



## Factory floor



## Reporting constructively



### Essentials

**Main topics:** Topics suitable for a constructive approach, thinking creatively, covering a story constructively, working with data, desk and field research, constructive interviewing, the hero's journey, constructive at every stage of a story.

**Summary:** Constructive reporting has all the elements of good, traditional reporting. But journalists working in a constructive mode add context to their stories and ask future-oriented questions – the “What Now?” element. Many kinds of stories can be approached in a constructive way, although fast-breaking news might not be suited to such things as a solutions approach. The constructive approach asks journalists to look at problems in a new way, which calls for creativity and unconventional thinking. Constructive journalists put an emphasis on looking for fresh perspectives, being empathetic when interviewing sources and letting go of assumptions. Constructive techniques can be integrated into every stage of the story production process.

### Can every story be a constructive story?

Journalists who produce constructive stories say that the approach is suitable for [a wide variety of topics](#): Health, the environment, climate change, human rights, social justice, education, technology, integration, etc. Wherever there are problems, journalists can look for people or organizations working on responses and report on them. Constructive journalism also has the potential to get polarized communities talking about divisive issues, and perhaps finding some common ground. This is especially the case during tense moments such as elections. However, promoting constructive dialogue on some topics might be difficult or impossible in countries where freedom of expression is low or does not exist.

So, while many stories can have constructive elements in them, some formats and topics may be better suited to certain of the “pillars” – solutions, context and nuance, dialogue and engagement – than others.

**Breaking news:** The solutions approach might not be suitable for breaking news, where getting the facts out fast is the priority. It can be right for second-day or longer-term follow-up stories since solutions stories can provide a fresh follow-up angle to news events. Solutions

stories are often more suited to a cooler stage of a topic's life cycle. Similarly, some aspects of the dialogue and engagement pillar can be difficult to apply when a story is breaking. Constructive dialogue usually comes later.

However, a constructive approach that adds context and complexity can be used even with brief reports and fast-moving news. The Danish news agency Ritzau encourages reporters to ask a few extra questions by doing the following:

- **Look forward:** What happens now? What's the next step?
- **Look for action:** What will you do now? How would you want to solve this?
- **Look for context and perspective:** Has this happened before? Can we compare this to anything? Do you have data, facts, sources on this?

**Tragic events:** Some journalists admit that there are highly emotional topics like death and tragic accidents “where compulsively looking for a constructive perspective is [simply inappropriate](#)”, at least in the very first reports following the event. In news agencies and newsrooms, where journalists work under time pressure, the potential for a constructive approach might be limited. However, sometimes a more careful choice of images and wording, one that doesn't inflame tension or cause great fear, can be a positive step in the constructive direction.

**Silver-lining stories:** In cases of disaster and turmoil – whether natural or man-made – journalists might look for [“silver-lining” stories](#) of not only survival but success, brilliance, solidarity, and extraordinary achievements. This doesn't mean downplaying tragedy, but to look for some positive element or development that comes in its wake.

Example: In the aftermath of a bomb explosion, breaking news offers crucial timely information but is not necessarily constructive. Investigative journalism serves a watchdog role which will ascertain who is to blame for the bomb and the lapse in security. A constructive journalism approach could explore efforts to prevent this kind of violence from occurring again – the “how do we move forward?” aspect.

## Developing a constructive story idea

Constructive journalists aim to move beyond the mindset that conflict-based, negative stories are the newsworthy ones. To do that, they need to look beyond traditional news values, and consider adding others to that list. Besides “good news”, these additional values could be “solution”, “cooperation”, “visual”, “emotions”, “relevance”, “follow-up”, sometimes even “surprise” – without falling into the trap of sensationalism. Researcher Perry Parks from the University of Michigan (US) has even advocated for [“joy” as a news value](#). The constructive approach often challenges journalists to **seek new ways of looking at problems**. How can they become more creative and think outside the box?

 See *handout 1: Re-examining news values*

**Undergoing filters:** Our brain is a self-organizing system. What we have experienced in the past influences the direction we take and makes us feel safe. Among other filters, our mind uses a “feasibility filter” that often hinders open-minded reflection (this takes too much time; costs too much money; this can’t work, etc.). “Negativity bias” also influences the way we react to new ideas. To loosen the tight control that our rational-logical (linear) thinking normally has on our mind we need **irritation**.

Some techniques to become more creative:

- **Lateral thinking:** Instead of focusing on the problem in straightforward way, allow the gaze to wander in [other directions](#) (thinking outside of the box).
- **Fast thinking:** Make yourself produce a certain number of ideas under time pressure, thereby preventing the brain from instantly judging the ideas (by mind storming, for instance “The Crazy 8” – see description in training session).
- **Associative brainstorming:** Start with one topic or story idea and develop a visual mind map by creating chains of associations (don’t structure the ideas in the first step).
- **Negative brainstorming:** For once our “negativity bias” can be useful: We are usually more creative when we ask what can be done to make the situation worse? The collected ideas are then turned into their opposites.
- **Walt Disney strategy:** Brainstorming as a role play – the different players could be the dreamer, the realist, the doer, the critic or the neutral observer.
- **Describe “personas”:** [Create fictional characters](#), based upon the journalistic research (education, lifestyle, interests, values, goals, needs, limitations, desires, attitudes...), add a few fictional personal details (name, sex, age, profession...) to make them realistic characters.
- **Change of perspective:** Look at a problem through the eyes of a mother, a child or other person.

The creative process needs chaos, not control. Only when we have gone through this phase should we move on to the second one: structuring ideas, clustering and prioritizing them according to relevance and usefulness for the target group or to the potential for solution finding.



*See handout 8: What type of creative person are you?*

**The PERMA model:** Most journalists tend to think along the same lines and thus have similar ideas for story angles. The world keeps being portrayed in a certain way – everything that’s wrong with systems, institutions, politicians, etc. But according to constructive journalism proponents such as Cathrine Gyldensted, this violates the journalist’s ethical guideline of *seeking truth and reporting it*, since it’s not the whole truth. She and others suggest trying [another framework](#) for brainstorming story angles and ideas – the PERMA model, which is based on the positive psychology work of Martin Seligman in the United States (also see Module 1, Chapter 2). When looking for stories and angles, journalists working constructively can consider the model’s five elements of well-being and add questions to them:

- **Positive emotion:** Who is hopeful? Who is grateful? Who has solved a problem? How will this benefit XX going forward?
- **Engagement:** Who has put in a great effort? Who is passionate about something?

- **Relationships:** Who has helped? Who has been brought together? Where are examples of cooperation? Where are closer ties forming? Where is there potential for closer ties?
- **Meaning** (belonging to or serving something bigger than the self): Why is this story important to tell? Who is wiser now? What did they learn? What is the meaning of what happened?
- **Accomplishments:** What did it take? What was overcome? What was achieved?

**Examples:** After a natural disaster, the media could report on how people are helping each other, inviting neighbors who have lost their homes or their power to stay with them, strengthening the social fabric. The media could talk to rescue workers and describe how they find meaning in helping people.

In economics reporting, reporters can look at the accomplishments of people who through resilience and creativity found jobs, turned businesses around or proposed new ways to structure the economy to decrease inequality and scarcity.

The PERMA model elements also offer a framework for reporters to identify positive threads within the top news stories that are already there to produce follow-up pieces.

**Engaging the audience/community:** Journalists can identify problems by listening to a community. To report constructively, it's crucial to know as much as possible about the audiences and the problems they face. In reaching out to the public, reporters learn what's important to their communities, access information and get in contact with sources. Media outlets and newsrooms have various options to interact with their audiences and build a community, such as social media channels, comment sections and public events (see Module 2, Chapter 3). But freelance journalists and photographers can also find ways to engage audiences. They should get into the routine of asking friends, acquaintances or interviewees if they've heard about an interesting approach to a problem or even some positive development around an issue. If they have a following on social media, they can put questions to their followers.

**Finding stories in data/positive deviants:** Journalists may also find solution story ideas in data, since it can show how a response has been working and give measurable evidence. Usually when searching for data, journalists look for the worst cases. For constructive reporting it can be interesting to look at the data differently. For constructive reporting it might be interesting to **look at who is doing the best**. Another option is to **look in the middle**. What does the data say about the majority rather than the worst or best case?

Another option is to look for **“positive deviants”**. These are outliers, responses that are bucking a trend. This is a way to work backward from evidence and find people who are meeting a challenge better than others. Deviation from a norm, but in a positive direction. In other words, who's doing better than the others with the same resources? This is a signal that something newsworthy could be happening. It's the journalist's job to get the story behind the positive deviant and uncover information that could be valuable. Some journalists hesitate to attempt solutions stories because they don't want to be labeled advocates or PR reps. But the data gives you evidence and shields you from accusations of advocacy.

**Example:** A dataset showing Covid infection rates in 2020 had many counties showing striking similarities. The curves on graphs representing infection numbers in Portugal, Italy and Hungary were almost identical. But the graph related to Kazakhstan had a completely different shape. Where infections in other countries were skyrocketing, in Kazakhstan they were falling. It was a positive deviant. The reporter then can take this information, do some reporting and find out what the country did to put their infection rates on a different trajectory. Perhaps Kazakhstan's more successful response could be replicated elsewhere.

 See handout 10: Using Data Constructively

**Looking at big problems?** Large problems that are usually considered the responsibility of governments or even global problems can be addressed by investigating how individuals or local communities are dealing with them.

**Example:** Australia's [ABC News](#) ran a story about an increasingly expensive housing market, one which has become unaffordable for many. The story looked at how some builders were reducing costs by designing houses on their own, taking over the unskilled labor themselves, using less expensive and recycled construction materials or sharing costs with other people. Affordable housing is a big issue that will not easily be solved by one program or government, but a constructive reporter can still address it by examining how individuals or communities are taking an innovative approach and solving at that level.

**Identifying potential pitfalls:** Promising solutions can be found in many places and on many levels. But it's important to not take a response at face value. Reporters have to do their jobs and look at possible negative sides of what might at first seem like a real success story.

- **Individual change agents** might not grasp the full extent of a problem and the consequences of their actions. The response could have unforeseen consequences.
- **Organizations** offering “forward-looking” solutions always have their own interests, which may not match the interests of the people who are concerned. This might be obvious when it comes to private companies and lobbying groups, but NGOs and not-for-profit associations might also have hidden self-interests.
- **Governments**, especially authoritarian regimes, might use success stories for their own purposes – self-promotion or propaganda.

Journalists should always remain curious, but critical about a solution. And they should never advocate for a specific one. The evidence of the response's results and limitations should speak for themselves.

**Sources for solutions stories:** Journalists can go to a variety of individuals or organizations to find interesting responses to problems.

- **Think tanks/policy experts/academics:** They know their areas of specialization well, and often know who is doing what to respond to a problem. They might have response ideas as well, but remember, a solid solutions story is about a response that is already being tried.
- **Large datasets:** As mentioned above, these can be good places to find positive deviants and get solid data on how a response works.

- **People/organizations working with an issue:** NGOs, foundations or activists working in a certain field might well know what is happening on the ground. They probably have their own projects underway. Remember, the reporter is not there to sell their response, but to report on it.
- **Networks of innovators:** Their whole *raison d'être* is to keep track of fresh approaches to issues.
- **The local community:** A media organization's audience on social media can be a good resource for interesting initiatives, as can people at a community center. Good constructive journalists engage with their public.
- **Other journalists:** Conversations with colleagues at other media outlets – around the country or on another continent – can give you insight into what's going on that might have slipped your notice or located outside your normal coverage area.

**Example:** Eromo Egbejule, West Africa editor of The Africa Report, participated in the [Good Growth Journalism Initiative](#) organized by UNDP in Peru in 2019. “I heard Costa Rica’s remarkable story. The country managed to reverse what was one of the highest deforestation rates in the world, with radical reforms backed by political willpower. It’s a lesson countries in Africa ought to learn.” Eromo detailed his findings in an article he published in the Africa Report: Lessons on political willpower from Costa Rica and Peru.

## Researching a constructive story

Once journalists have solid ideas, they can sit down to do background research and decide how they'll approach their topic and who they want to talk to. The PERMA method works here to help journalists identify positive threads in a story. (See the questions in the PERMA section above.) As constructive journalists plan and research, they keep their minds open, stay off of a predetermined path and let go of their assumptions. They let the story go where it will. Other aspects to consider:

- **Protagonists:** The people who will feature in the story. Who is engaged? Who is making a difference? Is this protagonist really representative of an issue or an outlier?
- **Sources:** Many journalists visit similar kinds of sources – officials, elites, one person on one side of an issue, another on the other. But that often leads to the same old black-and-white portrayals. It is useful to talk to people on the ground, not just the experts. Finding someone surprising or unexpected can add richness and another dimension.
- **Perspectives:** Constructive journalists try to tell the full story. Even if the topic is predominantly negative, there are often one or two positive or hopeful aspects to it. What aspect is usually underreported but might give the public a fresh, unexpected view?

**Data mining and analysis:** In case the problem is already known (such as climate change or water scarcity), or the journalist has identified a problem (such as people losing their jobs due to COVID-19), data mining and analysis can give a clearer idea about the **size and impact of a problem**.

- How many people are affected? Compare multiple datasets: Is the problem unique to a category of people or geographical location for instance or is it a common problem?
- How are they affected concretely and how seriously?

- Is there a similar problem in another region, another part of society, another context, somewhere else on the globe?

Often, journalists can easily pinpoint a problem through data, but it can be more challenging to find potential solutions. Sometimes, data can help or point in the direction of people who might be familiar with solutions being tried out. And of course, data sets often help to evaluate the **success of a solution**.

**Finding information:** In many parts of the developing world, hard data can be hard to come by. Nevertheless, there are ways for journalists to find information:

- directly from a source (official statistics/public records, studies, communities, organizations, private companies, audience, individuals)
- media and news reports, opinion articles, records, publications
- social media
- a FOIA (Freedom of Information) request
- community forums, mailing lists
- online resources (search engines, databases)
- public and private archives
- creating their own database

**Fact-checking is crucial:** Because constructive journalism often covers underreported problems or perspectives, constructive reporters often look for different, new or lesser-known sources. This makes good fact-checking and the vetting of sources all the more important. Verification and confirmation are key. Journalists should not jump to conclusions after just a first look at the results.

### Using data constructively:

#### Zoom into key data and zoom out to provide context

- Flat/absolute numbers are difficult to comprehend. Put them in relation to something else make more sense (example: "...that is equal to the size of 10 football pitches.").
- The farther an issue is from the audience's everyday life, the harder it is for it to mean something to them – "My reality is not your reality."
- Do not take the reader's knowledge for granted.
- The reporter helps create people's worldview.

#### Steps to take:

- Put the data in context and offer perspective – why is this figure important? What does it mean?
- Preferably offer the perspective early in the report, not hidden at the end.
- Environment and circumstances are always relevant.
- Events should be put in context (example: is this the first time it's happened, how was this resolved in the past?).
- Describe developments, trends, breakthroughs and collapses.

*Source: Minna Skau, Danish news agency Ritzau*



**Looking for context and nuance:** Constructive journalists examine the development of an issue over time by analyzing data, looking at the historical background and trying to get more than one perspective. While it's easiest to go to one or two sources for a story, to get a more nuanced view, additional sources can fill in the picture.

**On the ground research and the human face of an issue:** While desk research is important, journalists should always get out of the office, if possible, and go out to where the story is. Data can tell you the size and impact of an issue in numbers and other statistics, but it's by going out and talking to people that journalists learn how an issue or problem affects communities and individuals. This means paying close attention to their stories and listening to how they are trying to make sense of the problem. Who feels the need for change? Where? When? and why?

To summarize:

- The places affected should be visited, if possible.
- Multiple people directly affected by the problem should be heard.
- Different relevant stakeholders should be interviewed: the designers of a response, experts, activists, researchers, etc. Critics of a response should have a say.
- Community members should be involved in research where possible. What are their questions on the topic, their suggestions for solutions, their experiences?
- If the data points are insufficient or lacking, constructive journalists could do surveys and generate their own primary data.
- Journalists should reflect on the relationships between their interviewees: Are there underlying power dynamics involved related to gender, socio-economic status or political orientation?

**Look critically at the response:** Try to poke holes into any solution by talking to experts, opponents, considering counter-intuitive data, etc. to make sure it holds up to scrutiny. Is it really doing what its advocates claim? If it falls short, journalists should think about whether the story is worth covering. It may well be, because simply because a response is not perfect doesn't mean it isn't worthwhile on some level. Reporting on failure can be illuminating. But all problems or limitations should be covered. This is a central aspect of good solutions reporting.

**Self-assessment:** Authors of constructive stories need to ask themselves:

- Do I know enough about the history of the problem? And am I up to date?
- Do I have access to reliable tools to verify and analyze available data?
- What can I do to overcome the limitations and gaps of available data?
- Am I able to conduct this research alone? Do I need new skills? Do I need to involve the audience or seek skilled researchers or experts?
- Do I really see the big picture or am I fixated on a specific angle or an assumption? Am I looking at the full context and its impact? Sometimes the same issues affect different people and communities in different ways.

 See Handout 11: Tips for constructive reporting

## Conducting constructive interviews



Constructive stories demand different interview techniques than those that have been taught over decades in journalism education. Questions should relate to the experiences of the interviewee regarding the story topic, but they also try to uncover underlying motivations and feelings. Some of these techniques come from the dispute resolution process known as mediation. Mediators seek to deal with divisive issues by calming minds, opening up communication and finding ways out of conflict. Media professionals who conduct interviews like this say: it takes effort but it's worth it.

**Active Listening:** Good listening skills are essential for reporters. They are looking for context and the underlying reasons for people's stances and beliefs. They shouldn't just listen for soundbites or the most extreme, shocking thing that's said. The reporter should try to understand why people feel the way they do. What in their lives brought them to this place? It's not easy. Studies show that most people remember less than 50% of what they hear in a conversation. To add to that, interviewers are already having to think about many other things during an interview (recording levels, camera position, background, time pressure, etc.). But the more reporters really listen, the more they'll build trust, get their interviewee to lower defenses and get to the truth of the matter.

A way to achieve this is through active listening. In this approach, the journalist focuses on both the elements of speech and the interviewee's expressions, and also on the intent and implications of the words. Active listening is [focused and intentional](#) and requires effort.

- **Be attentive and relaxed:** Give the speaker your undivided attention.
- **Don't interrupt:** Relax the pace for a slower, more thoughtful exchange.
- **Ask questions for clarification:** If something is unclear, ask the speaker to explain it when there's a pause.
- **Pay attention to non-verbal cues:** The eyes, mouth or slope of the shoulders can indicate enthusiasm, boredom or irritation.

**Looping:** This technique – listening to understand – is a tool that mediators use to arrive at a deeper understanding of what's important to people and why. Looping creates empathy because “empathic listening allows the speaker to think [more clearly and more deeply](#),” according to the Urban Consulate, a US group which aims to make people talk to create more equitable communities. “When people feel understood, things go deeper.”

Looping is a technique developed by [The Center for Understanding in Conflict](#) and involves asking for confirmation to see if a listener has understood a speaker's message correctly. The interviewer paraphrases statements in a neutral way that have been made by an interviewee to demonstrate he or she has fully understood the answer. This technique also tends to calm strong feelings if the topic is highly emotional or controversial.

**Four-step guide for constructive interviewing:** The Solutions Journalism Network has adopted this looping technique and developed the following four-step guide.

- Step 1: Listen to the answer.
- Step 2: Check back with the interviewee by paraphrasing their response to understand more fully what he or she is saying. (This makes sure the reporter has understood the answer correctly and makes the interviewees feel they have been heard.)
- Step 3: Observe the reaction.

- Step 4: Correct (“polish”) understanding before moving on.



Source: Solutions Journalism Network

### Example:

*Source makes a statement:* I think immigrants are harming our country. Many of them are criminals and are violent. They’re coming across our borders to take jobs away from us and are a drain on resources in general. We should take care of our own.

*Journalist paraphrases:* You are worried about your safety and economic future if people come into the country who are violent or who get jobs. Is that right?

**Constructive questions:** Constructive journalists ask questions that, even in a negative situation, explore different aspects of a story. They ask about resilience, about people who’ve helped, about a path toward improvement and for points of view that provide meaning. Constructive interviews illuminate areas often left in the dark. And reporters should always keep in mind: ask questions about the future. Where do we go from here? What next?

**Constructive journalism on a deadline:** Busy journalists might feel they don’t have the time or resources to make a story “fully constructive”. And sometimes they’re right. To fully report a solutions story might well take more time and effort than a more traditional one would. But they would be surprised that even when working on a deadline, a few extra questions and looking ahead can work wonders.

### 1. Ask different questions to experts and people in authority

- What would you want to do?

- What would you do if you had the necessary power/influence?
- What will happen now?

## 2. Ask about solutions

- How could this issue be solved?
- Have others been in a similar situation?
- Do you know anyone who has solved this problem?
- Can that solution be used in this situation?
- Are there any important reservations to mention?
- Do you have contacts, source suggestions, fact sheets, links?

## 3. Try to get context and perspective

- Can we compare this to anything?
- Are the facts and numbers clear? Put them in relation to something that is more familiar.

## 4. Make it relevant to people's everyday lives

- Get numbers, precedents, time periods, etc. that can add perspective and context.
- Tell people why the piece of data is important, what it means. Don't just put it out there and hope that people will understand its significance.

## What makes a constructive story compelling?

Constructive stories should be particularly well told to attract audiences and create impact. But what makes a story compelling? Are usual storytelling formats sufficient?

**The hero's journey:** In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the mass media and the film industry have mainly relied on the "hero's journey" described by Joseph Campbell to tell compelling stories. A professor specializing in comparative mythology, Campbell described this journey in his 1949 book "The Hero with a Thousand Faces". He found variations on a classical story structure in tales and myths from many cultures: The hero leaves for the quest, learns from a mentor, fights enemies, almost dies, resurrects, finds his power and returns with an elixir. This archetype of human storytelling fits to some extent quite well to the problem-solution shift in constructive journalism. But to make constructive stories compelling and inspiring, the main elements need to be slightly modified or adapted:

- **Protagonist:** To get drawn into a story, the audience often needs somebody to identify with or to relate to. The Greek word "protagonist" literally means "the first struggler". But this person should not be presented as the superman or superwoman who easily overcomes all problems. Instead, he or she should be portrayed as having flaws. That is, a normal, vulnerable person. Constructive stories should be particularly careful not to show the protagonist as a mighty savior. This would disempower the audience.
- **Obstacle:** In a constructive story, this corresponds to a problem that is tackled. It determines the plot and the search for a way forward. The problem might have different angles – for instance an economic aspect, a societal aspect or an educational aspect. The journalist should be clear about the focus.

- **Goal:** The struggle of the protagonist to overcome the obstacle should have a concrete aim. In a constructive story, this is the response to the problem that has been identified. On a higher level it should also have a meaning. Reflecting on the goal is linked to the PERMA questions explored earlier in this chapter, "Why is the story important to tell?" Constructive stories often explore themes that all people connect with despite their political and philosophical differences, such as friendship, home and well-being.
- **Mentor:** This is meant as a metaphor for somebody – or something – that inspires or encourages the protagonist to search for a solution. In constructive reporting, it is particularly interesting to think about the source of inspiration/empowerment. The protagonist could have been inspired by meeting someone inspirational, reading a book, hearing about a technique or through the encouragement of others. However, the mentor, be it a person or an organization, should not, like the hero, be portrayed as a mighty savior.
- **Antagonist:** The antagonist represents the obstacles that the protagonist faces. For constructive journalists, this could be the limitations of a solution. In a context of conflicts, antagonists can represent other ethnic groups or people/groups on the other side of a struggle.

**Choice of story elements:** The “hero’s journey” story structure can be helpful to identify and choose the main story elements.

**The main character:** The choice of a main character is crucial for a constructive story: What can he or she offer? Share experiences, offer a solution or an idea that could encourage solution finding? Inspire? Is the person authentic to the setting? Affected by the context? Able to reflect the problem or show the bigger picture? Who is the best person to tell the story? Sometimes someone behind the scenes is more appealing than those in obvious positions.

**Address the human face of the problem:** Choose a relatable character. Give an example of a community member that is affected by the problem e.g., *Urban females aged 12 -17 = a group of teenage girls, who live in Beirut.*

**Identify a relevant context/create a believable persona:** Dig deeper into your data to identify other social or economic factors surrounding the people affected by the problem. Find a specific case or character from the community or build your own persona, e.g., *urban females aged 12 -17 from low-income and poorly educated families = Sara, a young orphan teenager, who lives in slums just outside Beirut with her two little brothers.* Developing personas might help to identify protagonists but also to better understand who the audience is.

## Being constructive at every stage of the story process

Adopting a constructive mindset means thinking about constructive techniques from the earliest stages of the story process and applying them wherever possible. At every step – from story idea to final product and feedback – journalists can work in a constructive mode. Here’s a recap:

### 1. Developing an idea, choosing a topic

- Brainstorm using the PERMA Method (see above).
- Engage the community to see what's important to them.
- Look at data for inspiration, be on the lookout for “positive deviants”.

## 2. Desk Research

- Look for protagonists that really represent an issue, not outliers. Are they engaged, making a difference?
- Look for multiple sources with different perspectives to add nuance. Are they surprising? What is their motivation for participating?
- There are multiple perspectives to a story. Ensure the whole picture is being explored, not just the negative or expected aspects.

## 3. Interviewing

- Active listening builds trust.
- The looping technique can help understanding and reveal what deeply matters to people.
- Future-oriented questions point to where things go from here.

## 4. Writing/editing

- Context and nuance should fill out the story.
- Including a variety of voices brings in fresh perspectives.
- Language use should be carefully considered – the goal is to inform, not to inflame or create fear.
- The pictures and headlines should be carefully considered.

## 5. Publication/community

- Publication on social media allows more interaction with the community.
- Questions from the audience should be answered and feedback requested.
- The community can suggest follow-up questions and what stories they want next.

↙ See handout 12: Being constructive at every stage of the story process



### More information

#### **Finding a Solutions-Oriented Story: Introduction**

<https://learninglab.solutionsjournalism.org/en/courses/basic-toolkit/basic-reporting/finding-introduction>

**Solutions Story tracker (SJN):** <https://storytracker.solutionsjournalism.org/>

**Fanning the Flames: Reporting on Terror in a Networked World, Tow Center, CSJ:**

[https://www.cjr.org/tow\\_center\\_reports/coverage\\_terrorism\\_social\\_media.php](https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/coverage_terrorism_social_media.php)

**Innovating News Journalism through Positive Psychology (2011)**

[https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp\\_capstone/20/](https://repository.upenn.edu/mapp_capstone/20/)

**Discovering Solutions: How are Journalists Applying Solutions Journalism to Change the Way News is Reported and What Do They Hope to Accomplish?**

<https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1404534/>

**Active Listening Skills, Examples and Exercises:**

<https://virtualspeech.com/blog/active-listening-skills-examples-and-exercises>

**Positive psychology could revolutionise journalism**

<https://www.positive.news/society/media/positive-psychology-revolutionise-journalism/>

**Leonie Gubela, Definition, Implementation and Effects of Constructive Journalism in German Print and Online Media, 2018**

[https://domedia.fra1.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/paper/MA\\_Gubela.pdf](https://domedia.fra1.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/paper/MA_Gubela.pdf)

**Daniel Kahneman, Thinking, Fast and Slow, Penguin Books, 2012 (book)**

**Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, New World Library, 2008 (book)**

**Matthew Winkler, Kirill Yeretzký, The Hero's Journey according to Joseph Campbell, 2016**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1Zxt28ff-E>

**Africa no Filter, How to write about Africa in 8 steps**

<https://africanofilter.org/uploads/files/How-to-tell-an-african-story.pdf>