

Personal statement

Being a journalist at the *M-A Chronicle* is the highlight of my day and that is because of the stories I write. I firmly support unbiased reporting that has an impact on my community.

The project I spent the most time on was my two-part series on Paper Tutoring. I spent hours combing through district documents and data. I couldn't stop thinking about the story and enjoyed every second. I was so inexperienced and naive when I started writing the article; I look back and cringe over my mistakes. Since its publication, I've struggled with self-doubt and intrusive thoughts, always telling me I should have done more. The thoughts are right, I should have done more: I should have gathered further data despite the pushback and delays, I should have reached out to more districts about the trends they are seeing, and I should have tried to interview additional students, tutors, and teachers. It's become an obsession, criticizing everything I did. I'm not saying all of those things are inaccurate, but I need to take a step back and acknowledge how I affected the stakeholders involved. The Associate Superintendent of Ed. Services called the article "compelling" and told me that the superintendent's team read it together. Later, an associate sat down with a representative from Paper and watched them almost beg to continue the contract. The most important thing is how I affected tutors, they said: "I hope you know you're a hero to us all." "You did the right thing." "Tutors felt so validated by your article." Reflecting on this article made me realize that being proud of something you wish you did differently is not an oxymoron. The point of journalism is to report on the problems people are facing and I excelled at creating a discussion around Paper tutoring. I could have done better, and I will always strive to do better, but I never want to lose sight of the people I am helping and the effect I have on my community. I'm proud of myself and the growth I've gone through as a person and a journalist. If I could redo my Paper series, I would have focused on trying to establish a trend across districts regarding Paper rather than focusing solely on my school.

An ethical dilemma I deliberated on was regarding "Losekoot and BSU Leadership Comment on Petition." The president of the BSU, Apollo Jackson, made several incorrect statements. I struggled with either including them or removing them. Even though it made BSU look bad, their knowledge gap about current policies is important to consider when evaluating the petition. I confided in my English teacher, a former journalism adviser, yet he didn't want to influence me. He compelled me to trust my instinct. That confidence helped me defend my decision to leave Jackson's quote in since a member of the editorial staff wanted it removed. My English teacher later said how proud he was of my article and my decision to leave in the quote.

I'm not perfect; I will always seek to understand my mistakes and learn from them. I think acknowledging my flaws is one of my strengths. I've grown to be able to constructively criticize my work, while also having pride in my results. I can do that because I care, I care about journalism, I care about maintaining ethical standards, and I care about representing marginalized people. I hope my portfolio shows how much I value the truth. All of my articles come from a place of compassion and sympathy, yet maintain a devotion to the facts. The impact that good journalism can have should never be minimized. I am honored by the growth I've already achieved and excited for my development as a writer and reporter.

Paper Tutoring: Over Half a Million on a Tutoring Service Few Use

My article started with the simple idea of investigating the usage data for the tutoring service but it had spiraled into even more—I discovered its poor service and high price and that Paper was not always one-on-one. Tutors claim that they routinely have more than four students at a time, and that's why responses lack quality. I was able to interview many tutors who explained how the service worked from their perspective and the issues they saw. This article allowed me to look at a lot of data, compile it, and write about it. My experience in writing this article has allowed me to participate in the process of digging deeper into government waste and spending, something incredibly common in California. I am a curious person and the reason I write an article is that it's answering a question I have. I'm proud of how this article analyzes and shows the issue with every part of the Paper service. I wish I could have looked at more data but the district was having issues getting it from Paper. It took several months to get the little amount of data we received. Writing this article, the program was concerned about potential litigation and so I spent hours verifying every claim made and litigation proofing it. I grew as a journalist from this article because it taught me to verify information with multiple sources along with keeping detailed notes. Since then, I've started recording where I get information from in a format that can help me verify information. This article is the perfect example of what I am best at, analyzing and presenting data on issues I care about. The article was one of the most read on the site with exceptionally high "time on page" and overall views. There were also a lot of views from Canada, where Paper is based.

Paper Tutoring: Accused of Misleading the District and Violating the Law

Following my story regarding Paper tutoring and their relationship with students and the district, a lot of tutors wanted to express more of the issues regarding Paper and their treatment of tutors. The District told me that tutors were fingerprinted because of safety concerns, but when I asked tutors about it, I was shocked to find out tutors claim they were not fingerprinted. I sent multiple emails to Paper asking for a comment on the fingerprinting issue and received no response. Regarding the other labor violations, tutors felt very wronged by Paper and I was interested to see what the lawyer had to say; the law was more of a gray area than I anticipated yet I wanted to show the reader that it's not as clear cut as tutors claimed. This article also took a lot of time to verify—I made sure to take steps to limit exposure to lawsuits as I feared Paper would be very litigious. I've been told by tutors that they threatened tutors for speaking to the "media" and reminded them of their confidentiality agreements after my article was published. This article allowed me to reflect on the treatment of the workers who are making the services I use. I hope I inspired discussions at the district level regarding the treatment of the people working for the companies they use.

M-A's Sports Funding: Who Covers What?

Everyone likes to complain, especially teenagers. This article was born out of the consistent complaints about fundraising a lot of student-athletes have. The M-A Athletic

Program was willing to give some financial data about funding for different sports. But I realized that the audience wouldn't want to have numbers thrown at them so I pivoted the article to show the attitudes of coaches and students about a few issues. Many student athletes were willing to complain in casual discussion but I had trouble finding people to go on the record. When I did speak with students and coaches, I found that there was a disconnect surrounding transportation. According to the athletic director and some coaches, transportation to and from games is available without restriction to everyone. Yet students felt that they were forced to drive. The article did a good job at balancing the athletic director's point of view and the sentiment of students. After the article was published, the athletic director added some information about a few small details and we updated the article accordingly. Another article that the *M-A Chronicle* wrote made the Athletic Department angry, however my article was able to constructively show some students' complaints while not causing any discontent.

SamTrans Frustrates Community With Poor Communication

Before the start of the school year, SamTrans implemented its operational refresh "Reimagine SamTrans". With little warning, they cut six miles from M-A's bus route leading to many angry parents. They claimed that only three people rode that portation but parents did not think that was accurate. I showed both sides of the argument by providing SamTrans reasons and contrasting that with parents' disagreements. After interviewing Assistant Vice Principal Nicholas Muys, I learned that the school's big issue is how SamTrans handled communication so I added that side to the article. Our school has multiple bus routes and I wanted to talk about at least one more. When I learned the school was considering running its own route in place of SamTrans, I talked with riders of the other routes about issues with the public on SamTrans to show some of the benefits of a school-run bus.

Losekoot and BSU Leadership Comment on Petition

Following a viral incident in which a Police officer, who was called to campus by the school's administration, had a physical altercation with an African American student, the Black Student Union (BSU) created a petition calling for change and spoke at the school board meeting. I wanted to go into depth about what each action item called for and how that could be implemented. The issue was that students were losing interest so I significantly shortened the article and changed the format. The dropdown menu allows readers to pick action items they want to know more about instead of reading through them all. I am just starting to think about creative ways to present information and dropdown menus are only the beginning. When interviewing BSU members, I struggled with getting them to go into depth about their ideas. I ended up interviewing every BSU member by attending three different meetings and meeting up with them at the Board meeting. I had a few ethical issues because the BSU members sometimes said things that were incorrect or not something they could say with authority. Like when a freshman made accusations against the administration for their treatment of Black staff. Principal Karl Losekoot agreed to an interview where we spent an hour going through each action item. The eventual conclusion was that most of these items had already been implemented and did not prevent the incident like BSU claimed. Sometimes, the BSU president and other members said

very incorrect things and I had to redirect them yet not call them out while I interviewed them. When I was younger, I was very aggressive and combative. During this article, I practiced remaining calm and respectfully challenging someone's point of view without causing them to be defensive. The article was successful in elevating the discussion surrounding the petition. One person reached out to me after reading the article to comment on how it changed her perspective on the petition. My goal for all of my articles is to show the truth and confront misconceptions. I'm glad this article was able to successfully accomplish this.