Explain This!

Course overview and final thoughts
Is explanatory journalism really needed?

(Yes)
Agenda

Review

- The need
- Your audience
- It’s hard!
- All in the attitude
FREEDOM OF THE PRESS IS LIMITED TO THOSE WHO OWN ONE.

(Allott Joseph Liebling said)
"To understand perfectly a new country, new situation, the new characters you confront on an assignment, is impossible. To understand more than half, so that your report will have significant correlation with what is happening, is hard. To transmit more than half of what you understand is a hard trick, too, far beyond the task of the so-called creative artist, who if he finds a character in his story awkward can simply change its characteristics. (Even to sex, vide Proust and Albertine. Let him try it with General de Gaulle.) It is possible, occasionally, to get something completely right: a scene, or a pattern of larceny, or a man's mind."
Attitude is Everything
What we will discuss today

- Your many audiences
- You and what you know
- The desert island
- The ‘arc of familiarity’
What you need to explain depends on.....

- What you know
- What your readers know
- What they don’t know
Module 2
Standard news articles

● Can news and explanation coexist? (Even on deadline?)

● ‘Write and fix’ vs ‘frame it first’

● Explanatory phrases, sentences, sections
WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- Jargon
- Basic background
- Identification of key people/points of view
- Summary of significance
Two approaches to writing news (with clarity)

WRITE AND FIX

Pros
- More practical on deadline
- Can help with writing ‘flow’

Cons
- Easier to forget things
- Shoehorning items in later can be hard

FRAME IT FIRST

Pros
- Less likely to forget things
- Makes it easier to spot holes

Cons
- Takes longer!
- Easy to get bogged down
- Awareness
- Understanding
- Phrase, sentence or section?
Agenda

the nub noun

: the main part or point of something

the nub of the story/problem/matter/argument
Breaking it down

- Recognize
- Research
- Think
- Write/Tighten
- Check
WHY

- Readers like them!
- They get read!
- They save time!
- They make great packaging!
- They fight misinformation!
HOW

- What to explain
- Who will write
- Angle and format
- Micro or macro
- Outline
- The Nub, Part 2
AUTISM CASES UP

AUTISM CASES UP; CAUSE IS UNCLEAR

By Erica Goode
Jan. 26, 2004

No one disputes it. Cases of autism, the baffling and often devastating neurological disorder that strikes in early childhood, are rising sharply.

In California alone, the number of children receiving special services for autism tripled from 1987 to 1998 and doubled in the four years after that. National figures tell a similar story.
As Autism Cases Rise, Parents Run
Frenzied Race to Get Help

By Jane Gross
Jan. 30, 2004

When Phyllis Lombardi lets her 6-year-old son, Joey, play in her
yard here, she cannot take her eyes off him because he is autistic,
barely speaks and might bolt into traffic.

But a fence costs more than the Lombardis can afford since they
moved to this Westchester County village last year. Ardsley has
state-of-the-art autism programs, but also real estate prices that
have forced the family into a rental just a block from the Saw Mill
River Parkway.

It was desperation that brought the family here from Rockland
County, when Mrs. Lombardi joined an army of parents, their
frustration growing as their numbers increased, facing a crisis of
supply and demand when their autistic children reach school age.
Six years ago, my son James fell down a well, and he's still climbing out.

James has autism. He is one of 150,000 or more American children classified in the last decade as having the once-rare disorder, including 25,000 in 2003. Half a century ago, polio epidemics left perhaps 5,000 children a year with some degree of disability, and the sight of children stricken overnight galvanized the nation. But autism's arrival, and the response to it, has not been so dramatic.

In James's case, a bubbling 2-year-old who loved "mashed potatoes" and sword-fighting faded away. In his place was a nearly silent, unhappy child who repeated meaningless phrases, lay on the floor squinting or pulled cowboy boots on and off until his feet were raw. Every day he fell a little further out of the world.

But one recent afternoon James sat at our kitchen table with his best friend, Larry, goofing off instead of doing homework. They made dumb jokes and gossiped about their "girlfriends" at their school, just up the street.

It's hard for me to explain how many dreams-come-true are reflected in that one sentence.