9 Steps

Discover what was, what's new, what's now!

for

Writing like a Journalist

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New York University Outstanding Teaching Award Winner

First book in the Journalist / Artist series

inner child university®

9 Steps for Writing Like a Journalist:
Discover what was, what's new, what's now

Essential Journalism Skills For Transforming
Your Writing & Your Life

This book is published by Inner Child University

Book 1 in the JournalARTist® Series

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Introduction

Welcome to *9 Steps!*

For the past 20 years, I've been teaching journalism at New York University. Students are always surprised by what I tell them on the first day of the semester.

"I don't care if you become a journalist," I say. "What matters is that journalism skills are life skills. And if you have these skills, you'll know how to get a life you really want."

My dream for you is that you learn how to write like a journalist so that you can become a JournalARTist. I hope these journalistic skills help you to discover the art of living with peace, creativity and happiness.

You'll find yourself by learning how to navigate the three dimensions of time with a special mantra: What was, what's new, what's now. If you've been feeling stuck, you'll start moving on from the past. Instead, you'll stay in the present by seeing what's new about your life. This discovery changes your future now. Right now.

As a JournalArtist, you'll also enjoy the excitement and healing that comes from expressing yourself in your own words. Your stories about you are powerful and unique! So go out there and share you truth.

Thank you for joining our JournalArtist movement. Now get out there and play!

Betty.

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Chapter 1: What is a JournalARTist®?

In 2013, I invented a new word: JournalARTist®! You can also write it as JournalArtist®. Or any other way where word "ART" snuggles right in the middle of j-o-u-r-n-a-l-i-s-t.

JournalARTists are people from any and every background. Our community is based on taking basic journalism tools and turning them into essential life skills for navigating the world.

These skills shows us how to work with facts. We know how to logically process and analyze information. As journalARTists, we start thinking more clearly about our lives, relationships and situations. The way we talk changes, too; we're more articulate. Connecting to ourselves and others gets easier. We go from day-to-day surviving, to thriving.

We also discover the power of our mantra: What was, what's new, what's now. Our awareness of time elements helps us to organize our writing and our lives in a very journalistic way.

Once being journalistic feels organic and natural, the next amazing thing happens. Our new skills turbocharge our inner artist. We feel more, and flow more as we explore our past, present and future. We're moving around with surprising creativity, in moments both big and small, high stakes and low stakes.

We start to trust the power of our own words. We discover that our own words have the power to reveal who we are and to heal us.

Expressing ourselves with confidence makes us brave to express ourselves.

Being ourselves leads to sharing our identities and stories in ways that make us happy and proud. This is how we get to lives, careers and relationships that we really want.

Chapter 2: What is a Journalist?

Journalists know how to work with facts. They also know how to go through tons of information and figure out what information is true, which material is filled with lies. This is called critical thinking and the power of inquiry.

Journalists are trained to do what each and every one of us needs to do. They know how to show up in all kinds of events and places – and come out with answers.

They know how to talk to strangers.

Journalists are highly skilled at time management, especially managing the pressure of deadlines.

Journalists are trained to actively listen and take notes. Staying calm in traumatic and changing situations are part of the job.

Journalists are strong communicators. They know how to express themselves and summarize information clearly.

All of this adds up to a set of skills that can become essential tools for non-journalists. The training that makes a person a journalist also makes them a super-powerful storyteller.

Journalists mostly tell the stories of other people. We all want to be able to do that, too.

We also want to be able to tell our own stories with the sharp focus and tools used by journalists.

Chapter 3: What are the 9 Tips?

Writing like a journalist can change more than how you express yourself with words. Writing like a journalist can actually transform your whole life. Here's why: journalistic skills can work for anyone. In fact, we all need them – even non-journalists.

When the 9 tips feel like a natural part of us, we become JournalARTists®. This means our new skills make us more confident and creative in how we live, work love and play. This is because we've become:

- clearer thinkers, writers and speakers
- stronger communicators
- more interesting storytellers

Some of the 9 tips are very familiar but now we're going to explore them in new ways. If you want to know more about any of the next nine tips, each of the tip's pages includes a link to its own blog post, and a little YouTube video.

Here's a list of the 9 tips, and the order in which they're presented in this book:

1. It's all about the 5Ws

2. Group together facts that relate to each other

3. Present facts in logical order

4. Wow facts drive a story

5. Write in short sentences

6. One idea per paragraph

7. Quotes humanize the story

8. You must pass the "so what?" test

9. Show, don't tell

Chapter 4

Tip #1: It's all about the 5Ws

Journalistic professional skill:

Stories need facts. The basic facts are the 5Ws: who, what, when, where, why. And sometimes, there's an "h": how.

Every story has many, many 5Ws. In fact, you could list endless 5Ws for any story or any moment of your life.

WHO is involved? WHAT is at stake? WHERE is the story taking place? WHEN and WHY did certain things happen?

The HOW of a story might be essential, too. How did a situation come about? How did matters get resolved?

From here, prioritize your 5Ws. Some facts matter more than others. Decide what's most important.

JournalArtist life skill:

Most of us were taught the 5Ws as little kids in school. They've been around a long time. Now, though, using them with conscious, self-awareness can bring better outcomes as we think through solutions, both big and small.

What should I have for lunch? Who should I spend time with this week? Apply the other 5Ws to simple questions. You'll move with more flow through your day.

Practice:

Pick a news story that interests you. It can be a big story, or small and quirky. Then ask yourself a series of questions about your interest and experiences:

- Who does this story impact?
- What does this story make me feel?
- When did I start getting interested in this topic?
- Where does this story take me?
- Why is this story important to me?
- How does this story impact me?

Chapter 5

Tip #2: Group together facts that relate to each other

Journalistic professional skill:

Instead of throwing everything together into a mixed fruit salad bowl, separate out the different categories. I call this matching apples to apples and oranges to oranges.

A fruit salad only tastes good when you know what you have for ingredients. Same thing with organizing facts. If you randomly throw random apples, potatoes and garlic at me, how is that a fruit salad? I'll be confused.

Instead, be clear about what you're serving your audience. Make one paragraph all about apples, all about one topic. Then, put all info related to oranges in a separate paragraph. Once you see what you have, you might serve up the apples first. Or, maybe the oranges. Or, maybe you're realize you need some blueberries – oops, what happened to the blueberries!?

JournalArtist life skill:

You might know someone like this: When you ask them how their day is going, the answer gets very long. You might love this person but sometimes you're scared to ask anything because they toss you an apple here, a banana there. And then, two minutes later, they come back with another apple. How we share our stories impacts whether we are truly heard.

Practice:

This is an exercise in active listening that will bring more self-awareness to our storytelling. As you go through your day, listen actively to how people share their latest news. What are you hearing in your own stories, and from others? Follow the apples and oranges.

Chapter 6

Tip #3: Present facts in a logical order

Journalistic Skill:

Sometimes, stories are hard to follow because you're jumping around instead of presenting the story in some kind of order.

Sequencing matters. What happened first, second and third? Is there a logic to how you're sharing your main points?

It takes more than facts to create a story; the information must make sense as your share it. The audience must be able to follow the action.

If they're reading or listening to the story, they have to see the scene playing out in their heads. They have to be able to visualize what's happening, how it's happening and maybe, why it's happening.

So, be prepared. You'll probably have to reorganize your material, multiple times. Along the way, you'll make hard decisions. You might take out some facts and add in other 5Ws. If there's missing information, be sure to fill the holes.

JournalArtist life skill:

Pay attention to the timeline in people's lives, and in your own life. When certain things happened makes a difference. In times of stress and/or creative thought, it can be helpful to slow down and create a chronology. When did you do this or that? What happened next?

Practice:

Pick a happy memory. Instead of writing out the memory, write it down as a list of steps. First, this happened. Next, that happened. Just the facts, without trying to make it a story. As you read through the list, do you notice anything new in the memory? Something you never noticed before?

Chapter 6

Tip #4: Wow facts drive a story

Journalistic Skill:

Do you remember the last time a story or news article grabbed your attention?

If you read, listened, watched or did all three to the story's very end, you probably talked to yourself.

That story just had a conversation with you, inside of your head. And when the story ended you probably said something like: Oh, wow, that's unbelievable. Oh, gee, I didn't know that. If that happened, then you just experienced what I call "gee/wow" facts.

From the opening line to the very last word, good stories are packed with 5W facts. Some of those facts will stand out as detailed, strategically placed information that surprise you. You stick with the story until the end because you want to know how things turned out. And along the way, you'll keep saying: Oh, wow. Wow, really?!

Life Skill:

Have you ever had people say “wow” when you shared something about your life? It might be something that you consider small and insignificant. But now, pay attention. Your listeners are letting you know that you have more greatness than you realize. Explore it!

Practice:

Sometimes, people only pay attention to the “wow” moments. In your conversations, listen for what goes unsaid, or minimized. The person’s who’s talking might say, “Oh, that was unimportant.” Or, maybe: “That was nothing. I’m fine.” Are they really?

Chapter 7

Tip #5: Write in short sentences

Journalistic professional skill:

You can take one word and make it a sentence. Yes. Yup. Really. A one-word sentence or short sentence keeps your storytelling lively.

You keep us moving from one thought to the next. adds liveliness to your storytelling. he goal is to hold onto your audience. Keep them moving through the story. Nice.

Short sentences are also great because you can move them around like little puzzle pieces. This helps you to sequence your information more effectively.

These short sentences are also a gift for anyone who has problems with grammar or who is learning English.

The basic structure of the short sentence is the simple subject-verb- object setup. Such a clean, tangle-free format! Here's an example: *The dog ate my homework.*

JournalArtist life skill:

Of course, you can also write and talk in long, beautiful, fancy sentences. Just remember that writing long sentences take a mastery of grammar, logic and your story outline. They can be powerful if you sprinkle them here and there.

But in reality, most people speak in short sentences – really! Once you notice this, you'll understand the concept of "conversational writing."

Practice:

Journalists try to write conversational. Even if it feels weird to write in short, conversational sentences, give it a try. You're already writing that way when you text. Just experiment with being more conscious of short, conversational sentences in how you talk, email and journal. But if you feel like writing long sentences, go for it. You want to start really listening to your body as you communicate.

Chapter 8

Tip #6: One idea per paragraph

Journalistic professional skill:

Most of my students struggle with the idea of paragraph breaks. They feel like they're doing something naughty. After all, most of them have been trained to write long paragraphs in school.

Journalistic writing can also involve long or long-ish paragraphs. But try really, really hard to be conversational or at least more readable than research papers.

So, this might be another new skill for you: Experiment with keeping your paragraphs short. The secret is breaking up your material so that each paragraph is a nugget of information. A clearly-presented idea.

Once you feel yourself moving on to another idea, hit the "return" key. If you have a new point to make, start a new paragraph.

JournalArtist life skill:

The idea of only one central idea per paragraph is a very powerful form of decluttering. You'll need to slow down, examine all the facts, ideas and emotions you're exploring. And then, put them in different buckets or drawers. You'll start feeling more deeply and thoughtfully – instead of rushing.

Practice:

Have you read anything you liked lately? Or, do you journal? Or, have you written anything that you really feel proud of?

Pull out a piece of writing that you enjoy reading. It can be your own or something written by someone else. Go through it and circle all the central ideas. Get a feel for how the piece is organized. This is a form of editing that will help you the next time you write something.

Since we believe in listening to our bodies, there's another way to practice this exercise: Go reorganize a drawer in your home. What is the central idea of the drawer? What can you edit out? Or, rearrange in this or other drawers?

Chapter 9

Tip #7: Quotes humnize the story

Journalistic professional skill:

The minute you add quotes to a story, you bring your readers closer to you. Suddenly, they feel like they're right there with you, inside the story.

Best of all, they feel like they're actually meeting the people you're quoting.

In journalistic articles, reporters try to get a quote into the story as soon as possible. The most classic form is to use the first paragraph to focus the piece. The second paragraph offers a bit more depth or background. By the third paragraph – if not sooner – you slip in your first quote.

And then, you keep this going throughout the rest of the piece. You want to weave in other people and their quotes as much as you can.

JournalArtist life skill:

This is another dimension of active listening. What are you hearing? What's really important? For example, at work, you might get an announcement or email from the boss. It says XYZ is important.

But then, you listen for what people are saying around you. In real life, they might have heard very different comments from the boss and other managers. Now, analyze the official statement with reality. Use your journalistic tools to analyze what's really going on.

Practice:

Take a minute to sit still and think about what it was like for you as a little kid. What did the people who raised you say all the time? This could be your parents or a parent, a guardian. Maybe even a teacher or a relative or neighbor.

Without overthinking, write down 10 quotes you were taught as the truth. How do you feel about those quotes today? Circle the ones that are still true for you.

Chapter 10

Tip #8: You must pass the “so what?” test

Journalistic professional skill:

When readers, listeners and/or viewers dive into your work, they have only one question on the brain: *So what? Why should I care about what you’re telling me?*

It's not enough that you love your themes and opening sentences. Your audience will only stick around if you hold their interest. To quote the famous writer Elmore Leonard: "Try to leave out the parts that readers tend to skip."

If you need to reorganize, be prepared for anything from minor tweaking to major surgery. But...you also have to trust yourself.

The journalism profession is filled with stubborn reporters who refused to quit on stories they cared about. But even they had to pass their editor or producer's "so what?" test to their stories out into the world.

JournalArtist life skill:

Sometimes, the loudest voice screaming “so what?” is the voice inside our own heads. We might be the first ones to doubt ourselves. Of course, maybe we were trained to feel that way. If you’re in a setting where your ideas are dismissed with “so what?”, it’s time to reflect and make changes. Start by trying to find your people, your chosen family. You deserve to be seen and heard and unconditionally loved.

Practice:

The “so what?” test is a confidence-building tool. It challenges you to believe in your truth, your dreams and the issues you believe are important. And working with the journalistic tools you already have can help.

Make a list of three dreams you have for yourself that you feel shy or afraid to talk about. Are there ways you can change how you tell the story of this dream? Start exploring the 5Ws: Who can I talk to about my dream? What could I share – or, not share? Where can I go to explore my dream? When can I start? Why is this dream important to me? How do I realize my dream?

Chapter 11

Tip #9: Show, don't tell

Journalistic professional skill:

If I say that I'm "happy" or my new shoes were "expensive," these telling words really mean nothing. After all, we might have different ideas of what makes us happy.

IAs for "expensive," buying a pair of shoes that cost more than $35 might feel pricey to me. Or, maybe $500 would feel expensive. Once I share these prices, you have a better idea of what I mean.

By the way, I know someone who works for a designer, who paid $1,700 for a pair of sandals! Now, that's an example of showing and not just telling.

Of course, sometimes, it's okay to only tell. It's also okay to show AND tell. Use your judgement as a storyteller. What examples of showing are most are important for your story?

Life Skill:

Showing is an absolutely necessary communication skill. For example, if I'm upset with a loved one in my life, it's meaningless to say: "You hurt my feelings." This instantly puts the other person on the defensive because they don't really know what you're talking about.

Try this instead: *When you forgot to wish me 'happy birthday,' I knew you also forgot that you had promised to take me out for dinner yesterday. And it really hurt my feelings.*

Practice:

As an exercise in self-awareness, notice how you talk. Do you tend to use "telling" words to describe your situations and feelings? When do you show and describe what you mean? What happens when you consciously try to show more, rather than just tell?

Chapter 12

Congratulations! You did it!

I hope you enjoy the journey ahead! If you keep practicing these nine tips, you'll realize they are more than just tips and tools. You're embracing a discipline that can change your entire life. And here we are, listed one more time:

1, It's all about the 5Ws

2. Group together facts that relate to each other

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Have fun and enjoy the journey!