

# 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.**

*(Abbatt Joseph Liebling said)*



MOTTO COSMOS

"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

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a black marker, writing the words "Attitude is Everything" in a cursive, handwritten style on a white surface. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with the marker tip touching the end of the word "Everything". The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# 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



# AGENDA

## 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**

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# Two approaches to writing news (with clarity)

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## 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?**

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# 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

7 MIN READ

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.

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# *As Autism Cases Rise, Parents Run Frenzied Race to Get Help*



Give this article



By **Jane Gross**

Jan. 30, 2004

7 MIN READ

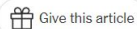
When Phyllis Lombardi lets her 6-year-old son, Joey, play in her yard here, she cannot take her eyes off him because he is autistic, barely speaks and might bolt into traffic.

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.

# *One Boy's Journey Out of Autism's Grasp*

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**By John O'Neil**

Dec. 29, 2004

12 MIN READ

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 totatoes" 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.

