

OTAKU | JOURNALIST

15 Worksheets

to plan, build, and bolster your



Niche Journalism Career



in 15 minutes or less.

by Lauren Orsini

Nobody knows your niche like you do.

You're more than a participant—you're a fan.

You know what readers care and what types of news they want to read about because if you weren't out there writing? You'd want to read it, too.

That gives you an edge over other writers and reporters already. You're in tune with your audience and your community just by being there.

I believe that if you're the one geeking out about something, you should be the one to tell its story. You'll be more likely to get the big picture, include the little details fans care about, and explain it all most clearly to outsiders.

You've got the passion, but you may be unsure on the specifics. That's where I come in.

This workbook is designed to help you build your niche career from the bottom to the top, starting with a mission statement and ending with valuable scripts I personally use in my professional work, even today.

Each worksheet takes 15 minutes or less, but will lead you straight toward the clarity you need to plan, build, and bolster a niche reporting career.

You know your subject. We just need to fill in the blanks.

Now let's get started.

Your mission statement

You're a writer, but maybe not the self-promote-y kind. Use this worksheet to explain what you do to other people. In the following worksheet, we'll turn it into a self-introduction.

What are your fandoms?

What are your geek credentials?

Examples: fanfiction writer, convention volunteer

What are your writing credentials?

Examples: any professional writing, your degree, your blog

Which of your prior articles/blog posts merge both?

Examples: any professional or personal writing on your fandom.

Your self-introduction

OK, now that you've brainstormed what you're all about, it's time to fill in the blanks.

You can use this self-introduction on a blog or portfolio about page or a truncated version when pitching yourself to news editors.



I'm _____, nice to meet you!

I'm best known for my work about _____, but there's a side of me that my colleagues there might not know about.

Ever since I first discovered it, I've been geeking out about _____. I've gotten pretty good at it too! You can check out my contributions to the fandom at _____.

This community has enriched my life and I want to share that with other people through my reporting. Here are some of the [articles/posts] that best encompass my geeky writing:

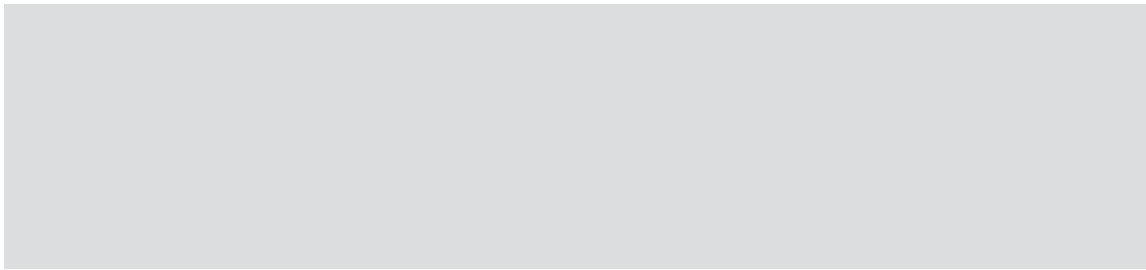
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Thanks for reading and feel free to [look around my site/browse my portfolio/contact me if you have a story with my name on it.]

Your reporting beat

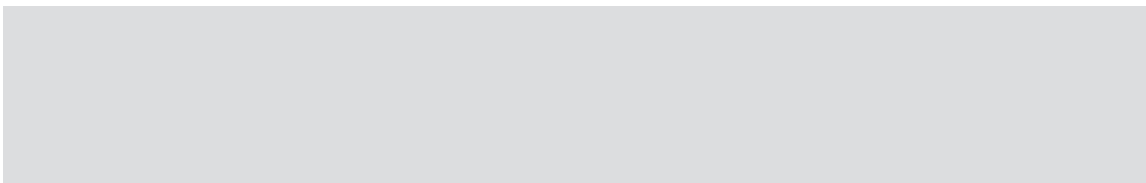
A good beat will be on a subject both **you** and **your intended audience** find interesting. It will also be something you know (or can learn) enough about to eventually become an expert on the topic.

1) Which specific topics interest you? Write down everything that comes to mind because we're going to narrow it down soon.



2) Now, which of these topics do you know well enough to feel confident writing about on a regular basis. Add a star next to those.

3) List some news sites that cover these subjects. If news sites are covering them, that means there is an interested audience.



4) Pick the topic on your list that best fits the criteria: it interests you, it interests your audience, and it's something you know (or plan to know) very well. Congratulations, you've found your beat!

My beat is: _____

Beat upkeep

Covering a beat well means regularly checking in with the **people**, **places**, and **other news** in your subject.

Fans, bloggers, industry workers, and creators are just some of the people who make up beats. Who are some of the people in your beat?

The people you cover spend time interacting in online forums and social networks. What are the places that make up your beat?

Name some of the news sites and other reporters who cover topics on your beat:

This information is most helpful if you check in on your beat every day. Assign yourself some tasks:

Check these news sites: _____

Follow these hashtags: _____

Visit/participate in these forums: _____

Checking in

One of the best ways to stay in touch with your community and find new story ideas is to send occasional check-in emails to your sources. This shows that you value their input and that you're committed to reporting on the things that matter to them.

I've written a sample email to a source below:



Dear _____ ,

I hope you're doing well.

Earlier this month, I reached out to you when I was reporting a story on _____. I've added a link to the story so you can see how it turned out.

I'm between stories right now, so I'm hoping you can help me out again.

Your [*blog posts/news articles/forum posts*] are a major resource for me when I'm looking for stories, and it's clear you're an expert in the field. I'm wondering if you're aware of any happenings in our topic that I might not have heard about yet, and which you think people would be interested in reading about.

Let me know if you've heard anything, and don't hesitate to reach out to me any time you've got a story!

Your friendly neighborhood reporter,

Brainstorm story ideas

When I'm at a loss for ideas, I brainstorm by considering four sources of inspiration. This worksheet gives you a space to try it out.

Inspired by a current event

Getting started: What's on Page One? What are people talking about in your community? What just blipped onto your radar?

Inspired by a person

Getting started: Whose name keeps popping up in the news? Who has been a valuable source to you? Who founded that interesting new blog?

Inspired by a previous story

Getting started: What's a topic or even the media covered but seems to have forgotten about? Could it use an update?

Inspired by your own experience

Getting started: What makes your interpretation of current events unique? How can you tie the news to a personal level?

Answer the right questions

A good fandom story objectively and clearly answers three questions that fans and readers need to know.

Before you even start writing, pick one story idea and fill in the blanks for each block. If you can fill in all three, you have a winner.

What's going on?

Example: The Attack on Titan manga sold 2.5 million copies.

Why do fans care?

Example: Attack on Titan was initially a fan favorite.

Why should readers care?

Example: Attack on Titan is now more popular than any Western comic.

Reaching out to a VIP

This email includes three parts. First, who are you and why should the VIP talk to you? Second, what do you want to talk about? And third, how will this benefit the VIP?

Dear [VIP name goes here],

I'm [me] and I'm a [reporter/podcaster] for [my outlet]. I'm writing an article about [my topic] and there's nobody I'd rather talk to about it than you.

I'd like to find out about your availability for an interview about [my topic]. I know your time is very valuable, so I won't waste it with questions you've answered a hundred times before. In general, I'm interested in asking about your own opinions and views.

If you're reporting for a large outlet:

[My outlet] receives [X] [page views/Facebook likes/etc.] every day. We're known as an authority on [topic] and have even received accolades for our reporting on the subject. A published interview with you could be mutually beneficial.

If you're not:

My audience at [X] may not be as large as the one you command on your own, but it is still a different demographic. The exposure you'd receive from our interview could earn you some new fans.

My deadline is [X] and I'm free to talk on the phone or send you questions through email at your earliest convenience. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,
[Your name and contact info here]

Interview questions

You already know about Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. Now the trick is tailoring these basics for different subjects. Here are topics you should ask everyone about, and a few example questions:



■ Questions about the past

How did you get involved with [interview topic]?
Who have been your most influential mentors?
What was your first encounter with [interview topic]?
Why...
When...
Where...

■ Questions about the present and future

Where do you primarily engage in [interview topic]?
Why do you continue to do it after all this time?
What do you have planned for the future?
Who...
When...
How...

■ Questions involving subjectivity/opinions

How would you edit/revise your work in [topic] if you had to?
Who else should I interview about this topic?
When did you realize [interview topic] was at a turning point?
Why...
When...
Where...

Pre-publication checklist

Deadlines are tight, but you'll be far more likely to avoid mistakes in your journalism career if you take precautions. Here's a list you can check off (here or just mentally) before you publish:

■ Close contact with sources

- Did you strongly suggest an in-person or phone interview, and use an email interview only as a last resort?
- Did you save all your notes or recordings?

■ Solid proof of evidence

- If you used photos, is there any chance they've been altered?
- If you used screenshots, can you recreate them?
- Are you sure you haven't been fooled by a parody website?

■ Verification for the story's claims

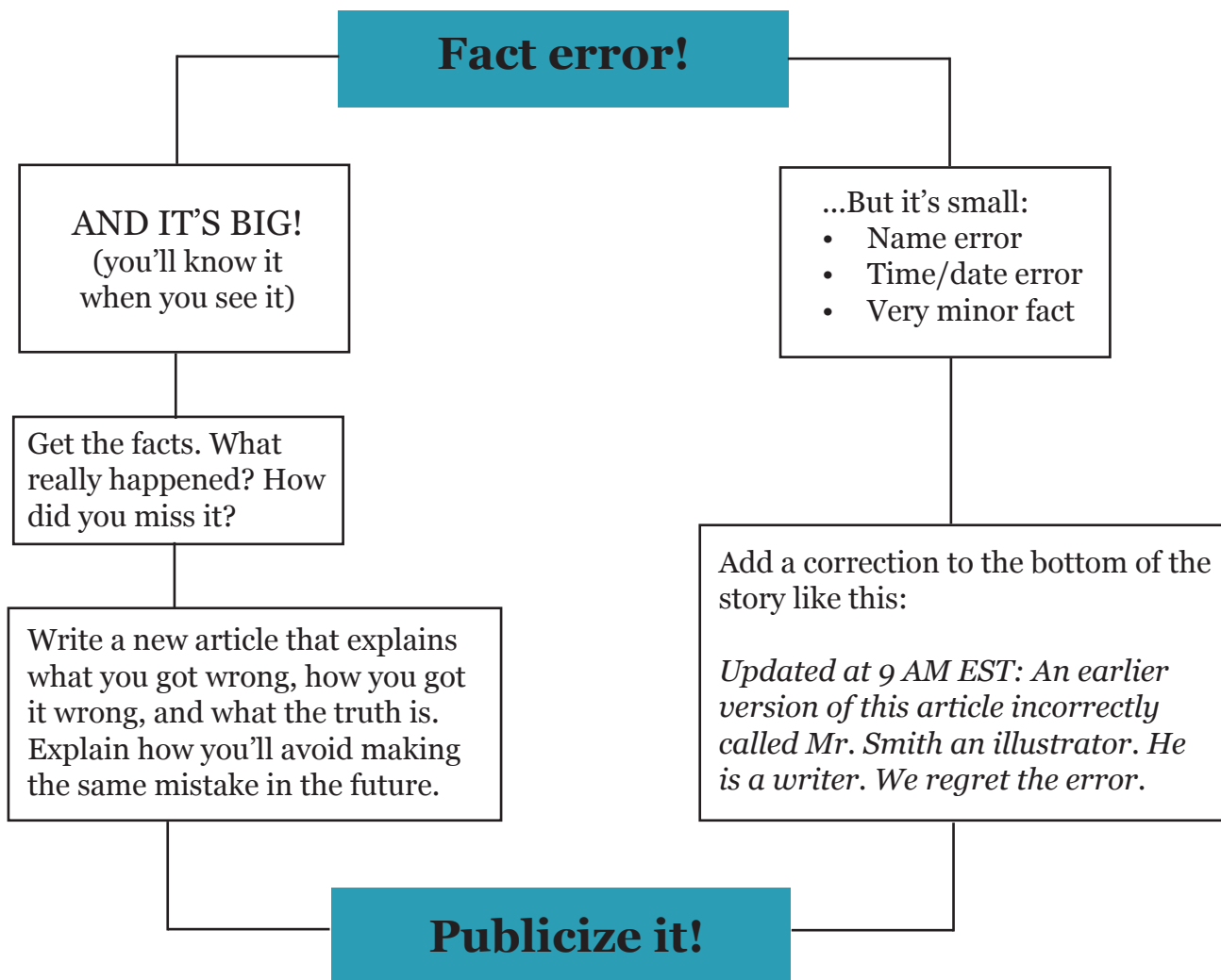
- Did you contact any large corporations mentioned in the article?
- Did you make any assumptions that logically sound true, but that you haven't double-checked to be sure?

■ Considered all viewpoints

- Did you speak to at least three people if your deadline permitted?
- Did you consider how this story affects even people who disagree with its subject?

Damage control cheat sheet

Hopefully you won't ever need this flowchart, but mistakes happen. Here's how to keep your head on straight and clean up after an error slips past you:



Contacting a press liaison

Subject: Reporter interested in covering your convention

Dear [Press Liaison] at [Convention],

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm [myself], a [writer/podcaster/student] at [X]. I'm very interested in covering your convention as a member of the press.

Use the next paragraph if you're an experienced reporter:

If you're interested in seeing my previous coverage, I do most of my reporting at [blog/website/YouTube channel] and I'd love for you to check it out.

Use the next paragraph if you're an inexperienced reporter:

I'm just getting started and I don't have a website to show you, but I've attached some writing samples. They may not all be anime related, but they're some of the pieces I'm most proud of.

If you choose to accept me, I plan to spend the convention working on [reporting project of your choice]. I'd be happy to share it with you when it's published.

Please let me know if you need anything else. I hope to meet you at [Fan convention]!

Best,
[Your name and contact info here]

Event coverage checklist

Events sap the strength out of all of us, but if you can make it a habit to do these things during and after cons, your reporting will be better for it. Here are two checklists you can use to stay accountable:



Nightly checklist for events

- Type up all handwritten notes into legible computer print.
- Load audio and video recordings onto a laptop or hard drive.
- Load best photos into DropBox or similar service.
- Review the schedule for program alterations.

Post-event to-do list

- Touch base with editors ASAP; set story deadlines.
- Join the event's mailing list.
- Follow up with the event press liaison.
- Get some rest, finally!

Where to write

I think your first niche writing publication should be your blog. You can test out ideas without seeing if they meet an editor's approval first. But eventually, you'll want to find work elsewhere. Here's how to figure out where you should pitch your work.

Where do you currently read news about your preferred niche?

Name some journalists you admire. Where do they write?

Now pick three of the sites you listed . Find the contact email and an editor's name to write to. Even if the email is `press@X.com`, I challenge you to find a human name by reading the masthead or about page. It isn't hard and ups your chance of getting a reply.

Publication:

Editor's Name:

Email:

Publication:

Editor's Name:

Email:

Publication:

Editor's Name:

Email:

Send a pitch email

This email begins by humanizing you and sharing some vital details about your experience and how you discovered the opportunity. The second half is all business.

Dear [Editor],

I heard [from a colleague/on a freelance message board] that you're accepting new freelance writers, so I wanted to reach out and introduce myself. My name is [your name] and I'm a [city] based writer with a focus on [comics/games/etc.] news. Over the past X years, I've written about X for [previous workplace/high school or college paper]. You can see samples of my work on my website.

I see that [Editor's site] already covers a lot of pop culture news, but I notice that [your specific niche] news has been fairly absent for some time. I'd like to pitch a few things in this vein if you think they'd fit the site. As a long time reader myself, I had a few ideas on what might engage readers:

1. Niche Story Idea #1
2. Niche Story Idea #2

Thanks for your time. Let me know if either of these sound like a fit!

Best,
[Your name and contact info here]

Thanks for reading!

If you like what you saw here, I've got more for you:

- Check out my blog, which is full of information and inspiration for aspiring niche reporters. It's over at OtakuJournalist.com.
- Read one of my books. Otaku Journalism is about building a niche reporting career you love, and it's targeted at geeky niches in particular. Build Your Anime Blog is half advice guide, half interview session with 14 of the Web's most successful anime bloggers.
- Take my free course, the Niche Reviewer Crash Course, and laser-focus on writing informed reviews for four different niche topics.
- Let me know what you thought of the workbook! Drop me a line at lauren@otakujournalist.com. Better yet, use my handy form!



About me:

I'm **Lauren Orsini, the Otaku Journalist**. I believe if you're totally geeking out about a story, you should be the one to tell it. My own brand of journalism can be found at Forbes, Anime News Network, and dozens of other places.

See you around the web!

