WRITEGIRL PLANET
JOURNALISM WORKSHOP
Issue No. 1

Tips
FROM TOP LOS ANGELES JOURNALISTS

Every Story Has an Angle
WHERE TO FIND YOURS

Fact vs. Fake
HOW TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES

March 2020
WRITEGIRL PLANET: JOURNALISM

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https://www.newcurrents.com/intro/quiz/quiz.html
Welcome to WriteGirl Planet

Hello WriteGirls!

We miss seeing your bright faces! It’s hard to believe that it has only been just over one month since we were all together at the WriteGirl Songwriting Workshop at The Huntington in February! So much has happened since then, and we are all in the midst of adapting to many changes.

One thing that has not changed is that WriteGirl is here for you! We are working through a variety of new ways to continue to inspire all of you, including large group zoom workshops, small group zoom gatherings, email packets (such as this one right here, The WriteGirl Planet!), video workshops and much more. We are resilient! We are flexible! We can re-invent what WriteGirl looks like right now, and we are super excited for the chance to put our creative energy to work on that! Our staff has been meeting on zoom twice a day to plan a whole suite of digital experiences for you.

When I started WriteGirl back in 2001, I had one goal – to inspire girls to find their creative voice. It was important then, and it’s even more important now. Your voice is needed, not only to help advance your own ideas and goals, but also to be able to speak up for your family, your community, your generation, your city. At this moment, while we all are staying home or inside, and keeping up physical distancing for the wellbeing of all, we have a special opportunity to get creative and get writing! You can waste this time, or you can use it...and of course, you know which one would be a better choice, right? Maybe you can finally finish that novel you started, or explore writing in a new genre (such as Journalism, perhaps?!) or write a small poem or rant or rave, every day...there are an infinite number of ways you could use this time inside to write!

So, we’ve put together this first edition of The WriteGirl Planet to give you some WriteGirl-curated writing activities and techniques, advice from experts, online resources and even some self-care strategies, because yes, this is a very important time to take extra care of yourself. (Tip from me: See if you can come up with a new way to transition into wind-down mode at night. Put on gentle music, drink some hot tea, read a poem from a WriteGirl book and make a wish upon a star or the moon. Night rituals can really help guide us into a better night’s sleep!)

We want to read your writing, so please send it to us! We are here for you, and we look forward to all the new ways we can evolve the WriteGirl community to inspire each other in the online space, for now. And when you have finished reading through this special first issue of The WriteGirl Planet, get off your screens and go for a walk!!

Warmly,
Keren Taylor
How to use this at home

1. Wash your hands (why not?!)

2. Grab your journal and a pen

3. Browse these pages and find something that intrigues you. (Print this PDF, or read it on your device, your choice!)

4. Follow your instinct, and write as much as you can

5. When you feel like you’ve accomplished something, draw a smiley face or five stars on your own work (or just pat yourself on the back)

6. If you start to feel lonely, here are some encouraging volunteers!

7. Put your journal down and come back again tomorrow to try another activity!
To help my interview relax, I remind them how the photographer is eavesdropping on our conversation. Please, just look at me.

I’d like to address interviewing techniques because everything hinges on a reporter’s ability to solicit meaningful information.

If the interview is done in person, eye contact and active listening skills are vital. Plus, a good reporter will research the subject/topic so as not to waste anyone’s time. I work with a camera crew everyday. To help my interview relax, I remind them how the photographer is eavesdropping on our conversation. Please, just look at me. Good reporters don’t pre-interview or script questions. Just let it flow. And before you call it a wrap, ask your subject if there’s anything you forgot to ask? Often they’ll volunteer a juicy nugget that will make your story sing.

Treat every interview like a conversation. You’re still going to ask the questions and they’re still going to do most of the talking, but if you can create an environment that doesn’t feel like an inquisition, you’re more likely to get honest and candid responses out of your subject.
MORE TIPS FROM LOCAL JOURNALISTS

What advice do you have for WriteGirl journalists?

Katie Geyer

WriteGirl Managing Director, former journalist published in *The Boston Globe, Los Angeles magazine* and *The Santa Clarita Valley Signal*

**Tips for story ideas:**

- Be observant and be curious! Take notes about what you’re curious about. You’ll be surprised just how many questions cross your mind throughout the day!
- Note changes you see in your community over time – it might be indicative of a larger change happening.
- Do you know a fascinating person or someone who works in an interesting occupation? Those stories might make for a great profiles.
- Remember that your unique experience provides you with insights that other journalists might not be aware of. There’s never a shortage of stories to tell. It’s all about finding new perspectives to share with the world.

Lindsay Miller

News and Culture Director, *POPSugar*

One helpful thing for journalists to remember is to always ask themselves this question: “How do I know that?” If you’re writing a news story, be sure you can answer that question for every piece of information, fact or statistic in your piece!
Brittany Beckman
Managing Editor at Mashable

Writing on deadline: Ah, the dreaded deadline. They are key to journalism; every news outlet wants to be first. And they can be a challenge!

*Don’t wait until the last minute to start writing. Write as you go.*

Your deadline may be different depending on the type of journalism you do. If you are working in breaking news, you can have a deadline of "Right now!" from an editor.

If you are a features writer, you can have anywhere from a day, a week, or a month to file a story. Often, you may be working on a few assignments at once, with a quick story boiling on your front burner and a longterm one simmering on your back burner.

My advice here is don’t wait until the last minute to start writing. Write as you go. After your first interview, pull out the 3-4 best quotes. Once you have an idea for your first line, write it down. (It may change, and that’s OK!) Get bits and pieces of the writing down as you’re researching. Start outlining as you go. This way, when you’re done researching, you aren’t faced with a mountain of information and a blank page.

Deanna Barnert
Entertainment Journalist/TV Critic at Bauer Media

Interviewing tip:
No matter who you are interviewing, your most powerful tool is a show of respect for your interviewee. So start off by showing gratitude for your subject’s time and willingness to talk.
Karen Grigsby Bates
Senior Correspondent, Codeswitch, NPR

What's worked for me as a reporter:

- When I arrive, I spend a little time chatting with my subject, just seeing what our commonalities might be. (What's your puppy's name? Are you reading this book? It's next up for my book club!) It relaxes us both.

- Let them know when the formal interview begins, when you're going to go on the record, and let them know when you've finished the official interview.

- If you're confused about something, don't be shy to ask for clarification: "I've never heard that term before; can you tell me what it means?" It saves time to figure it out in the moment, in case they're not available later.

- Thank them for their time and ask if you can contact them later if you have a follow-up question when you're fact-checking your story.

- Always, always remember that unless the person you're interviewing is a politician or other person who is accountable to the public, they are not obligated to speak to you. They're doing it so you can report your story — so don't act as if they owe you; it's actually the other way around.

Kitty Felde
Award-winning public radio journalist & host of the Book Club for Kids podcast

Make a list of everything you need to know:

- Add the question YOU want answered
- Put your question in the order that makes sense. Build up to your toughest question, but don't leave it for last - you may run out of time.
- LISTEN hard to the answers
- Follow up. Follow up again if necessary
- Be polite, honest, calm
I remember being in college and being afraid of that word – thinking it was some scary schmoozing in high heels that I didn’t feel equipped to do.

A) **Make a good impression** by finding ways to be your authentic self when you're doing internships or other entry level positions. If you like baking, bring something special in and put it out in the kitchen. If you play sports, talk about that with other staff members. Try and connect with people as a human. Beyond the work. That will make you memorable when opportunities open up. (Warning: Be strategic about it. There is a fine line between sharing and overshar ing – and potentially being inappropriate or annoying.)

B) **Strategically stay in touch** after internships or fellowships end. Send an email to your old boss with a link to a piece that publishes at your next gig. Follow the staff on Twitter and like tweets. Amplify the work of the organizations. I was on a webinar recently and a woman I greatly respect was one of the presenters. I shot her a DM on Twitter and said I really appreciated the insight she gave. She said it was great to hear from me and the note brightened her day. Am I looking for a new job? No! But she’s a well-connected person and I never know when I may need her help.

C) **It truly is a small world after all!** In media, so many people are connected! An intern recently told me she was applying for something and I was like, "Oh cool, I met that woman at a wedding once, I'll send her a note." Keep in touch with people from previous workplaces and let them know where you're applying next. It’s likely they know someone there. If there's somewhere you'd like to work, poke around on LinkedIn to see how you might be connected to people who work there.
Every Story Has An Angle

What’s Your Angle?

Smart journalists are always looking for the right angle when they develop their stories. Here are two ways you can use the columns below:

1) Randomly pair a topic with a media outlet and let the outlet determine your angle!
   OR

2) Pick ONE topic from the list and write 10 different headlines – one for each outlet!

10 Current Topics

1. Female representation in the Presidential race
2. A day in the life of [choose an occupation that excites you!]
3. The simple life (e.g., sewing, baking, and growing your own food)
4. Endangered species
5. An interview with [someone you admire]?
6. Los Angeles, outdoors
7. Self-care
8. Cooking from scratch
9. Plant-based diets
10. Young environmentalists

10 Media Outlets

1. Sports Illustrated
2. New York Times
3. Fine Gardening Magazine
4. Yoga Magazine
5. Entertainment Weekly
6. Tractor & Machinery Magazine
7. KPCC (Pasadena NPR station)
8. Long Beach Press-Telegram
9. ABC7 Evening News
10. UCLA Daily Bruin campus newspaper
ANATOMY OF A NEWS ARTICLE

Copy this layout in your journal!
You can use it to write an article about anything!

Title/Headline

LEDE
Summarize the whole story in one sentence.

NUT GRAF
The "nutshell paragraph" gives all the main details and establishes why the reader should care about the story. Readers who want to know more details will keep reading.

Photo

CAPTION:
Photos can capture attention. Use your caption to add what the reader cannot see.

DETAILS
Readers could stop reading at any time.
START with information the reader must have to know what happened.
NEXT, add information that can give them more insight but isn't essential.
FINISH with details that are interesting or nice to know.

Did you talk to someone?
Use a QUOTE!

Is there DATA?
Include an important statistic!
Fact vs. Fake

Questions to Ask Yourself as a Media Consumer

The following questions will help you get a sense of how reliable the information is:

- **How many sources are there?** Are they quoted directly? Are their names and titles included? Is someone’s pet hamster their main source?

- **Who is (or is not) quoted, and what do they say?** Does the reporter quote people on both sides of the issue?

- **Are there significant spelling and grammar errors?** Most reputable news outlets have a team of skilled editors who help ensure quality control. If it looks like it was written by someone’s little brother, it’s probably fake news.

- **Do they use exclamation points?** Most trusted articles don’t use exclamation points unless it’s in a quote.

- **Are there hard facts from specific sources?** Does it say “Studies show that…” “Sources say…” or does it cite a specific study or a specific person?

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These days, with so much going on in the world and with so much false information being circulated, it’s important to know how to separate the trustworthy news from the unreliable (or even fake) news.

- If it’s an article from a website you’ve never heard of before, go to their About Us or Contact Us page to learn more about them. You could go one step further and Google them.

- Is the content paid by a company or a politician? If Ronald McDonald himself is writing a piece about how fries are healthy, you may want to be a little skeptical.

- Beware of satirical websites like The Onion. The information on these sites is deliberately exaggerated or skewed for the purpose of comedy.

- Unreliable websites often use outrageous headlines as clickbait on social media. You can often tell by the comments made on the social media post whether it’s clickbait. Look for another news story on the same topic. Does this story also appear in traditional media? Did your friend’s crazy uncle retweet it?

- Note the section of the publication it’s coming from. Is it in the Opinion or section? Is it a column outlining someone’s personal opinion? It doesn’t necessarily mean it’s inaccurate – it just means it’s someone’s opinion.
The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County was sad to miss WriteGirl!

(Now there’s a catchy headline!)

The Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County is the largest natural and historical museum in the western United States. Its collections include nearly 35 million specimens and artifacts and cover 4.5 billion years of history.

Since we did not go to the museum this season, we are bringing the museum to YOU! Use the museum images here to inspire your articles!

- Choose a street in Los Angeles that you know and write the headline for a story that took place there. What was one thing that happened?

- Write a headline that captures how you feel about Los Angeles, right now.

- Imagine coming to Los Angeles as a travel writer. Capture your first impressions and what you’re planning to do here.

- If the L.A. Times interviewed you about the sights and sounds of Los Angeles, what three things would you be sure to talk about?

_Becoming Los Angeles“ Exhibit:_
This diorama of Los Angeles as it looked between 1938 and 1940 gives a glimpse of our city’s past.
This altar or ofrenda, created by Ofelia Esparza and Rosanna Esparza Ahrens offers viewers the vision of Los Angeles as a village.

- What would you ask Ofelia and Rosanna about the items in this exhibit?

- Write a caption for this image of the ofrenda. Try to capture its boldness and energy.

- Be a cultural journalist and write about a celebration that you know well. What are the traditions? Who are the people that participate? Create a list of interview questions for one participant in this celebration.

- Think about your local community. Who are the leaders and “celebrities”? Write a profile of someone in your neighborhood.

Test your knowledge of this week’s big stories!

The world’s only Tyrannosaurus rex growth series includes a baby dinosaur and a “sub-adult”, shown here.

- Caption this photo in a way that highlights the relationship between these two dinosaurs.

- If you were granted an interview with the archeologists who discovered the bones of this T-Rex, what questions would you ask them?

- You’ve been asked to write an editorial article about the importance of preserving the bones of dinosaurs, what will you write?

- Imagine a PARENTING magazine has asked you to write about the similarities between dinosaur parenting and human parenting. Make a list of five topics to investigate, starting with 1) food and 2) shelter.

Did you know?
The word dinosaur means terrifying lizard. This name was invented by Sir Richard Owen in 1842.

Send us your writing!
Email us at membership@writegirl.org
Ariel Edwards-Levy’s first experience with journalism was through WriteGirl, and now, a decade later, Ariel is a political journalist with the Huffington Post working on national elections and overseeing the online newspaper’s polling in Washington, D.C. Ariel credits WriteGirl for introducing her to the world of journalism. “A mentor allowed me to shadow her for a few days and helped me write my first article that appeared in print.” Ariel Edwards-Levy at The Huffington Post: https://www.huffpost.com/author/ariel-edwardslevy

Caroline Champlin is from the class of 2015! She double majored at UC Berkeley in Rhetoric and Science Communication. She began working as the News Director on her campus radio station and over the last two years has moved from intern and reporter at KQED in the Bay area to local reporter and producer covering homeless issues on KPCC - Southern California Public Radio. Caroline Champlin at KPCC: https://www.scpr.org/programs/airtalk/2020/03/03/65375/super-tuesday-l-a-county-voters-cast-their-ballots/, https://www.kqed.org/author/cchamplin

Pamela Avila is a writer, editor and social media strategist based in Los Angeles. She graduated from UC Santa Cruz in English Language and Literature and during her summers became a Communications Intern at WriteGirl for 2 years. Since then she has worked for various news and popular internet outlets including hellogiggles, mitú and Los Angeles Magazine. She currently is a News Writer for E! Networks and covers everything from arts & culture to politics. Pamela Avila at E! News: https://avilapamela.journoportfolio.com/
Interview someone in your life about a specific incident that they witnessed or were a part of.

It can be big, like asking your mom about the day you were born, or small, like asking your dad about his recent trip to the grocery store.

Think about the questions you want to ask them in advance, and then interview them and take notes.

After you’re done with the interview, write a story, and don’t forget to use the article format we provided in your packets if you aren’t sure where to start!

BONUS!
Interview a SECOND person for another perspective on the same event!

Revisit the Opening Writing Activity:
Write about something funny you experienced this past week!
Submit Your Work

- **Send us your writing!** We want to read your snappy headlines about your life and your neighborhoods! We may be able to use your writing for a blog or some other cool places! Email us at membership@writegirl.org

- **Los Angeles Times High School Insider** fosters a community of young readers, thinkers and storytellers to amplify and develop their voices on the issues that matter. They are committed to empowering a generation of young people to actively seek out, engage in and support a productive public discourse that will create a better future for us all. Interested in being a contributor? Send an email to Molly.Heber@latimes.com

- **Eat, Darling, Eat** is a storytelling website about mother/daughter relationships, centered around something that is fundamental and fun, evocative and provocative, shared across all cultures and generations: food. Some stories are warm tributes to beloved women; others are about more complicated family dynamics. Some are hilarious, some heartwarming, some heartbreaking. Get in touch to submit your own original story: info@EatDarlingEat.net

- **Polyphony Lit** is accepting submissions of poetry, fiction and creative nonfiction from high school students worldwide. The student editors provide feedback to all submissions, including the ones they do not accept for publication. To be guaranteed feedback, submit your piece by April 30. Read their guidelines before submitting at https://www.plitsubmissions.org/

- **Teen Sequins** is a teen literary journal by Gigantic Sequins which features outstanding poetry from writers 14 - 18 years old. This journal highlights the works of teens to show the world just exactly how vibrant, inventive and moving teenage writers can be. Submissions are open til July 12th. Find out how to submit at http://www.giganticsequins.com/submit.html
D-I-Y BOOKMARKS

Great Women in Journalism

If you want, feel free to print out this one page and create your own bookmarks!

Rachel Maddow
Born 1973
Rachel Maddow, American broadcast journalist and host of the Emmy-winning Rachel Maddow Show, is a graduate of Stanford University and holds a doctorate from Oxford University.

Choosing journalism because she liked explaining things to people, she got her start in local radio and eventually became the face of MSNBC. The first openly gay political television host, Maddow combines humor and empathy to deliver calm, seriously researched political discourse often not seen.

Maddow is the author of several books, including Drift: The Unmooring of American Military Power, a #1 New York Times bestseller.

Think about what motivates you to write and communicate.

Jenna Wortham
Born 1981
As a staff writer for The New York Times Magazine, Jenna Wortham explores topics including technology, race, gender, and queer identity.

Wortham is known for insightful observations about the internet and contemporary pop culture. When she discussed Beyoncé’s Lemonade album in the New York Times arts section, the pop star sent the journalist flowers with a note that said, “Thanks for understanding my heart.”

Wortham’s award-winning podcast, Still Processing, which she co-hosts with New York Times critic at large Wesley Morris, covers “the pleasures and pathologies of America” today. The two culture writers discuss topics ranging from TV shows to current events, helping listeners gain a deeper understanding of society.

Consider how your age and identity might offer you particular insights into American culture.

Sonia Nazario
Born 1960
Sonia Nazario is an award-winning journalist whose stories have tackled some of this country’s most intractable problems and have won some of the most prestigious awards, including two Pulitzer Prizes. She was also a finalist for a third Pulitzer, in Public Service.

She is best known for “Enrique’s Journey,” her story of a Honduran boy’s struggle to find his mother in the U.S. Published as a series in the Los Angeles Times, “Enrique’s Journey” won the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing in 2003. It was turned into a book by Random House and became a national bestseller.

In 2012 Columbia Journalism Review named Nazario among “40 women who changed the media business in the past 40.”

What can you share about your own little corner of the world? Give your readers the world through your own eyes.

Seung Min Kim
Born 1985
In just over ten years since graduating from college, Kim became a White House correspondent for The Washington Post, covering the current administration through a congressional lens.

This trailblazer has helpful advice for other young women starting out in journalism: be forthright with sources, know your subject, and prepare sharply-worded questions in advance. She also encourages young journalists to embrace their identities in their work, saying that “by virtue of your race and gender, you see stories in a different light.”

Kim is also a political analyst at CNN and PBS and is a past president of the D.C. chapter of the Asian American Journalists Association.

How have your ethnicity and gender shaped how you view the world?
RESOURCES

Where to get news!

We are glad to suggest a few reliable media news outlets to you! News is everywhere, but we recommend these highly-respected media companies that hire staff reporters and have the budget to support thorough fact-checking and research.

LOS ANGELES TIMES:

NPR:
- A privately and publicly funded American nonprofit membership media organization reporting on news, arts & life, entertainment and more. https://www.npr.org/

LOS ANGELES MAGAZINE:
- A definitive resource that covers the people, food, culture, arts and entertainment, fashion, lifestyle and news of Southern California. https://www.lamag.com/

NEW YORK TIMES:
- An influential paper with global readership that covers politics, global stories and emphasizes arts and culture too! https://www.nytimes.com/

REUTERS:
- An independently run international news organization with a main focus on financial and business markets and breaking news. https://www.reuters.com/

BBC NEWS:
- A global news network from the U.K. that is a great source for factual, unbiased journalism on a wide variety of news topics https://www.bbc.com/news/world

POLITICO:
- A major nonpartisan source for news on politics and policy. https://www.politico.com/

DEADLINE:
- An online news site founded with entertainment industry news as its focus. https://deadline.com/

TEEN VOGUE:
- The latest on fashion, entertainment, social justice issues and more. https://www.teenvogue.com/
SELF - CARE

Physical Distancing means Social Media Connecting!

We’ve been publishing a ton of purposeful social media content to engage teen writers across the globe! Our latest campaign features writing prompts & tips focused on using creativity as a tool for promoting wellness & self-care. Check out WriteGirl’s Instagram & Twitter (we’re @WriteGirlLA), and write along with us OR share your advice for using art to manage stress.

Here’s a few writing prompts we love to get you started!

- When life gets overwhelming, journaling can help with time management, stress, and be a source of self-care. Take 5 minutes to jot down a few thoughts to help you stay focused and calm.

- Try something new today! It can be anything: drawing, knitting, yoga, singing — as long as you’ve never tried it before. Write about how your new experience made you feel, what you liked about it, and why you would or wouldn’t try it again!

- Think of a real, imaginary or fictional place that makes you feel happy or at peace. Write about this place in detail for 5 minutes using all your senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. Then you’ll be able to revisit this “place” by re-reading what you wrote anytime, anywhere.
STAY AT HOME ACTIVITIES

There are plenty of resources online with lists of engaging stay-at-home activities. Here are some standouts from *Los Angeles Magazine*:

10 (Free) Ways to Use the L.A. Public Library While Actual Libraries Are Closed

- **E-books and Audiobooks:** You can read or listen to novels and magazines.

- **Movies, TV & More:** FREE Streaming services! Filled with new movies and classics.

- **TESSA Photo Archive:** Search through decades of old newspaper archives.

- **News:** Free 24-hr digital subscription to the *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*.

- **Language Learning Tools:** There is an app where you can choose to learn one of 70 languages.

Try Mindfulness through Meditation

**MindShift™ CBT App**

This *FREE* app uses scientifically proven strategies based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to help you learn to relax and be mindful, develop more effective ways of thinking, and use active steps to take charge of your anxiety.

Learn more & download at [https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/](https://www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/)
WHAT'S NEXT?

WRITEGIRL CHARACTER & DIALOGUE ONLINE WORKSHOP

Are you a fan of TV? Movies? Plays? All three?!

Here's your chance to learn the secrets of writing scenes and monologues for the stage and screen! At this interactive online workshop, we will explore subtext, conflict, “the inciting incident,” character development and much more!

We will be joined by special guest actors who will bring your writing to life!

ONLINE CLUBHOUSE JUST FOR YOU!

Visit the WriteGirl Clubhouse page, just for WriteGirls: RSVP to our upcoming workshops! Submit your writing for publication! Learn about scholarship opportunities! www.writegirl.org/writegirl-club-house

SPECIAL THANKS TO:

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Event Assistant

We're here for you!