

Writing 101: How to report for our communities

Don't just report the top line

- Read the full study or report before publishing an article about it.
- The findings in a study's summary may not be truly indicative of the full study's findings
- Don't report based only on a press release. Always read the full study or research report



Writing 101: How to report for our communities

Don't trust data automatically

- Be aware of and willing to question stakeholders and data collection methodology
- Request the raw data where possible and always include the details of the research methods in your reporting
- In the case of South Africa's daily reports, seek to understand how the "counting" and reporting of daily statistics is done



Writing 101: How to report for our communities

Use trusted and reliable sources

- Reporting is only as good as its sources. Be sure to use expert and knowledgeable sources to inform your stories on COVID-19 and vaccines
- When reporting on a new vaccine or study, consult your experts such as the National Institute of Communicable Diseases



Writing 101: How to report for our communities

State the source

- When reporting on scientific studies, reports, case numbers and vaccines, name the source of the information to show credibility and allow readers to search for more information on the topic.
- Reporting is only as good as its sources. Be sure to use expert and knowledgeable sources to inform your stories on COVID-19 and vaccines



Writing 101: How to report for our communities

Define the terms

- Although certain scientific words may be used frequently in reporting on COVID-19 and vaccines, it is important to define scientific terms in every article, or link to a [glossary of terms](#) that will allow the reader to educate themselves



Writing 101: How to report for our communities

Remind everyone of the benefits of vaccines

- Reporting on potentially effective COVID-19 vaccines is vital for informing those who already plan to be vaccinated, but with misinformation rife during the pandemic, don't forget to inform readers of the importance of all vaccines.
- Tackle vaccine hesitancy by reporting [facts and figures](#) on vaccine efficacy in ending epidemics throughout history.



Do's and Don'ts of Reporting on COVID-19 — from a Non-Science Background

Gathering sources

DO: Collect multiple sources

- Reporters should connect with people at hospitals, universities and government agencies.
- Every reporter should have at least an epidemiologist, a lab expert and a local health officer to interview and consult regularly. These contacts will be able to provide critical information for stories, and act as helpful off-the-record sources to provide context for new information and fact-check government statements.

DON'T: Forget to do background research

- Once you have your list of sources, it is important to carefully vet the information they give you as a precaution
- Reporters should never neglect government agencies that deal in health and healthcare



Do's and Don'ts of Reporting on COVID-19 — from a Non-Science Background

Misinformation (Fake News)

DO: Debunk misinformation

- In the hysteria surrounding COVID-19, misinformation and conspiracy theories are inevitably circulated online. When combating these stories, journalists should debunk it by noting the source of the false information, replacing it with facts and explaining why it's circulating.

DON'T: Become part of the problem

- Journalists can avoid becoming part of the misinformation problem by making sure their headlines reflect the reporting in their stories.
- It's also important to be mindful of the tone of your writing. The wrong language and word choice can easily cause the audience to panic.

Do's and Don'ts of Reporting on COVID-19 — from a Non-Science Background

Covering the long term

DO: Focus on your community

- Though there is pressure to constantly publish new stories as new information on COVID-19 is released, the the “big picture” hasn’t changed. Details and data about the spread may change, but the prevention information will stay relevant for months.
- Journalists covering COVID-19 in the long term should also turn their attention towards how the virus is affecting local communities. You can easily find your next stories by simply asking the question, “What population do I care about that’s being neglected?”

DON'T: Forget to humanise this crisis

- In a time of such uncertainty and negativity, it’s important to focus on the human angle. First-person stories are effective to show the audience that there are people behind the numbers and statistics. When used correctly, these stories also generate positive reader response and high engagement.
- It is important for reporters to combat alarm by balancing fear with facts and suggestions. For example, when writing about people clearing stock from grocery stores, add facts about how hoarding is unnecessary and suggest where and when to shop.



Sources

International Center for Journalists

World Health Organization

United Nations

Internews

IJNet

Journalism.co.uk

