Welcome! This presentation is aimed at writers, editors and designers. As it evolved over the years, I kept adding and deleting the page examples you’ll see, but I always kept the runtime around 45 minutes. This version, however, is much longer, with many more examples. This way, you can select what to keep and what to delete.
Before we begin, a question: What’s our goal, when we publish a story? Do we do it for fame and fortune? For the big bucks? To make the world a better place?

How do you measure success?

For me – prepare to be disappointed – it always comes down to one word: Eyeballs.
Yes, eyeballs. I want *as many eyeballs as possible* on my stuff. For *as long as possible*, too.
That sounds selfish, I know. But it’s really not. . . .
. . . . because it’s a competitive media market out there, whatever platform you’re working on. TV and radio broadcasts live and die based on ratings — the number of eyeballs (or ears) they attract. For websites, it’s the number of clicks.
Is there anything sadder than a beautifully written news story, on an important topic, that dies because it’s lost amidst the media maze, becoming . . . . . invisible?
So, as I used to tell my students: *Pretend you agree with me.* How do you attract readers in the most dependably effective way?
DOCTOR TIM'S FOOLPROOF 2-STEP FORMULA TO GUARANTEE JOURNALISTIC SUCCESS
ATTRACT EYEBALLS as cleverly as you can
2
DELIVER THE DATA
as efficiently
as you can
OK, Step One. Let’s think about this. What does it take to attract the eyeballs of a typical modern reader?
How about a page like this? Hey, wait! Come back! There’s some terrific journalism here!
Or even a story like this. Important stuff, sure — but to a typical reader, it looks more like this . . .
a tough, uphill slog. Just the layout alone — all that serious, gray text — looks daunting, regardless of how well-written the story may be.
Think about your own publication. How much eyeball appeal do the stories offer, on a scale from weak to strong — from “NO BALLS” to “BALLSY”?

So how do you go about attracting eyeballs in a clever way? Let’s look at some examples. . . .
This may be the most arresting magazine cover of all time. Forced you to engage, didn’t it? (Sure it’s tasteless, but it’s appropriate for a humor magazine.)
This big, bold, red headline has enormous stopping power. Designers call this a “type attack”: using aggressive typography to sell a big story when you’ve got no dramatic photos. Too sensational? At first, you might think so. But once you’ve read all that oversized type, don’t you want to keep reading?
Talk about dramatic photos! Once you see this image (and the compelling headline), how can you not at least sample what the text is saying?
“Relax! Don’t get excited.” The confrontational crop on this photo is unusually aggressive. And the layout makes this look like an easy read.
Again, on this page, it’s not just the extreme size and cropping of the photo – it’s the way the layout provides a variety of accessible entry points to lure you in.
Here, a big, messy headline does the job of grabbing your attention.
Tilting type and photos can be gimmicky, but it’s effective with the right topic (usually feature stories).
Just how daring are you willing to be? This story about porn and technology tested the tolerance of readers in Cleveland.
Fun with fruit! You can arrange your fruit to form a happy face . . . . .
. . . . or you can try something more risqué. Too much for your readers? (This page ran years ago in Quebec, of all places.)
You can attract eyeballs by *the way you present information*, too. Notice how much engaging data is transmitted by this hard-working (but elegantly designed) type.
Same here. What’s appealing about this layout is how accessible the information is. This is an extremely effective way to make dry economic data appealing by presenting it in short form.
Again, an admirable short-form alternative to your typical freeze-warning story. It’s everything you need to know in one appealing package: Cool photo-illustration. Big blue temperatures and subheads. Useful bullet items. And a web link for more info.

Or would you rather just read 15 inches of gray text?
What is the Federal Reserve System? You could try reading a 5,000-word essay — OR you could browse this impressive full-page infographic. Some would argue that it dumb-s-down complex information; but others would insist that, because the page looks so accessible, it actually delivers more data more successfully than 100 paragraphs of linear text would.
The Fed serves as the central bank of the United States, providing various financial services and tools to stabilize the economy. Here are some of its primary functions:

**IT SERVES AS THE NATION’S CENTRAL BANK**
- Maintains accounts for the U.S. Treasury.
- Processes government checks, savings, and money orders.
- The Fed can order more currency in order to meet demand from banks – which, in turn, helps to meet demand from customers – by borrowing currency from the Bureau of Engraving and Printing.

**IT SETS MONETARY POLICY, AFFECTING THE ECONOMY**
- Sets the reserve requirement for banks and other financial institutions.
- Sets the discount rate, which is the interest rate banks charge each other to borrow money. And that, in turn, affects interest rates banks charge their customers.
- The Fed can indirectly influence the economy by influencing the demand for loans. As a result, the Fed aims to prevent inflation and keep the economy stable.

**IT REGULATES THE BANKING INDUSTRY**
- Regulates banks and their activities to ensure stability and prevent financial crises.
- Provides a framework for banks and financial institutions to operate.
- The “check-clearing process” – a key part of the Fed’s operation – is the process by which banks exchange checks and clear funds. It ensures that funds are transferred accurately and efficiently.

These functions are crucial in maintaining the stability of the U.S. financial system and ensuring economic growth and stability.
Enough, for now, about grabbing eyeballs (although if you want to explore more inspiring design devices, be sure to view our companion presentation, 101 Swipeable Ideas.)

Instead, let’s focus on pure journalism — reporting and writing — to figure out how to present information in the most effective possible way.
Suppose you’re a reporter. A feature writer. And you’re preparing to write a story about a disturbing new trend: Dog Suicide. That’s right. It’s true!* People are going away to work or school, abandoning their miserable dogs in lonely laundry rooms all day. The poor critters are terminally depressed. Can you blame them?
*It’s not true.
So you get on the phone to interview veterinarians and bereaved pet owners . . . .
. . . . then you sit down and type up your story. It’s going to be epic! Awesome! Heart-breaking!
Great stuff! You’re on fire! Readers are gonna love this!!

On a dark, moonless night in early May, Ada Plum awoke from a dreamless sleep to realize that something was wrong. She called for her dog.

“Tuffy?”
Ada’s voice echoed through the dimly-lit bedroom in her suburban Beaverton home.

“Tuffy? Come here, little darling.”
But Tuffy never came. Never barked. Never begged for another bone or fetched another stick.

Tuffy was dead — another tragic victim of canine suicide. In the past year alone, according to veterinarian researchers, more than 350 local dogs have ended their lonely days of despair by taking their own lives. It is a crime as baffling as it is unexplainable.
When you turn in your story, your gruff-but-lovable editor says, “Great stuff. But where’s the photos?”
So you quickly dispatch a photographer to shoot a grieving dog owner, who poses on the living-room couch for this sad (and awkward) portrait.
And here it is: your front-page centerpiece. Some copy editor gives it one of those standard, alliterative feature headlines, like *Learning to Live* . . .
LIVING to LEARN

by Ben Dover

When the whole house woke up at the aftermath of a winter snowstorm, the family was gathered in the living room, looking out the window at the falling snow. The decorations were up, the Christmas tree was lit, and the music was playing softly in the background. The family was all excited about the snow day and the possibilities of a white Christmas.

The children had been looking forward to this day for weeks, and now they were finally getting their chance. They ran outside, jumping and spinning in the falling snow, their laughter filling the air. The parents watched with smiles on their faces, happy to see their children enjoying themselves.

As the day wore on, the snow continued to fall, creating a beautiful blanket on the ground. The family spent the day playing games, building snowmen, and having fun in the snow. It was a perfect day, filled with joy and happiness.

Turn to LIFE, page 56

. . . . or Living to Learn . . . .
or Looking for Love. Whatever. But there it is on Page Oney. And when the story jumps to page 4 . . .
it looks like this. Uh-oh. Too gray? Luckily, a quick-witted editor fixes it . . . .
by adding subheads. Still too dull? How about it we find another depressing photo and stick that at the top of the page?
Better, maybe. But when you see this layout, you cry, “You can’t cut 15 inches out of my story!! Make that photo smaller!”
So you compromise, and this is how the page prints.

But now that we’re done, maybe we should stop and ask: *How much of this are readers gonna actually read?*

Imagine that you’re a typical reader. How far would you make it? (And remember, this is a beautifully written story. Award-winning, even. Possibly.) Would you reach the end? The middle? Would you even have
turned to this page at all?
As it turns out, newspapers are a billion-dollar industry with no accurate way to measure how consumers actually use their products.

But here’s a revealing way to see how your readers read your publication:
Granted, a survey like this is more insightful than scientific. But the more readers you survey, the more accurate it becomes.

Once you begin analyzing the results, major patterns should begin to emerge.

Let’s look at some real-world examples:
Here’s a feature page from southern Oregon. This reader reads that big liftout quote; the cutlines for the lead story; and downpage, the headline and a couple inches of text. That’s it. Is that unusual? Or typical?
Another feature page, this time from Omaha. This reader scans the headline type and the fast-facts box at the bottom of the page. . . . but no text at all.

Over and over again, this has proven true with feature pages like this – readers browse ‘em, but don’t actually read ‘em.

Or am I deliberately choosing examples that prove a point? (A good reason why you should survey the
reading habits of your community.)
Here we are in San Francisco. This is how an attorney reads his newspaper: one or two inches at the start of every story — four paragraphs, tops.
Another page from San Francisco. Look: This reader actually read most of that top story, although, like most readers, he failed to read past the “jump,” where the story continued on an inside page. Which is true for most readers, actually. After doing this survey dozens of times, I found that readers followed stories inside only about one in 20 times (or 5% of the time).

Notice that bottom story: an
engaging profile of Ram Dass, a popular spiritual teacher who suffered a stroke. Note how the reader reads just the first two inches . . . . and then the story jumps . . . .
. . . . and on the jump page, he reads . . . . . the last two inches! And then he goes on to read the fascinating French election results.

What’s going on?? Here’s what I’ve concluded: Readers aren’t lazy, or stupid. They’re busy. Distracted. Overloaded. Those long columns of text were successful in your father’s newspaper. But today (unless you’re retired or have lots of free time), they look like work. So our eyeballs
are attracted to short-form data — like that France election graphic.

Think this is true for your friends and family? For you? How much of that Dog Suicide story would you have read?
By the way, here’s my all-time favorite survey sample. You can actually hear the reader saying: **Skip the preamble. Just give me the bullet items.**

What if it turns out that most readers actually feel that way? Would it change the way you approach your reporting — the way you deliver the data?
Magazines have figured this out a long time ago. Take Maxim, for instance. For a while there (before it changed ownership), Maxim was wildly successful. Let’s listen to its editor explain his editorial strategy:
Back in 2002, Maxim editor Keith Blanchard spoke at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. An excerpt:

Today, Maxim is the largest general interest men’s magazine on Planet Earth.

Is Maxim a light read? Of course it is. If you’re trying to reach cranky retirees, maybe 6,000-word rants are still appropriate. But our readers are young affluent men, which means they’re busier today than they will ever be in their lives; they have shorter attention spans than any previous generation; they are chronically overstimulated and easily bored. Now we can sit in a corner and bemoan this sad state of affairs, or we can get off our ass and adapt.

We have built a highly successful magazine by the astonishing methodology of figuring out what readers want and then giving it to them, an enterprise which in journalism is called pandering, and which in every other industry is called customer service.

We have become masters of the short form because, for reasons entirely outside our control, the short form is what people want now. Adapt or perish.
Thumb through a typical issue of Maxim in its heyday, and notice how many long, texty stories they’re running. (Spoiler alert: none.)
SHOTS IN THE DARK

A 14-year-old boy released a homemade terrorist video that threat- ened a school. However, his parents thought differently.

Scene 1: Home of Mr. and Mrs. Johnson, Los Angeles, USA.

Mr. Johnson: "I'm concerned about John. He's been acting strangely lately."

Mrs. Johnson: "I've noticed too. He's been spending a lot of time alone.

Scene 2: John's room.

John: "I just need some time to myself. I'm feeling lonely.

Scene 3: Mr. Johnson's office.

Mr. Johnson: "I've been thinking about enrolling John in therapy."

Mrs. Johnson: "That's a good idea. We've been so busy lately.

Scene 4: John's school.

Teacher: "John, I've noticed you've been absent a lot lately.

Scene 5: John's room.

John: "I just need some time to myself. I'm feeling lonely.

Scene 6: Mr. Johnson's office.

Mr. Johnson: "I've been thinking about enrolling John in therapy."

Mrs. Johnson: "That's a good idea. We've been so busy lately.

Scene 7: John's school.

Teacher: "John, I've noticed you've been absent a lot lately.

Scene 8: John's room.

John: "I just need some time to myself. I'm feeling lonely.

The Director Strikes Back

Mr. Johnson: "I've been thinking about enrolling John in therapy."

Mrs. Johnson: "That's a good idea. We've been so busy lately.

Scene 9: John's school.

Teacher: "John, I've noticed you've been absent a lot lately.

Scene 10: John's room.

John: "I just need some time to myself. I'm feeling lonely."
ADDICTED TO HAZE
Your PSI is about to become your drug dealer. Get ready to mainline.

Terry’s note: "Someones out there doing the!" The game is a trip to a near-future where drug dealing is legal, and you're a prisoner being offered a shot at freedom if you join a drug cartel. The main challenge is to stay alive long enough to escape by traversing the city on a series of drug deals. The game is about as deep as a PS1 game can be, but it's packed with action and a darkly hilarious story.

High Score

Game On

- Metal Gear Solid
- Final Fantasy VII
- Resident Evil
- Grand Theft Auto

- Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games
- Crash Bandicoot
- Spyro: Year of the Dragon
- Tony Hawk's Pro Skater

- Duke Nukem 3D
- Doom
- Quake
- Myst
How To

MAKE BALLOON ANIMALS

It's a fun game that kids and grown-ups can play. Here's how:

Step 1: Inflate the balloon to the desired size. Make sure it's a good enough size to make the animal you want.

Step 2: Tie a knot at the end of the balloon to keep air from escaping. This will prevent the balloon from shrinking or expanding too much.

Step 3: There are many different shapes and designs you can make with balloons. Some common ones include animals, balloons, and flowers.

Step 4: Practice your skills by making different shapes until you get the hang of it.

Step 5: Share your creations with others or keep them for yourself.

Enjoy your new skill of making balloon animals!
HOW TO

SPOT A COUNTERFEIT
Recognize fake hundred dollar bills before they become a nightmare!

Although the new $100 bill is the most counterfeit-resistant currency in history, it can be duplicated with the help of counterfeit panes.

1. **Beware** a new $100 bill. It may not be the real thing. The Bureau of Engraving and Printing advises that the new $100 bill should look the same as the old $100 bill.

2. **Look for a watermark**. The watermark should be visible on the bill and should match the face of the bill.

3. **Check the serial number**. The serial number should be printed on the bill and should match the face of the bill.

4. **Check the security features**. The security features should be clearly visible on the bill and should match the face of the bill.

THROW A BOOMERANG

Pretend people in public, the same way you throw a frisbee!

1. **Pretend** a frisbee is coming at you. The frisbee should be thrown at you from a distance of about 10 feet.

2. **Catch** the frisbee. The frisbee should be caught in your hand or on your shoulder.

3. **Throw** the frisbee back. The frisbee should be thrown back to the person who threw it to you.

4. **Repeat** the process. The process should be repeated until you and the person you are pretending to throw a frisbee with have the same amount of fun.
THE GREAT MAXIM BEER QUIZ

KNOCUT DROPS

BEER TRIVIA

HATED LUNCH

MICRO BUSTED

THE ANSWERS
Yes, it’s all short, punchy and visual. But it’s solid information — not just trivia.

Now, you could argue that Maxim is sophomoric and, yes, sexist. But consider who its target audience is. And ask yourself: Are they not giving their readers useful, accessible content?

And would an editorial strategy like this — emphasizing short-form data delivery — work effectively for other
audiences, as well?
The Week’s editorial staff sifts through the best publications around the world and distills the meatiest news into data–dense paragraphs — chunks of information organized by bold subheads.
The keepers of the Constitution

By WALTER SCOTT

The Supreme Court has just completed its annual term, during which it has decided some of the most important cases in its long history. The Court has made a number of significant rulings that will have far-reaching implications for the future of American law. In this Briefing, we will explore the key issues that the Court addressed during its most recent term.

How powerful is the U.S. Supreme Court?

The U.S. Supreme Court has been called the "highest court in the land," and for good reason. It is the final arbiter of the Constitution's provisions, and its decisions are binding on all federal and state courts. In fact, the Court has the power to overturn state laws and even presidential actions if they conflict with the Constitution. This power makes the Supreme Court one of the most powerful institutions in the United States.

Why is the Supreme Court important?

The Supreme Court is important because it is the final word on interpreting the Constitution. It has the power to strike down laws that it deems unconstitutional, and its decisions can have a profound impact on the lives of Americans. The Court's rulings can shape the course of American history, and its decisions often set precedents that will be followed by lower courts.

What happened in the Supreme Court term?

The Supreme Court term ended on June 28, 2021, and it was a landmark term that addressed a number of key issues. Some of the most important decisions included rulings on immigration, abortion rights, and the Affordable Care Act. The Court also issued a number of decisions on criminal justice, voting rights, and environmental regulations. These decisions have significant implications for the future of American law and policy.

How does the Supreme Court make decisions?

The Supreme Court makes decisions through a process of deliberation and voting. The Court has nine justices, and six of them must vote to strike down a law. The Chief Justice presides over the Court, and in case of a tie vote, the Chief Justice has the casting vote. The Court typically issues its decisions at the end of each term, usually in June or July.
Notice just how much material has been compressed into this one Business page – 11 different topics in all.
In one survey, readers were monitored while reading both a typical newsmagazine (left) and The Week. They spent roughly twice as long, on average, reading pages in The Week.
So what’s the best method for attracting eyeballs and delivering data?
Start using a bigger toolbox.
Do more chunking.
Improve your collaboration.
Start using a bigger toolbox.

If those are the only design tools in your toolbox, you may be limited into publishing what looks like Your Father’s Newspaper. All those long-form “notebook dumps” could be tough sledding for your impatient, time-starved readers.

How can you speed up their comprehension without dumbing down
your journalism?
To deliver more modern journalism, you need a bigger toolbox — with a variety of text and graphic options (“alternative story forms”) like these.

Let’s take a tour through some examples.
The fast-fact box. Instead of burying the basic who-what-where-when down in the 17th paragraph, you can highlight it in a box that makes it easy for readers to find. You can do this for meetings. Concerts. Restaurant reviews. Sporting events.
The bio box. Writing a profile of some newsmaker? A format like this adds a nice graphic touch to your story while providing an accessible way to organize basic biographical details — although you could also use it to add offbeat flavor, like the top example does.
Note the power of fast-fact bullet items. Where does your eye want to go first: to the text along the right side of the page, or the **WHO HE WAS/WHAT HE DID** bullets along the top?
The Q & A. A verbatim transcript of an interview. Here are two examples of Q & A’s that are short and sweet. But they can run long, too, especially for deep dives with articulate newsmakers.
Another type of Q & A, where you ask (and answer) hypothetical questions about a current event — in this case, as the story’s lead puts it: *It’s the question of the week: Who will be able to get a flu shot this year, and when?*
Be patient, persistent if you need vaccine

Long lines have formed at flu clinics held in retail stores, and others are being canceled for lack of flu vaccine. The unexpected vaccine shortage has raised many questions about how people can best protect themselves. USA TODAY reporter Anita Manning asked experts for their advice.

Q: What if I'm in one of the groups (including people older than 65 or people any age who have chronic health problems) who should receive a flu shot, but I can't find one?
A: Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, advises people to be persistent and patient. The 22 million doses that have not already been shipped will be moving from distributors to doctors, hospitals, nursing homes, health departments and other vaccine providers over the next six to eight weeks. Places that have no vaccine today may have it in a few weeks. Keep checking with your doctor. Many state and local health departments are posting information on flu clinics and other advice on their Web pages.

Q: Who will decide whether I can have a flu shot?
A: The CDC has issued guidelines that in most cases are being followed by health departments, companies providing vaccine clinics and others. But, says Patrick Libby, executive director of the National Association of County and City Health Officials, if doctors are faced with more high-risk people than there are doses of vaccine, “decisions will have to be made about prioritizing among the priorities. That hasn’t happened yet, at least on the federal level.” Most clinics are providing vaccine only to high-risk patients on a first-come-first-serve basis.

Q: Will it soon be too late for a flu shot to be effective this year?
A: It takes two weeks for the vaccine to be fully effective. The flu season usually starts in November and peaks in late December or January, so there’s still time to take precautions.

Q: I have heard that some flu vaccine is being sold on the black market. If I can’t get it somewhere else, should I try that?
A: No. There would be no way to be sure you’re getting real vaccine.

Q: What about going to Canada to get a flu shot?
A: It’s not illegal, and many people go to Canada for prescription drugs. The Food and Drug Administration cautions that vaccine licensed in Canada has not been approved for use in the USA.

Q: What can I do to reduce my risk of catching flu if I’m not vaccinated?
A: Health officials remind everyone to wash their hands frequently, because flu viruses can live on surfaces, including hands and doorknobs. Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze. Avoid contact with sick people. If you’re sick, don’t go to work or school, and stay off airplanes. If you think you’re coming down with the flu, your doctor may prescribe an antiviral medicine that can limit the severity of symptoms. But don’t wait. The drugs have to be taken within the first two days of symptoms.
A few years back, New York governor Eliot Spitzer resigned after being shamed in a prostitution scandal. (This was the eyeball-grabbing cover of New York magazine that week) . . . .
In the midst of that widely reported scandal, The Huffington Post ran this irreverent but highly entertaining Q & A that asks questions like *Why do powerful men who seem to have it all, then go and screw everything up* and — in case you were wondering — *How does one become a prostitute?*
Speaking of prostitutes, here’s a page from The New York Times. Note the fast–fact box.
Quizzes. Readers love quizzes. They’re interactive and personal, and work especially well on feature pages.
This may be the most popular (and plagiarized) story I ever wrote, where readers get points if they’ve seen a ghost, escaped a tornado or saved somebody’s life.
Diagrams. The new parking tickets are here! So what’s what? This is an engaging way to give readers a guided tour.
This page is similar in structure to the previous page, and shows how to preview an art exhibit in a reader-friendly way: a few inches of introductory text, a fast-facts box, and a series of quotes from the artist as he explains how a typical painting comes together.
A regular man-and-woman-on-the-street feature from the San Jose Mercury News years ago. This format could be popular in any newspaper: Why We Wear What We Wear.
Step-by-step instructions. In this case, how to throw a toga party . . . .
How to roll a joint

BY JOHNNY MACHO

You could say I've taken a lot of hits in my time. Consider this: I had 150 stitches in me by the time I was seven. I broke my leg skiing a hilly mountain in Canada (true, I kept me out of the draft). I messed up both my knees playing basketball. Once, I was even abducted by a bunch of aliens. They tried to take me to Mexico. Now I've started taking hits of Malibu, which occasionally gets dangerous, what with moshpools and S.O.S. Press. That's why it pays to be ready for misfortune. My advice to the weak-kneed: Before you decide to take that trip, make sure your joints are secure.

1. Roll One. Roll a rig over.
When you finish making a drug rig, the rig will be easy to put together. First, you have to roll a rig over.

2. Fold One. Fold a strip.
You can use a strip of paper or a strip of cloth. The strip should be about 3-5 inches wide. Fold the strip in half, then fold it in half again. This will give you a strip that is about 1 inch wide. The strip should be long enough to wrap around your finger.

3. Roll Two. Roll a strip tightly.
After you've finished rolling, slide the strip over the end of the stick. If you can't slide it, your joint is messed up. This is how you should roll:

When you're done, wrap your strip around the joint. You can wrap it around the stick or around your finger. This is how you should wrap:

5. Wrap Four. Wrap a strip tightly.
After you've finished wrapping, slide the strip over the end of the stick. If you can't slide it, your joint is messed up.

After you've finished wrapping, slide the strip over the end of the stick. If you can't slide it, your joint is messed up.

. . . how to roll a joint . . .
Wands at the ready!

Want to make the final Harry Potter movie feel like more of an event? Whether you are going to the show or are just a Potter fan, we've got a step-by-step process for making your very own wizard wand.

On his website/Diagon Alley to watch how it's done.

1. Roll a standard piece of white paper tubing at the cone, cut a little longer than the tube. This will help the wand look like a wand pipe.

2. About halfway through, you want to put glue on the bottom of the cone, this will help the wand look more realistic.

3. When the wax is dry, cut the paper inside to help the wand look more realistic.

4. Split the paper opening to help the wax glaze when you put the wand inside, you can use paper to put it in.

5. If you are careful, you can achieve a rounded edge.

6. The wand will start to take shape when it's turned and you will see the edges of your wand will shape it. A little more consistent and a bit more running.

7. The end will shape and change the rounds, and when the flame is off, it will change.

8. The wand will go on to be painted and turned to its final shape. A little more consistent and a bit more running.

9. When you have spin your wand around, it's important to have it in the shape you want to have it, and the wand will go on to be painted.

Photos by The Hustle Times/Neil Gather

... how to make a wizard wand ...
. . . . how to kill a zombie . . . .
or how to strip for your girlfriend (a special package for Valentine’s Day).
Top Ten lists. Movies, wildfires, burgers – you get the idea.
# TOP 10 WILDFIRES

Every dry spring and summer brings a forecast warning for smoke-filled Detroit.

For now, let’s move on to the bigger picture: Look at the 10 worst wildfires in U.S. history—areas of which happened first in California—rehab of property tax.
Polls and surveys. From political issues to pop culture — give readers choices, collect their responses (mail-in? online?), then tabulate the results.
You can package poll results in a variety of ways, whether in list form (with artwork) or as infographics (with pie charts, for instance).
You can find more inspiring examples of all the above sidebars either by Googling, say *timelines*, or by consulting “The Newspaper Designer’s Handbook.”
1

Start using a bigger toolbox.
Do more chunking.
chunking \textit{n.} Dividing a long story into small, easy-to-digest chunks.
For years, students have been told that THIS is the ideal model for conveying information: the essay. Paragraph after paragraph . . .
Wildlife Conservation and the Loss of Species

The number one cause of species loss is in fact the loss of their habitat. It is estimated that the Earth loses ten species per day, mainly at the hand of the human population. Each species, and in fact each organism, play key ecological roles. When a species is lost, it is impossible to predict the full extent of the effect this loss will have on the ecosystem it previously inhabited and the world at large. This, as well as an infinite number of other reasons, provides the basis for a strong argument as to why the human population needs to make great strides toward the preservation of both habitats and their species.

As previously stated, it is estimated that on average, 10 species are lost per day. The equals 3600 species annually. While a great number of these species are microorganisms whose extinction cannot be easily noticed, some of these organisms are larger, such as animals and plants. Many humans do not feel the drive to help these species, but are more concerned with their daily lives and those items they prioritize. However, the loss of these species does in fact affect everyone and everything in the world. For example, a great deal of animals are used for food, writer for himself or herself personally or for a lovely pet. Many plants also provide materials such as cotton, hemp, and fabric dyes. Plants and bacteria cultures provide medicines, and those synthetic materials in medications are modeled after plants. Others argue the famous point “with great power comes great responsibility.” As
The most significant and documented data and content on zebra mussel invasiveness in the United States is that of the Great Lakes and the surrounding smaller lakes in the network. Zebra mussels were discovered in 1986 in Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair. Within three to five years of observing the initial establishment of zebra mussels in Lake St. Clair, there was extremely high to near mortality of the unionid population especially after the increased chloride infestations in the summer of 1989. This trend persisted and within the next two to three years the unionid population had been almost completely extirpated. This trend seemed to be matched in the much larger water body of Lake Erie. Mainly in the western part of the lake was where studies took place and the zebra population was established and flourished in no time. In one to two years the zebra population was observed to skyrocket while the unionid population decreased dramatically. These observations were supported by statistics as from 1989 to 1991 the unionid population, after three years of the zebra mussel invasion, went from 53% alive and 47% dead, to 100% of the unionid population in western Lake Erie being dead. This drastic occurrence greatly supported and exemplified the dire effects zebra mussels had on unionids as this was unprecedented since unionids had thrived in western Lake Erie for centuries prior to this. From the Great Lake systems, zebra mussel populations became established in rivers such as the Mississippi and the Illinois in around 1990. This was thought to have occurred most likely from veligers contained in water flowing in canals that connected the Illinois river to Lake Michigan. These rivers and, other rivers that were soon invaded, displayed the same exact exponential increase in zebra mussel population and consequent decrease in unionid populations as the Great Lakes exhibited. “Zebra mussels not only colonized unionids but also essentially covered the entire surface of the gravel bed. They formed a pavement made up of zebra mussel shells...”

. . . . after paragraph. So if your target audience is, say, a college professor, this is how you deliver the data.
For years, then, *this guy* has been the gatekeeper for those long-form essays. *He’s* the guy you always needed to please. But what pleases *him* may not actually please most *normal* people.

(Incidentally, I debated whether it was sexist to depict this stereotypical professor as a *man*. After all, just because someone’s in a position of authority, we shouldn’t automatically assume it’s a *dude*. But then I thought, “Would it not be sexist to use a *grumpy woman* to represent all college professors?” This is always a worthwhile dilemma to ponder, especially if you’re a journalist or page designer,
though you can argue back and forth without ever really reaching an infallible verdict.)
Sadly, most normal people don’t have the interest or the patience for theme papers like this. In the real world, they grade them much more harshly.
So wouldn’t that be true for news stories, as well?

Take a story like this: A few years ago, consumers across the country began contracting salmonella food poisoning from tainted tomatoes. Everyone was nervous, and justifiably so.

So here’s how most newspapers presented their front-page story: a generic tomato photo, and 20 (or more) inches of traditional text.
Or is this a more efficient way to present that information? Here, the important info is broken into short, digestible chunks. It’s more concise (and much less detailed) — but might it communicate more easily and effectively?
Another example — same story, different front page. But again, ask yourself: Does this “chunked” version of the story communicate in a more accessible way?
Suppose the president gives a speech . . . . in this case, announcing a major new jobs proposal. Here’s the traditional way to lay out that story: big photo, headline, and a dozen meaty paragraphs of text.
Would readers prefer this version, instead? We’ve added a liftout quote to that photo. But more importantly, we’re using boldface bullets to highlight key points of the plan.
“Il n’est pas plus essentiel pour notre avenir que de donner à des millions d’Américains de bonnes jobs maintenant.”

Trump unveils his job plan

The 10-point proposal combines tax breaks with ambitious new infrastructure projects

Or is this even more effective: packaging key points of the plan in a colorful sidebar?
But wait! How about this: A more dramatic display headline. A few inches of introductory text. Bullet items that detail points of the plan. Reactions from key members of Congress. And a “What Happens Next” sidebar leading to more stories inside the paper.
Your Father’s Newspaper vs. a chunked, short-form alternative. Which do you prefer?

More importantly, which would do a more effective job of attracting eyeballs and keeping them engaged for a longer period of time?
Let’s look at some different ways newspapers have chunked stories. (And remember, the intention here is NOT to trivialize information, or to dumb it down. The goal is to make important information more accessible.)

A big blizzard is coming. How big? How bad? How soon?
Look at the delivery of information in this package. How much did the writer depend upon traditional inverted-pyramid reporting?
Budget stories are often extremely tough to comprehend. Which version do you think communicates better — the main story, using narrative text, or the sidebar, which itemizes the key statistics?
Here’s a restaurant review aimed at readers with small budgets and short attention spans. Note how everything on the page is bite-sized and easy to digest.
This two-page spread in an entertainment tabloid provides everything you need to know to survive the coming zombie apocalypse.
Notice how two of the three stories on this front page use boldface keywords to introduce chunked paragraphs summarizing key bits of information.
Do more chunking.
Improve your collaboration.
Journalists — especially newspaper journalists — are notoriously bad at collaboration. Don’t believe me? Take a look at this typical feature page.

It’s easy to predict how that lead story came together:

1) The reporter decided to find out — as the first sentence clearly states — “What’s the best way to tone your abs?” So he talked to some experts, got some useful tips, and typed up a long story.
2) Then the reporter (or maybe an editor) ordered some photos, and a photographer ran off to the gym. Or, better yet: they found a trove of free photos (!!) from the American Council on Exercise.

3) Next, a designer laid out the page so the photos and text looked attractive and tidy. Unfortunately, the photos don’t really make much sense on their own, and it’s hard to find where they’re explained in the text. . . . but the readers can sort that out for themselves, I guess.

4) The designer left space for a big headline, and a copy editor came up with: AB-SOLUTE BEST. It’s a pun! Copy editors are word people who love clever puns, even if their meaning is vague . . . . like this is.

So this is how a typical newspaper page comes together. The end result isn’t
terribly compelling, though. And notice how the story, the photos and the headline fail to work together in any obvious way. They’re disconnected from each other. Like the staffers who produced this page.
NOW here’s that same story presented in Men’s Health magazine. Notice the difference? See how the big headline and photo work together? How the headline leads right into the text? How the text gets right to the point? How the cutlines describe each photo sequence?

Does this page grab your eyeballs? Deliver the data in an effective way? Or do you prefer the newspaper version?
Yes, collaboration is hard, but the results can be terrific — even in a small newsroom like the one at the N-West Iowa Review, an award-winning weekly paper.

Let’s thumb through a typical issue of their entertainment tabloid.
Here’s that cover story, on martial arts classes for kids. It occupies a two-page spread. Notice the format: a few introductory paragraphs, then a half-dozen short-form options ranging from lists to fast-fact boxes to a Q&A and a glossary.

There’s a lot of information here, but very little traditional text.
Another story (by that same writer) about upcoming clown classes. Again, a short introduction followed by a sidebar, a Q&A and some fast facts.
Another short-form layout — again, in the same issue — because hey, it’s almost racing season! Here’s all you need to know on one page: where the races are, what types of cars, and how to attend the upcoming racecar show.
Yet another short-form preview. In fact, nearly everything in this issue is packaged in short, appealing chunks like this.

Did these stories come together like that by accident? No. The newsroom has a system in place for planning and packaging stories with this end result in mind.

And that system is known as “The Maestro Concept.”
The Maestro Concept was devised back in the 1990s by Leland “Buck” Ryan, a journalism professor (and longtime friend of the author). For a detailed analysis, I recommend the Wikipedia entry for *Maestro Concept*.

In short, it’s a process for encouraging teamwork among newspaper staffers. For integrating words, images and design. For reminding journalists to “think like a reader.”
Basically, the concept is this: The best time to collaborate — to brainstorm that big story — is *before* the story gets written. Before the reporter sits down, alone, to start typing those 30 paragraphs of text.

So imagine a meeting where we kick that story around: we being the reporter. The editor. The photographer. The designer. In fact, *anyone* who’s got a stake in that story gets to help shape its treatment during
a quick (five-minute session) where they fill out this form. Together. Collaboratively.
Here’s an overview of how that works. At left, the completed maestro form, which resulted in the printed page at right.

Now, things may surely change as the reporter gathers more information, or as the artwork comes together. But with this process, at least there’s a beginning blueprint that guides the evolution of the package.

If you’re presenting this slideshow
to a class or a newsroom and you’d like to
test-drive the Maestro Concept, the next
10 slides will guide you through a typical
front-page example.

If you would like to print out a physical
copy of this form, 1) export the previous
slide, scale it to fit your printer output,
and print out copies, or 2) download a
PDF of the maestro form from the NSPA
website, then print out copies as needed.
OK, here we go. We’ve got a big, breaking story for tomorrow’s front page. So first thing, top left corner of the maestro form: What’s the story idea, in 25 words or less? (This forces the reporter or editor to boil the concept down into an easily digestible nugget.)

In this case, here it is: **UFOs have been landing at night, abducting local citizens.**

Make sense? Once everyone
understands the concept and agrees that it’s worthy, you proceed to the next section.
Now, *think like a reader*. What are the biggest, juicest, most pressing questions readers will have about this topic? For instance, how about: *Where have the abductions occurred? (Is it anywhere near MY house?)*

Excellent question. And how should we answer that question? Can we do it with a photo? With a headline? Down in the 17th paragraph of the text? Or is there a sidebar that would work . . . like, say . . . *a map?*
You don’t have to write anything down just yet. But keep churning out questions, like: Who’s been abducted? Is this some kind of hoax? Are the abductees claiming that they were probed? And for each question, try to determine the best way to answer: text, artwork, sidebar, graphic . . . .?

But the most important question of all — the one you must ask for every story you ever do — is this: Why should I care? The answer may not always be obvious, so try asking in different ways: How does this affect ME? Or . . . . . What should I be doing about this?

Once you feel confident about your questions and answers, fill in the form and move on to the next section.
At this point, you could begin discussing photo options (with the photographer right there, helping guide the process). Want mug shots of the abductees? Can you get a photo of the UFO tonight? Or should the lead art be the map that shows where the UFOs have landed?

Your page designer could now start sketching out the package: put the artwork here, the sidebars there. In fact, you could even kick around
headline ideas now — while you’re fresh — instead of saving that for last, when everyone’s tired and pressured by deadlines.

That’s the process in a nutshell. When it works, it makes those big stories more accessible, more reader-friendly, better-designed, more visual. It encourages collaboration by spreading the ownership around — it’s not just the reporter’s story anymore.

So let’s see how this page might have actually turned out:
If we hadn’t maestroed the story, a photographer would have visited one of the abductees and shot this corny photo of the guy saying, “Here’s where they probed me.”
That photo would have anchored this traditional story design: Headline, deck, photo, and 20 paragraphs of traditional text. And there it is: your front-page centerpiece. Perfect for your father’s 1966 newspaper.

But what if we had constructed a package based upon the questions on our maestro form?
First, let’s fix the right half of the layout. Instead of that corny photo, we’d run a map to answer the question, *Where have the abductions occurred?* And maybe our second question was: *Who’s been abducted?* To answer that, we created bio boxes for each of the abductees — and paired those with our map to show who was abducted *where.*
What was the “Why should I care?” for this story? Hopefully, you would have come up with something like: *How do I protect myself from the aliens?* And to answer that question, you could ask a UFO expert for a list of bullet-item tips — and you’d run it here, at the very top of the story.

Notice, too, that we’ve jazzed up the headline a bit more, since we’d written it in advance.
Like the layout so far? If I were in charge, I might have asked one more question during the maestro meeting: *Is this just a hoax?* Which we could have answered with a quick reader survey (maybe send someone to the mall and ask 100 people these questions.)

Could be a good sidebar. Or maybe it’s just making the page too busy. Now that I see it in print, I think I’d prefer . . . .
. . . . this version. OR do you prefer . . .
... the traditional version — the one that would run in Your Father’s Newspaper? Which version attracts eyeballs better? Delivers the information more effectively?
If you’re intrigued by this process, you’re bound to have questions. Such as:

— Do we do this for every story? Probably not. At first, it may be best to focus on your big lead (centerpiece) news, feature or sports stories. Change, after all, is difficult. But once the workflow smoothes out, you could require this for, say, all stories over 20 inches. Or 20 paragraphs. Or 1,000 words.
And test your readers to see if they’re actually reading more material this way (see slide #46 above).

— **Who’s in charge?** Many papers have had success with creating a Staff Maestro position — someone who “gets it” when it comes to merging words and visuals in short-form packages. But it doesn’t need to be that formal. What’s important is to encourage, or even mandate, maestroing each big story, since most journalists loathe meetings — and reporters, especially, hate being forced to share ownership of *their* stories.
Let’s review. In particular, let’s review this “Why Should I Care?” concept.

Take this front-page story, for instance, on . . . . sewer rates. (And by the way: You know you’ve hit rock bottom when a story on sewer rates leads your front page.)

Anyway, read the headline. Read the deck. And now tell me: Why should I care?
Ah! Here’s the answer, buried halfway down the page: *Your sewer bill will increase five bucks a month.*

At the very least, shouldn’t THAT have been somewhere in the big type?
Two pages from 2010, when Congress approved dramatic health-care reform (known as Obamacare).

Which do you prefer: the traditional approach at right, or the more typographically aggressive, what-it-means-to-you approach at left?
Another what-it-would-mean package (from the Virginian-Pilot), on a plan to expand the local naval base.
Or this example — a money story — from Time magazine.
Here’s a budget story from the Columbus Dispatch. These stories can be awfully dull, but by 1) Adding YOU to the headline, and 2) breaking up the text into bullet items, it suddenly seems much more relevant and accessible.
Take a story like this: mountain lions have begun roaming around your town. What’s the **Why Should I Care?** (Answer below.)

For this story, you’ve actually got two excellent “why should I care” questions:
1) Where have the mountain lions been spotted? (Are they anywhere near MY HOUSE???) To best answer that, we need to display a map. And as it turns out, there IS a map in that top photo — but it’s, uhhh, under the guy’s hand. Which makes that photo worthless.

2) How do I protect myself if I encounter a mountain lion? Again, this layout takes us halfway there on the second page, with that LET HIM KNOW IF YOU’VE BEEN MAULED sidebar. But no, what this story really needs, right there on Page One, is the What To Do explainer, with bullet-item tips and a photo of a mountain lion — maybe even a mountain lion bio box (size, weight, dietary habits, etc.)
One final example. Suppose you live in Portland, Oregon, in the shadow of the Cascade Mountains — the stomping grounds of the legendary Bigfoot! You decide to do a story on local Bigfoot hunters. . . . and this is how the finished page turns out. Sadly, it’s a dismal failure: Clumsy typography, amateurish photography, pine needles (get it? From the forest?) scattered haphazardly around the page. And acres of dull, gray type.
Isn’t there some better way to package a story like this? Suppose you decide to try again – and this time, use the Maestro process to produce a more engaging, interactive package. What could you differently? What would it look like?

And most importantly, to start on the right track: What’s the best answer to the question Why Should I Care?
This page began by asking the question, *How Can I Find Bigfoot?* There it is, the most interactive, engaging *Why Should I Care?* question of all.

And once you’ve chosen that to be your organizing theme, the rest of the page falls into place. You can even see how other think-like-a-reader questions got answered: *Where can I find Bigfoot?* That’s a map. *How do I identify him?* That’s a bio box. And so
on. (It’s even got a long, narrative story about bigfoot trackers, like that previous page did — if you’re interested in them.)

Attracting eyeballs. Delivering data efficiently. Thinking like a reader. Chunking. It’s all here, in this example. Now that you’ve seen how it works for stories about UFOs and Bigfoot, are you willing to apply it to real-world journalism?