**Profile Story Project Name:**

Our first major writing project this year is writing a profile story on another student within the classroom. You’ll be interviewing a classmate and then writing an informational/profile article about him/her which will get posted on our classroom website-or some other venue. **Your final draft will be due on Tuesday, October 18th.** Rachel and I brainstormed the schedule for this assignment, but changes may occur based on how much we accomplish in class, each day. The due date, will likely NOT change.

Day 1:

1. What is a profile story?
   1. What are the characteristics of a profile story

Day 2:

1. Come with 5-10 questions on the background to conduct interviews
2. How to take notes during the interview (body language, outfit, etc.)

Day 3:

1. Conduct interview
2. Go over notes, do you need clarification?

Day 4:

1. Revisit mentor text (example profile story) to review expectations
2. Start writing
   1. Brainframe pros v. con
   2. Rough draft

Day 5 & 6

1. Rough draft

Day 7:

1. Self/peer/teacher edit and revise
2. See if information is correct from your classmate

Day 8-10:

1. Edit/revise/Final draft

You final draft will need to contain:

-MUGS

-An introduction

-A conclusion

-At least 1 direct quote from the student you interviewed

**How to Write a Profile Story**

A profile story is a portrait of a person in words. Like the best painted portraits, the best profiles capture the character, spirit and style of their subjects. They delve beneath the surface to look at what motivates people, what excites them, what makes them interesting. Good profiles get into the heart of the person and find out what makes them tick.

The problem is that lives are hard to fit into newspaper articles, no matter how much space is allotted for them. Reporters who simply try to cram into a profile all the facts they can come up with inevitably end up with something more like a narrative version of a resume than a journalism story.

Like all other stories, profiles must have an angle, a primary theme. That theme should be introduced in the lead, it should be explored and often it will be returned to at the end of the story. Something of a person’s character, spirit and style will then be revealed through that theme.

Whatever the theme, it takes a thorough understanding of a person’s life to create a revealing sketch of that life. Reporters should spend time with their subjects while they’re doing whatever makes them newsworthy. For example, if you’re writing about a ballerina, try to observe her performing on stage or at least practicing in her dance studio.

Good profiles - and all good journalism stories - show, instead of telling. Use all five senses when you interview someone. What are they wearing? Do they fiddle nervously with their pencil? Is there a chocolate smudge on their shirt? Is their hair stylishly spiked?

Because a profile cannot be complete without quotes - there is no way to write a profile without extensive interviewing. Frequently, more than one interview is necessary unless the writer already knows his subject well Good profiles also contain quotes from people who know the subject of your story well. Spice your story with the words of family, friends, enemies and the subjects themselves.

Finally, good profiles strike the appropriate tone.  Think about your profile - is it someone who is involved in a serious issue, like eating disorders? You probably want to be more serious in your tone. Is it someone playful - a comic book artist, perhaps? You can be more playful. But remember - your personal opinion is not appropriate. You are there to merely paint a picture of this person - to let the facts speak for themselves.

**http://www.schooljournalism.org/note-taking-and-interviewing-tips/**

**Taking notes**

* Develop your own note-taking system. Use abbreviations. Make them up.
* Jot a question mark in the margin if you need to clarify a point before the interview ends.
* Always put quotation marks around direct quotes. Don’t fixate on quotes.
* If the subject is saying something you won’t use or aren’t interested in, don’t write it down.
* Re-read your notes immediately after the interview.
* Write a three- to five-sentence summary in your notebook at the end of each interview.

**Organizing a story**

Now that you’ve done all the research and reporting, it’s time to put the story together. Here are a few steps that will help you organize your story.

* Look over your notes. What information is important? Who are your most important sources?
* Determine the focal point of your story. Ideally, you should be able to do this in one word.
* Once you have determined the point, think about how your story might end.
* Next, determine how you will reach the end of your story. What information will you begin with? What will come next so that the story is easy for the reader to follow? Make an outline and map out this information for yourself.
* Be careful not to put all the best information in the beginning of the story. If possible, create a sense of mystery so your reader is given small pieces of the best information along the way.
* Think aboutyour most important sources. Make sure you mention them early in the story.
* Keep one ideato a paragraph. Long paragraphs bore readers.
* Keep related information together. If you don’t your story will have no sense of cohesion.

[**Note-Taking Tips From Professional Journalists**](http://craft1-sen.2011.journalism.cuny.edu/2011/09/16/note-taking-tips-from-professional-journalists/)

**Posted 16. Sep, 2011 in**[**Class Handouts**](http://craft1-sen.2011.journalism.cuny.edu/category/class-handouts/)**,**[**Lecture Notes**](http://craft1-sen.2011.journalism.cuny.edu/category/lecture-notes/)

http://craft1-sen.2011.journalism.cuny.edu/2011/09/16/note-taking-tips-from-professional-journalists/

The best reporters return from every assignment with a notebook stuffed with quotes, information and sensory detail — the raw material we need to build a story. But how do we fill those notebooks? One of the most difficult skills for new reporters to pick up is also one of the most basic — note-taking.

Every reporter has his or her own systems for note-taking, which start with some nuts-and-bolts decisions: Reporter’s notebook or steno pad? Ballpoint or roller ball? Shorthand or cursive? To record or not? Try a few combinations and figure out what feels most comfortable for you over a long day of reporting.

It’s hard to over-emphasize the importance of solid notes. As well as providing the material for your story, your notes are also your documentation of your reporting process. Your editors or professors may on occasion ask to see your notes. They don’t need to be tidy, but they do need to be complete — if it’s in your story, it should be in your notes or your research. Your notes should also provide avenues to verify information and quotes — phone numbers, email addresses, website urls. Your integrity as a journalist rests not only on your finished product, but also upon your reporting process and your ability to document that process.

In 2007, I asked some friends to explain their note-taking systems and offer tips. Please add your own in the comments below!

**Taking Notes: A selection of tips and advice from working journalists (Compiled by Indrani Sen in 2007)**

**Ann Givens, Newsday reporter:** A journalism professor of mine once gave me this tip, and I’ve used it here and there: Before you go out on an interview, prepare a handful of throwaway questions in addition to your good ones. Then, when you’re behind in your note taking, toss out a throwaway question and just let the person talk while you’re finishing up writing.

But I think the REAL skill that everyone develops over time is just the ability to know a great quote when a person says it, and then just tune everything else out while you get it down. I think we all tend to feel like we need a zillion quotes when we’re out in the field, but when we get back and write, we realize we only need 2-3 for most stories. So the trick is catching the great ones, and then not worrying too much about letting the rest slide by.

**Erik German, Newsday reporter [now at The Daily]:**

Also, in a situation where there’s a bunch of people talking, I try to write down a few (three is best) physical details for each person during moments when they repeat themselves or when they’re saying boring stuff. This helps me remember who was who when writing and it gives me something to work with just in case I need to describe the characters in my story.

If I’m really taking good notes, I’ll write down the gestures people make as they say their best quotes, just in case I want to frame their words with a bit of physical description.

After I get back to the office, and before I open up the blank word-processing page, I flip through my notebook and — preferably in a different color ink — I circle all the best quotes. I also will go through my notebook and write out abbreviated or garbled words before I forget what precisely was said and can’t make sense of my handwriting. This is especially important if more than a day will elapse between taking the notes and writing from them. They very quickly become indecipherable.

**Katie Thomas, New York Times reporter:** One thing that sprung to my mind immediately is if I’m at a press conference, I always record as a backup to check my notes, because the assumption is other media are covering it too and it would be awkward if they have different quotes than you do… but of course I never take notes lackadaisically, assuming I’m recording it … just in case it’s not really recording.

The other thing is more a mental trick. Rather than just frantically trying to keep up, I make sure I glance down every once in a while and just check that the notes I’m writing down are actually MAKING SENSE and are READABLE … sometimes you can get so caught up taking down half-sentences and then starting again that you don’t have anything useful. The other mental trick is to really listen for quotes — which is something that I’m sure all of us have practiced well but is hard for a new person. Once I hear a good quote, I latch onto it and don’t let go until I’ve finished writing it down… even if I miss what the person is now saying. If it’s a one on one and not a press conference, I can ask them to repeat what they just said. Sometimes I even ask a question I know the answer to, just to let them ramble while I’m catching up with something they said five minutes ago.

**Jennifer Smith, Newsday reporter:** You don’t need to write down everything verbatim—just the best quotes, and summarize the rest. Circle or star important parts. Sometimes I flip the paper over and write scene description.

If you are doing a longer interview for a profile and you type faster than you write longhand, you can also augment your in person interview with a phone follow-up, using a headset for hands-free conversation.

**Wayne Svoboda, freelancer, former correspondent for Time magazine and Africa Editor at The Economist newspaper of London, journalism associate professor:** My own thoughts, as I always tell students, include: get a good notebook. I suggest Reporter’s Note Book #651, ordered from Stationers Inc. in Richmond, Virginia. Hard to find, so sometimes classes go together to order by mail a set of a dozen or two or however many. Develop a personal shorthand, with abbreviations at least you will understand even if nobody else. Learn to buy time to record good quotes verbatim by somehow or other making your interview subject pause (ask him to repeat something, so you can focus mostly on recalling what he or she just said that was a keeper).

**Lonnie Isabel, former deputy managing editor of Newsday, journalism associate professor:** I also used a highlighter or multi-colored pins to sort notes for lead, background, or divergent viewpoints.

**Mohamad Bazzi, former Newsday Middle East correspondent, Council on Foreign Relations fellow, journalism associate professor at NYU:** I try to go over my notes and to underline (or highlight) key quotes. If it’s for a daily story, I try to go over (“organize”) my notes before I start writing. I also try to type up all the quotes that I think I’m going to use in my story, and I put them in a separate file from the actual story.

If I’m working on a long-range story, I try to organize my notes on the night that I’ve done the interview. That way, I can better decipher my handwriting and I can try to paraphrase things that I might have missed. I also try to type up the key quotes/thoughts that might be in my story. I’m not always disciplined about typing up notes right away, so at the end of a week or 10 day trip, I end up with many pages of notes to type. It can take hours.

The most unusual note-taking technique that I’ve seen is from a foreign correspondent friend of mine. He often uses 2 different colored pens while conducting his interviews. So he actually color-codes his notes (and writes them in sub-categories) while he’s doing the interview. I’ve also seem him use one of those thick multi-colored pens, and switch colors during interviews. I think his technique often worries his subjects. I wouldn’t recommend it.

**And here are Indrani’s tips:** I write a list of questions that I need answers to in the inside cover of my reporter’s notebook, so that I can flip back to it easily during interviews. As I’m taking notes, I look out for quotes or details that could be my lead or kicker, and I mark them with stars so that I’ll find them easily later. Before I sit down to write, I go through my notebook (or typed notes) with a highlighter and mark them up with my strange personal system — quotes I might actually use are highlighted; when a new person starts talking, I mark the page with a little stick figure; and I circle any information that I’ll paraphrase in the story.

If you have shorthand, by all means use it, but be careful not to skip words or paraphrase when you need a direct quote. My opinion on recording is there’s no harm doing it (with your source’s knowledge), as long as you also take written notes. On deadline, you’ll rarely have time to transcribe recorded interviews. And keep in mind that sooner or later your technology will fail — we all have a horror story or two about that. Also, beware of the sloppiness that can creep into your note-taking if you know you’re also recording.