

Section 1: Find the Story in Your Reporting

Reporting gives you facts, interviews, quotations, observations, photographs, video, and sound. Those materials do not arrange themselves into a finished story. Before writing the Bellville Herd article or building the video news package, your team must determine what the reporting actually shows, why it matters, and which material best helps the audience understand it.

This guide explains how to move from a folder full of reporting to one clear, accurate, and supportable story. It is the first stage of Write and Package. Do not begin by writing the first paragraph that comes to mind or dropping clips onto an editing timeline. First decide what story your evidence allows you to tell.

By the end of this process, your team should have a final story focus, a central audience question, an organized set of supporting evidence, a working beginning-middle-ending structure, and a clear understanding of how the article and video package will tell the same story in different ways.

Begin With the Reporting You Actually Have

The approved pitch gave your reporting direction. It identified a possible story, an expected angle, useful sources, needed information, and potential visuals. It was a plan based on what you knew before the full reporting was completed.

Now the interviews have been conducted, facts have been checked, events have been observed, and the available media has been reviewed. The completed reporting is more reliable than the original prediction. Your finished story must follow the evidence, even when the evidence complicates or changes the angle that was approved at the Pitch Meeting.

Do not begin with the question, What did we say our story would be? Begin with these questions:

- What did we learn that is important, specific, and verified?
- What changed, happened, was decided, was achieved, or is about to happen?
- Who is affected, and how are they affected?
- What do the strongest sources and evidence help us understand?
- What does the audience need to know first?
- Why does this story matter now?

Your pitch remains an important guide, but it is not a conclusion that you are required to prove. Journalism begins with a question and follows the evidence. It does not begin with an answer and search only for material that supports it.

Understand the Difference Between Material and Story

A team may return with forty video clips, three interviews, several pages of notes, photographs, schedules, scores, and official announcements. That is a collection of reporting material. It becomes a story only when the team identifies a meaningful focus and arranges the strongest information around it.

Material answers, What did we collect? A story answers, What happened, what does it mean, and why should our audience care?

A topic is not a story

A topic is a broad subject such as football, theater, P-TECH, robotics, student council, or a school policy. A topic tells the audience only the general area being covered.

Topic: Robotics

That label does not reveal what is new, important, changing, difficult, successful, or useful. A reporter must find the specific development inside the topic.

An event is not automatically a story

An event may provide the time and place where reporting happens, but simply announcing that an event occurred usually produces a weak story. The audience needs to understand what happened within the event, what was at stake, what resulted, or why the event mattered.

Event description: The robotics team attended a competition Saturday.

Possible story: After rebuilding its robot between rounds, the team recovered from an early mechanical failure and earned its first advancement of the season.

An interview is not the story

An interview is a source of facts, explanations, experiences, and quotations. The reporter decides how those answers fit into the larger story. Do not organize an article or package as Question 1, Answer 1, Question 2, Answer 2. That reproduces a conversation instead of reporting a story.

Footage is not the story

Good-looking footage can strengthen a story, but attractive clips do not create meaning on their own. A video package must use pictures and sound to show actions, evidence, reactions, settings, and consequences connected to the central focus. Do not build the story around a clip merely because it looks impressive.

Return to the Approved Assignment

Before choosing a final focus, read the exact assignment recorded after the Pitch Meeting. Use the approved version, including changes required by Mr. G, rather than relying on memory or returning to the original proposal.

Identify the following:

- The approved story and expected angle
- The intended value to the audience
- Required sources or perspectives
- Required facts, visuals, sound, or format
- Changes or conditions added during approval
- The article and package deadline

Then compare the assignment with the completed reporting. Mark what the evidence clearly supports, what became more complicated, what turned out to be inaccurate, and what important development appeared during reporting.

A normal refinement of the angle does not mean the reporting failed. It often means the reporting worked. However, a major change in subject, purpose, or direction must be discussed with Mr. G before the team begins writing and editing.

Create a Complete Reporting Inventory

The Prepare and Report stage required your team to transfer, review, verify, label, and organize the material. Now create a working inventory of the strongest usable pieces. The purpose is not to list every file. The purpose is to make the evidence visible so the team can compare it and make editorial decisions.

Your working inventory should include:

- Verified facts and the source or record that confirms each one
- Important background information and necessary context
- Direct quotations for the written article
- Recorded sound bites with filenames and timecodes
- Observations made by the reporting team
- Documents, schedules, records, statistics, and official results
- Strong B-roll, complete visual sequences, reactions, and details
- Photographs suitable for the article
- Natural sound that could open, connect, or strengthen the package
- Any limitations, uncertainty, disagreement, or missing information

Do not rely on statements such as We have a good interview or There should be a shot of that. Identify the exact quotation, sound bite, fact, or file. Record its location so another team member can find it without searching through every folder.

Use evidence labels

As you review the inventory, label each major item according to its value:

Label	Meaning	What to do
Essential	The audience cannot understand the story without it.	Use it in the article, package, or both.
Strong support	It proves, explains, demonstrates, or humanizes an important part of the story.	Use it where it adds understanding.
Useful context	It helps explain background, timing, or consequences.	Include only the amount the audience needs.
Interesting but optional	It is relevant but does not advance the central focus.	Use only if time and space allow.
Unusable or unsupported	It is inaccurate, unclear, repetitive, technically poor, misleading, or unverified.	Do not publish it.

Identify What Is New

A news story needs a meaningful development. Ask what the audience did not know before this reporting cycle or what has changed since the subject was last covered.

Possible developments include:

- A decision was made
- A result was announced
- A team, organization, or individual achieved something
- A problem appeared or was resolved
- A program, policy, schedule, leadership role, or process changed
- A deadline or important event is approaching
- Students or staff are experiencing a significant effect
- The reporting revealed an explanation, conflict, challenge, or response

The newest fact is not always the most important fact, but the finished story should make clear why it deserves attention during this news cycle.

Determine Why the Story Matters

Newsworthiness is not a decoration added to the introduction. It helps determine what belongs in the story and what should receive the most attention. The same event can produce different stories depending on which consequence matters most to the Bellville audience.

Consider:

- Impact: How many people are affected, and how significantly?
- Timeliness: Why should the audience know this now?
- Proximity: How directly is it connected to Bellville High School or the surrounding community?
- Prominence: Are people, programs, decisions, or institutions of special interest involved?
- Conflict or challenge: What obstacle, disagreement, competition, or difficult decision shaped the outcome?
- Human interest: What experience, emotion, effort, or unusual detail helps the audience connect with the story?
- Usefulness: What does the audience need to know, prepare for, attend, understand, or do?

Do not exaggerate importance. A story can matter to a limited group without pretending that it affects the entire campus. Describe the real impact accurately.

Write the Final Story Focus

The final story focus is one sentence that states what happened or is happening, identifies the central point the story will examine, and explains why it matters. It keeps the article and video package from wandering into unrelated material.

Use this working pattern:

Something specific happened or is happening, and this story will show or explain the central focus because it matters to the audience in this specific way.

Example:

After an early mechanical failure, the Bellville robotics team rebuilt its robot between rounds and earned its first advancement of the season, showing how preparation and teamwork allowed the students to recover under competition pressure.

This statement is not necessarily the article lead or a line of narration. It is an internal guide for the reporting team.

Test the focus statement

A useful focus statement should pass each test:

- ☐ It identifies a specific development rather than a broad topic.
- ☐ It is supported by verified reporting.
- ☐ It explains what is most important about the story.
- ☐ It identifies a real reason the audience should care.
- ☐ It does not promise something the reporting cannot deliver.
- ☐ It is narrow enough to complete within the assigned article and package length.
- ☐ It can guide decisions about facts, quotations, sound bites, and visuals.

If team members cannot agree on the focus, do not hide the disagreement by writing a vague sentence. Return to the evidence and identify what is confirmed, important, and best supported.

Choose the Central Audience Question

Imagine the audience asking one main question after hearing the story introduced. The article and package must answer that question. A central audience question helps the team recognize necessary information and remove material that does not belong.

What allowed the robotics team to recover from the failure and advance?

Supporting questions may include:

- What failed and when did it happen?
- What did the students have to repair?
- How much time did they have?
- Who made the important decisions?
- What was the result?
- What does the experience change for the next competition?

Do not allow the story to become a list of answers to unrelated questions. Supporting information should help answer the central question or provide context necessary to understand it.

Select the Strongest Evidence

A fact, quotation, sound bite, or visual earns a place in the story because of what it contributes. Do not select material because a certain student recorded it, because it took a long time to obtain, or because the team feels obligated to use every interview.

Choose strong facts

Strong facts are verified, specific, relevant, understandable, and connected to the focus. Exact dates, scores, amounts, decisions, requirements, and outcomes are often more useful than vague descriptions.

Weak: The team did well at the competition.

Stronger: The team won three elimination rounds and advanced to the regional tournament for the first time.

Choose strong written quotations

A direct quotation should provide a distinctive explanation, reaction, experience, judgment, or memorable wording. Use paraphrasing for ordinary factual information that the reporter can state more clearly and briefly.

A quotation is especially useful when it:

- Shows what a person experienced or felt
- Explains how or why something happened
- Provides a specific example
- Expresses a perspective that should remain in the source's own words
- Adds a voice or detail the reporter cannot reproduce through summary

Choose strong sound bites

A video sound bite must work after the reporter's question is removed. It should be understandable, concise, relevant, technically usable, and spoken with enough clarity and energy to hold the audience's attention.

Record the exact filename and beginning and ending timecode. Do not write good quote somewhere in interview. The editor needs to locate it immediately.

Choose strong visuals and natural sound

Visuals should show something the audience needs to see: action, evidence, process, setting, reaction, identity, scale, change, or consequence. Natural sound should help the audience experience the scene or create a meaningful transition. Neither should be chosen merely to cover empty space.

Evaluate Sources and Perspectives

A strong story does not measure fairness by counting quotations. It asks whether the people with necessary knowledge, responsibility, experience, and affected perspectives are represented accurately.

Review each source and identify what that person contributes:

- Firsthand experience
- Official responsibility or authority
- Technical or subject knowledge
- An affected student's or staff member's perspective
- Independent confirmation
- A response to criticism, disagreement, or an important claim

An official source may confirm a policy or decision, but that person may not explain how students experience it. A participant may describe an experience but may not know the official reason behind a decision. Use each source for information that person is qualified to provide.

Do not create false balance by treating a baseless claim as equal to verified evidence. Do not hide a meaningful disagreement either. Describe what is known, attribute disputed statements, and explain what could not be resolved.

Separate Fact Observation and Opinion

The finished story may contain verified facts, direct observations, and attributed opinions. The audience must be able to tell the difference.

- **Fact:** Information confirmed through an appropriate source, record, document, or direct observation.
- **Observation:** Something the reporter directly saw, heard, or documented during reporting.
- **Opinion:** A person's belief, judgment, interpretation, prediction, or reaction.

A recording proves that a person made a statement. It does not automatically prove the statement is factual. Statements containing claims, numbers, causes, accusations, rankings, or predictions may require independent verification or clear attribution.

Do not turn the reporter's impression into fact. Words such as successful, disappointing, impressive, unfair, massive, or historic require evidence, attribution, or careful explanation.

Resolve Contradictions and Uncertainty

Reporting sometimes produces conflicting dates, totals, explanations, or accounts of what happened. Do not choose the version that sounds best or quietly remove the contradiction when it affects the story.

When information conflicts:

1. Identify the exact point of disagreement.
2. Return to the original recordings, notes, documents, or results.
3. Determine which source has direct knowledge or official responsibility.
4. Seek an independent record or additional source when necessary.
5. Ask the appropriate person to clarify or respond.
6. State uncertainty honestly if the matter cannot be resolved by the deadline.

Never use language that makes uncertain information sound confirmed. If a number is estimated, call it an estimate. If a result is unofficial, identify it as unofficial. If an important claim could not be verified, discuss it with Mr. G before including it.

Decide What to Leave Out

Editing begins before the first sentence is written. A focused story leaves out material that is repetitive, weak, unrelated, unsupported, or impossible to explain fairly within the available time and space.

Material may be omitted when it:

- Does not help answer the central audience question

- Repeats information already communicated more effectively
- Belongs to the general topic but not the specific story
- Cannot be verified
- Would require so much background that it distracts from the main story
- Creates a side issue the team has not reported thoroughly
- Is technically unusable or misleading without missing context
- Is private, inappropriate, or outside the approved reporting purpose

Leaving material out does not mean the work used to gather it was wasted. Reporting helps the team understand the subject even when every detail does not appear in the final product.

Build the Story Structure

After choosing the focus and evidence, arrange the story before drafting. Both the article and package need a logical progression, although they will not use identical wording or necessarily present every detail in the same order.

The beginning

The beginning should establish the most important development and give the audience a reason to continue. It should identify the real story, not merely announce the topic or say that an event took place.

The middle

The middle provides the facts, evidence, explanation, voices, actions, context, and consequences needed to understand the story. Each part should lead naturally to the next rather than feeling like a list of disconnected interview answers.

The ending

The ending should provide a meaningful sense of completion. It may explain what happens next, identify an approaching decision or event, return to an important person or image, or show what the development means. Do not end simply because the team ran out of material.

Create a story map

Before drafting, write a short map such as:

1. The main development the audience needs to know
2. The context required to understand it
3. The strongest evidence or example
4. The people who explain or experience it
5. The complication, challenge, response, or result
6. What happens next or what the audience should remember

This map is not a rigid formula. It is a test of whether the team has a complete and understandable story.

Plan One Story for Two Different Products

The Bellville Herd article and the video news package should report the same central story using the same verified facts. They are not duplicate products, however. Reading and viewing require different storytelling choices.

Element	Written article	Video news package
Primary strength	Can provide more detail, background, explanation, and several quotations.	Can show action, faces, places, emotion, sequences, and natural sound.
Language	Written for readers who can pause, reread, and scan.	Written for the ear in short, conversational sentences.
Source use	Direct quotations and paraphrases are attributed in text.	Selected SOTs let viewers hear and see the source directly.
Evidence	Facts, documents, descriptions, links, photographs, and captions.	B-roll, interview video, graphics, reporter narration, and natural sound.
Organization	Can support additional context and detail.	Must be selective and fit a limited running time.

Do not copy the article into the narration track. Do not remove important facts from the article merely because they will appear in the package. Determine how each medium can best communicate the shared story.

Work as One Editorial Team

When several students gathered the reporting, the team must make the story decision together. One person should not begin writing an article while another independently edits a different version of the story.

Before production begins, the team should agree on:

- The final focus statement
- The central audience question
- The most important verified facts
- The strongest quotations and sound bites
- The essential visuals and natural sound
- The beginning, middle, and ending
- What will be emphasized in the article
- What will be emphasized in the package
- Which student is responsible for each next task

Disagreement should be resolved through the reporting evidence and the approved assignment, not through volume, seniority, or whose material is being considered.

Know When Follow Up Reporting Is Still Required

Write and Package begins only when the story is sufficiently reported, accurate, usable, and organized. Discovering a small question during planning is normal. Discovering that the central claim

has no confirmation, an essential perspective is missing, or the strongest interview is unusable means the reporting is not complete.

Stop and complete follow-up reporting when:

- The main development cannot be verified
- The team cannot explain why the story matters
- A person or organization facing a significant claim has not had an opportunity to respond
- A central number, date, result, title, or quotation remains uncertain
- The available sources all repeat the same secondhand information
- The package lacks the visual or audio evidence needed to tell the story truthfully
- The reporting supports a substantially different story that has not been approved

Do not cover a reporting gap with vague writing, extra B-roll, music, graphics, or a reporter's assumption. Production cannot repair missing journalism.

Common Mistakes When Finding the Story

Forcing the Original Angle

The team selects only facts and quotations that support the pitch while ignoring evidence that complicates it. Follow what the reporting shows and discuss major changes with Mr. G.

Writing About the Topic Instead of the Development

The story describes a team, club, class, or program but never explains what is happening now. Identify the decision, change, result, challenge, achievement, or consequence.

Making the Event the Entire Story

The article becomes a chronological list of activities: first this happened, then this happened, and finally everyone went home. Find the outcome, stakes, response, or meaning within the event.

Choosing the First Quote Instead of the Best Quote

The first usable answer is not necessarily the strongest. Review the full interviews and compare possible quotations and sound bites.

Trying to Use Everything

The team includes every interview, fact, and clip because someone worked to gather it. Use only the material that advances or supports the central story.

Choosing the Story Around the Best Looking Footage

Excellent footage may be irrelevant to the most important development. The story determines the visuals; visuals do not get to invent the story.

Confusing Emotion With Evidence

A passionate statement may be a strong sound bite, but emotion does not confirm a factual claim. Verify the claim separately and attribute the perspective accurately.

Using Only Official Voices

Officials may explain decisions, but affected students, participants, teachers, staff members, or families may be necessary to show impact and experience.

Using Only Student Opinion

Student reaction may be important, but opinion does not replace verified information or an explanation from someone qualified to provide it.

Starting the Timeline Before the Story Is Clear

Randomly assembling favorite clips usually creates a confusing package and wastes editing time. Approve the focus and story map first.

Final Story Decision Worksheet

Complete these statements before writing the article or scripting the package.

The specific development we are reporting is:

The most important thing our reporting revealed is:

This matters to the Bellville audience because:

The central question the story will answer is:

Our final story focus statement is:

The strongest verified facts are:

The strongest written quotations are:

The strongest video sound bites and timecodes are:

The strongest visuals and natural sound are:

The perspectives represented in the story are:

The beginning of the story will establish:

The middle of the story will explain or demonstrate:

The ending will show or explain:

The article can provide additional detail about:

The video package can best show and let the audience hear:

Material we are intentionally leaving out and why:

Questions or uncertainties that still require action:

Before Moving to the News Article Checklist

- ☐ We reviewed the exact approved assignment and all required changes.
- ☐ We based the finished story on verified reporting rather than assumptions.
- ☐ We identified a specific development rather than a broad topic.
- ☐ We can explain what is new and why the story matters now.
- ☐ We wrote one clear final story focus statement.
- ☐ We identified the central audience question.
- ☐ We selected the most important verified facts.
- ☐ We selected useful written quotations rather than copying entire interviews.
- ☐ We logged the best SOTs with exact filenames and timecodes.
- ☐ We identified visuals and natural sound that support the story.
- ☐ We included the necessary official, knowledgeable, firsthand, and affected perspectives.
- ☐ We separated confirmed facts, direct observations, and attributed opinions.
- ☐ We resolved important contradictions or identified uncertainty accurately.
- ☐ We removed unrelated, repetitive, unsupported, misleading, or unusable material.
- ☐ We created a working beginning, middle, and ending.

- ☐ We know how the article and video package will tell the same story differently.
- ☐ Every remaining follow-up task has been completed or approved by Mr. G.
- ☐ The team agrees on the story before separate writing and editing work begins.

The Standard for Finding the Story

A team is not ready to write and package merely because the reporting deadline arrived or the media folder contains many files. The team is ready when it can explain one accurate, specific, relevant, and supportable story without guessing.

You should be able to show:

- What happened or is happening
- What the reporting proves
- Why the development matters to the audience
- Which facts and sources support it
- Which voices and perspectives are necessary
- Which quotations, sound bites, visuals, and natural sound best tell it
- How the story begins, develops, and ends
- How the article and package will use their different strengths

The reporting created the raw material. Your editorial decisions give that material focus, order, meaning, and purpose. Once the team can defend those decisions with verified evidence, it is ready to move to Section 2 and write the news article.