

Write Like the Pros

Silvia Foster-Frau

The Washington Post

Silvia.Foster-Frau@washpost.com

Instagram: @silviafosterfrau

Twitter: @silviaelenaff

TikTok: silviafosterfrau

Marcela García

The Boston Globe

marcela.garcia@globe.com

BlueSky: marcelagarcia.bsky.social

Instagram: @marcela_elisa

TikTok: @santoandbenito

Bio

Silvia Foster-Frau

National investigative reporter, The Washington Post

Nieman Journalism Fellow '26, Harvard University

Background:

- **Paid internship in college**
- **Hearst Journalism Fellow**
- **Small papers to bigger ones**
 - **The Washington Post**
 - **Multiculturalism reporter**
 - **Mass shootings**
 - **Investigative reporter**
 - **Immigration**

Tips and tricks Ok no tricks just tips

- **Good writing requires good reporting**
 - **Details**
 - **Starring or highlighting when a quote stands out during interview**
 - **Jotting down concepts/phrases in notebook as they come to you**
 - **Note the setting in your interview. What are they wearing, what photos are on the walls? What are the sounds and smells around you?**
 - **Source diversity**
- **Make an outline**
- **Chronological order is the best order 90% of the time**
- **Write soon after interviews while memory is fresh**
- **Don't use words you wouldn't normally use when talking to a friend**

Tips Cont'd...

- Describe people's actions and reactions around the quote
- Make sure every sentence serves the point you are trying to make in each paragraph
- Replace adverbs with strong verbs (ran quickly = sprinted)
- Try not to end on a quote (I mostly fail at this)
- Trim and trim and trim dialogue
- Look to cut (20%?) before turning it in
- Fresh eyes can help
- So can reading your work out loud
- The best stories have all the elements – narrative, hard news, accountability, etc.

Weaving narratives

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2023/sutherland-springs-shooting-survivors-ar-15-scars/>

Anecdotal lede followed by revealing investigation

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2024/04/18/new-mexico-arsenic-drinking-water/>

Write Like the Pros

The art of the argument

*Writing opinion that is bold, grounded,
and persuasive*



A little about me

- **Originally from México**
- **College degree in Economics**
- **Moved to Boston to get a graduate degree in journalism; earned one from the Harvard Extension School**
- **Began journo career in Spanish-language media**
- **Got hired at *The Boston Globe* in early 2014, where I've been writing editorials and columns since**
- **I write about... everything! I focus on: public education, immigrants and immigration policy, social inequities, the Latino community in Boston and beyond.**

Opinion vs. News: Same Craft, Different Purpose

- News reporting: Here's *what happened*
- Opinion writing: Here's what it means, why it matters, what we should do about it, how you should think about it, etc.
- Opinion writing is *not* just reacting to the news – ‘*this is terrible*’ — or simply a “hot take.” It’s not venting, it’s not a rant, it’s not a summary of the news
- It’s building a clear argument through reporting, research, and critical thinking
- A good opinion column interprets, offers you a fresh/original way to think about a complicated issue, and/or argues for evidence-based solutions

How To Write Compelling Columns — I

- Know your actual argument before you write
- Lead with tension, you want to show a contrast
- Use a news hook or “*why now*”: tie the lede to something timely (campus vote, national story, viral incident)
- Nut graf: Focus on the argument (what you believe), the stakes, and a hint of your evidence (how you’re supporting your argument, establishes why readers should trust you)
- Use a human entry point: People and characters need to exemplify the argument; some of the best columns tell the issues through people’s experiences, a human story or scene
- You can be voicy!

How To Write Compelling Columns — II

- Every quote should do something prose can't — capture voice, reveal character, or deliver a fact concisely, vividly
- Report, report, report: your argument is only as strong as your evidence
- Take a real position: “*This is complicated*” is an observation, not an opinion. Avoid equivocation; opinion pieces shouldn't be mushy
- For the ending, also avoid: summary endings, “*In conclusion*” vibes, and moralizing
- Instead, ask: What should the reader think, feel, or do differently?

Examples

- <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/11/07/opinion/trump-latino-voters/>
- <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/04/11/opinion/green-card-holder-travel-dilemma/>
- <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/05/20/opinion/alex-alex-mayor-boston/>
- <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/02/06/opinion/massachusetts-early-college-program-successful-pilot-sustainable-policy/>
- <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2024/12/29/opinion/mattahunt-school-bps-haitian-creole/>