

Generating Good Story Ideas

Be observant and curious

- Make the effort to observe what's going on around you
- Don't be afraid to ask questions (basic or complex)

Know your audience

- Geographic community vs. collective area(s) of interest
- Ethnic, economic, ideological, social makeup

Talk to people

- Go inside and outside your social circle
- Find out what people care about most
- Everyone believes certain things are underpublicized, unappreciated, unknown
- Ask them who else to interview

Generating Good Story Ideas

Learn about your community

- Look for demographic info about area
- Examine previous media coverage of your community
- Look for announcements of local/campus activities

Discuss and develop story topics

- Brainstorm ideas with fellow journalists and others
- If story subjects change, follow up with interviewees

Keep track of ideas, look for next steps

- One good story idea often leads to multiple others
- Keep record of subtopics & ideas you don't use
- Keep contact info of good sources

But what if the well runs dry?

What if nothing interesting is going on and you're out of fresh ideas?

What if you've covered every decent story from every press release?

What if you're stuck with nothing but...

**TERRIBLE
STORY
IDEAS???**

Turning Trash to Treasure

What makes a story idea bad?

- **It's boring**
 - According to whom? Someone thinks it's interesting
 - Focus story on those people, why they care about it
- **It's pointless**
 - Is there a meaning below the surface?
 - Try to find out the background of the story
- **It's ridiculous**
 - The event/person/institution seems crazy to you
 - What makes it unusual or quirky?
- **It's a cliché**
 - Rags to riches, local boy made good, child prodigy, etc.
 - Are there details that set this story apart from the cliché?

Turning Trash to Treasure

What makes a story idea bad?

- **It's the same as something we've already covered**
 - Dig deeper to find differences, variations
 - Different focus, different people, different activities?
- **Interviewee has nothing interesting to say**
 - Follow up – ask questions from unique angles
 - Inarticulate people can do significant things
 - Focus on achievements, interviews with friends, family, etc.
- **Subject is distasteful or disgusting**
 - What can/will public gain from this subject?
 - Does it illustrate an important larger point?
- **Nobody will understand this**
 - Have experts explain things to you; do research on your own
 - Explain why this is important in plain English in your story

Turning Trash to Treasure

Good general approaches:

- Ask people in your audience about the subject
- Learn more about the subject on your own
- Ask people participating why your audience should care
- Get to know the context (social, cultural, etc.) – is there a local group behind this?
- Ask yourself what exactly is boring, pointless, ridiculous etc. about the subject – do others disagree?
- Find groups online that focus on the subject
- **Focus on the people involved** more than the subject – audiences love to read about other people's activities