

Story coaching in five steps (with room for dips, dives and detours)

~ *Jacqui Banaszynski* ~

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1. Coach the idea (pre-reporting)

Think the story through with the reporter.

Don't pre-edit, but do pre-conceive (leaving room for reality).

Identify a likely story approach or genre (profile, explanatory, etc).

Agree on the story's primary purpose or hope.

Expand curiosity; narrow focus.

Agree on the necessities (time investment, next check-in, etc).

2. Coach the story (post-reporting/pre-writing)

Listen to what the reporter has learned.

Re-interview the reporter, listening for patterns, for themes, for holes.

Feed back the reporter's story in synthesis or summary form.

Agree on a working budget line (nut graf).

Discuss lede possibilities.

Discuss tone and likely structure of a story.

Agree on the necessities (length, deadline, foto and grafix, etc).

3. Coach the structure (the first draft)

Respond to the *story*, not the commas.

Write a "story edit memo" that:

Summarizes the story (what core story did you read)

Summarizes the story's strengths (what's working and why)

Summarizes the story's key problems (what primary work needs to be done)

(Tip: Focus on no more than three key issues. Likely targets: missing information; story focus or cohesion; story structure or organization of material; story tone; story pacing and speed.)

(interim step: You may want to respond to a second draft with more specific comments before you accept a final draft for a line edit)

4. Coach the words (the final draft)

Side-by-side, line-by-line editing

Clarity, pacing, speed, strength, sentence structure

5. Coach the process (post-publication)

Debriefs and future game-plans