

Advice from Anne Paine, environmental reporter, The Tennessean

1. Make sure there is a local angle, first and foremost. I have to relate everything to folks living within Nashville and surrounding counties. My editors are always asking "What's the impact?" When they say that, they are talking about the impact to as many people as possible in a relatively narrow area - Nashville and the counties that touch it. I can't come back with an answer that there's an endangered animal in East Tennessee or Alabama that would be harmed or an important development project in those areas that wouldn't be completed because of a creature. I've got to have a dollar and cents, health or some other kind of effect or credible reason why a lot of people should care locally.
2. Get your info together as much as possible beforehand so you can present it simply and clearly. On the other hand, I love people calling with tips - any tips, good or bad - anytime. I depend on tips, (whether it's about a tiny snail that's showed up or a hazardous waste problem) and it's fine if details are sketchy. That's a reporter's job to work out whether something is news, and if it should be pursued. But if someone knows something about the topic and is pushing a particular view, they should provide that info. Emailing the reporter any basic facts as well as telephoning them doesn't hurt.
3. Sometimes I get overwhelmed with info that an enthusiastic advocate will send. I like having plenty 'o documents, but if I can't easily grasp the bottom line that can be a problem in the deadline-driven world a reporter is bound to.
4. Provide phone numbers and emails where I can find you day or night. Sometimes people only give me a work number and that can be a problem since I and other reporters frequently end up working off hours, trying to look into an issue while working on another more pressing story the editors want.
5. If a person knows of a potential photograph that could be taken or videotape that could be made to illustrate whatever the story is about or has data suitable for a graph, mention it. The newspaper is very visually oriented these days and the online version of the paper is a large focus. We are doing videotapes along with most any other visual way we can make a story come alive for a reader/viewer.
6. My pet peeve these days is when a person I have called for info tells me "just look on" this or that website. Navigating and finding what I need can be too time consuming and confusing. I'm often in need of "chat," quotes that people relate too. That said, I like it when I'm given a website address and the person explains what's there to me, and how to get what's needed. I always want web addresses to include with stories online so the public (and I) can learn more.
7. Don't think because you have talked to a reporter that a story will appear. Be patient, but not too patient. I don't mind callbacks on a topic in a week, two weeks or more. Sometimes there's a good story that I want to pitch to my editors, but I get bogged down in other pressing stories (I'm working as the night (2-11 p.m.) police reporter this week since we're short-staffed). The info you might have given me can get buried under other

info and, yes, forgotten. I appreciate callbacks - reminders - and also folks who understand that even if that particular story is not written, I am still interested and need to keep apprised of what's going on out there. A related story might crop up and a reporter can get the bigger picture - or have a source - as a result of the earlier info.

8. Be thick-skinned and brave. I tend (tend!) not to be prickly, but some reporters are. You can ask if they have time to talk before you start on what you've got to say.

9. Despite everything said above... There are no rules. Please everyone call or email me anytime day or night - with anything you've got. Plus, I'm willing to advise as to where else in the newspaper a person might turn to place information.

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