporter into a storyteller

Ask questions.

Enthuse at interest points.

Identify patterns and themes.

Connect the reporter to the reader (bridge writer and audience)

Provide a brief summary of your story conversations.

Push the reporter to take risks, but provide a safe foundation.

5. Talk about *writing* (defined as storytelling in all forms)

Structure

Tone

Pacing and rhythm

Goal of the piece

6. Synthesize and summarize
 - Find the sum of the reporter's work.
 - Listen to what the reporter has discovered and feed it back in summary form or as a working budget line/nut graf.
 - Identify the forest that is created by the reporter's info-trees.
7. Be a partner in making choices
 - What is the story's primary emphasis or goal?
 - What can we leave out?
 - What other packaging or story-telling options help the whole?
 - What won't work and why?
8. Be the first reader
 - Respond first overall to the story ... not the commas.
 - Tell the reporter what you've read, what you've learned, what you've felt, what you've missed, what you've wondered.
 - Restate the conclusion of the story in one line.
9. Edit without fear or favor, but honor the reporter's voice
 - Identify the writer's habits (pattern strengths and weaknesses).
 - Explain changes to the writer.
 - Be specific.
 - Get the writer to *show* the story's main points.
 - Re-interview the writer to reinforce the reporting process.
 - Show the writer where he/she has gotten mired in the story.
 - Remind the writer of the reader.
10. Debrief
 - Note what worked, and what didn't, about the reporting, writing and editing process
 - Commit to next-time improvements.
 - Develop "challenge" game plans to expand the reporter's range story by story, tool by tool, technique by technique.