

COPY THAT

Writing for Yearbooks

A Beginner's Handbook

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Junior Russ Solis admitted he's not sure he'd have run for sophomore class Student Council president or perhaps some other club officer post if it hadn't been for "the scholarship."

He wants "the scholarship," and, at this school, if you mention the scholarship, no one asks, "Which scholarship are you talking about?" Everyone knows it's the Santa Rosa Walsh Foundation Scholarship.

Everyone knows because almost every student attending Santa Rosa High School is trying to earn their share of it, and the good thing is, they're not competing against each other. They're competing against themselves.

So, they do what they have to do to earn points that will translate into financial aid they can use to attend any other post-secondary institution — Texas A&M to Amarillo Dental Assistant School.

They earn points in all sorts.



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For writing prompts, assignments and other instructional handouts, visit www.radicalwrite.com and click on the "CopyThat" link.

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I UNDERSTAND.

You were handed an almost impossible task. Crank out a yearbook on time and under budget without infuriating parents or triggering an emergency school board meeting or making the 6 o'clock news. Of course, the first thing you do is thumb through last year's book and think "I'm OK." or "I'm toast."

Either way, you're stuck, so you watch YouTube videos. You fish the internet for tips. You call your publishing company rep two or three times a day, and slowly, you develop a kinship with photos, headlines and consistent internal spacing. Everything seems possible until someone mentions "copy," which means writing, and that, for some reason, throws you for a loop. What once looked possible now appears impossible.

Well, cheer up. This step-by-step approach shows you how to find stories hidden in plain sight, how to interview, how to write leads, how to organize a story, how to edit it efficiently and how to end it gracefully. I'll explain why voice-driven features must replace say-nothing news articles, data-choked research papers and puffy, stuffy essays if we aspire to produce a book that is enjoyed on Day 1 and treasured in Year 50.

This isn't magic nor mystery nor theoretical mathematics. It's a step-by-step process that requires nothing more than an open mind and an open eye.

TRUST ME, YOU CAN DO THIS.

IF ANY OF THIS
SOUNDS FAMILIAR,
YOU MAY BE THE NEW
YEARBOOK ADVISER.

YOU HAVE LITTLE or no journalism training, so you'll grasp hieroglyphics before you understand AP style or yearbook company software.

YOU'VE NEVER written a feature story in your life.

YOU HAVE A FAMILY and friends, and you haven't time to teach grammar to students who should have mastered subject/verb agreement years ago.

YOU INHERITED staff members who owe their allegiance to the former adviser or who signed up because they think this class is a cut-and-paste Easy A. They certainly didn't sign up to interview, observe, write, edit, proof and rewrite stories.

COPY THAT

An explanation of why
yearbooks need copy,
and why that copy should
say something more than
"It was very exciting. We
had a lot of fun."

BOBBY HAWTHORNE

Austin, Texas

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR.

Like most of the other children attending Hazelton Elementary School, first grader Nicholas Wayt loves the new "Writing Buddy" program.

The program pairs younger children with an older mentor student, and they talk and share stories and correct each other and in doing so often form a special rapport.

Nicholas' favorite writing buddy is a third grader. Her name is Rylie. When he's working with her, he listens intently, almost reverentially, as if every word she speaks is pure gold.

This brings great satisfaction to one of the "Writing Buddy" instructors because Nicholas is her son, and his favorite writing buddy is Evelyn Wayt, his sister.

"At home, it's a different story between them, but when they're working together at school, they hug and act like they haven't seen each other in weeks.



HOVERING OVER THE WATER, a huge, terrifying cloud emits thunder and lightning during an early-morning thunderstorm off the coast of the State of Texas. "Thunderstorms are scary because a person can be struck by lightning and injured or even killed," said a senior who responded to a text. "IMHO, that would be exciting but not entirely fun."

TELL A STORY

**COOL PHOTO, BUT
SO WHAT? WHAT
DOES IT MEAN?
WHY IS IT HERE?
WHO CARES?**

Here's the "so what?"
The person who shot
this photograph
is an insomniac.
He happened to
be awake at 2 a.m.
when the massive
thunderstorm rolled
through. He has a
story. "One hot and
sticky July night..."

Yearbooks should be
full of stories like this
one. They shouldn't
be full of superficial
quotes from random
kids who respond to
a text asking them,
"Is sleep important to
you?"

One hot and sticky July night, AP English teacher James Prather couldn't sleep, which was no big shock since he's an insomniac and has been most of his life. He was vacationing with his wife and three kids on Galveston Island, and he was monitoring a spectacular thunderstorm that looked like something out of the D-Day Invasion.

"It was magnificent, so I strolled down to the beach lugging my new Canon D7 and a huge 70-200mm lens and a tripod," Prather said. "I shot for about 20 minutes before I realized I was in standing directly in the path of an electric storm while holding a large chunk of iron, so I scooted back to the condo."

He said he crawled up to a second-floor deck and continued to shoot until he felt the hairs on the back of his neck bristling.

"I climbed down, found a comfortable deck chair on the covered patio, bagged my camera and lens, slipped on my headphones and listened to Pink Floyd's 'Dark Side of the Moon,'" he said. "It seemed appropriate."

For the record, he dozed off a couple of times, but "It didn't amount to much," he said. "I got a few decent photos, but not much in the way of winks. So, now you know what it's like to be an insomniac."

■ THE POWERS THAT 'BEE'

The last of the Powers clan is taking one final shot at the Scripps National Spelling Bee crown. Eighth grader Katie Powers is the fourth of four siblings, all of whom had advanced to the national round only to fall just short of the title.

"My oldest sister, Karen, finished fourth in 2014, and my brother, Aaron, placed three two years later," Katie said. "My older sister, Kaitlin, didn't place, but she came down with the flu the day of the tournament, so the family decided not to disown her."

Both parents also participated in the Spelling Bee as teens.

"It's a family thing," Katie said. "We still have our own competitions at home and when we're driving long distances, like to Colorado. It's a great way to pass time."

Katie said she's making no guarantees as to how far she'll advance. The National Spelling Bee will be June 2 in Washington D.C.

"I'd love to win, of course," she said. "Who wouldn't? I'm working hard, but if I don't walk away with the big prize, that's OK. The experience has been great. It's helped me tremendously at school, and I'm getting a free trip to Washington out of it."

**WHY DO WE NEED
COPY IN OUR
YEARBOOKS?
EVERYONE KNOWS
EVERYONE, AND
THEY ALL KNOW
EVERYTHING.**

Not true. Everyone does not know everyone. Everyone does not know everything. Even if they did, how would you know it? You're just assuming that everyone knows everything because you think you do.

Sure, most may know that an event was held, but they don't know how it affected this girl or that boy, and it is ridiculous to suggest that everyone experienced the same event in the same way. Your copy should reveal how different people have different experiences, and different people often react differently to shared experiences.