

Exercise 1: Answer

Setting up a to-do list is a good start. You'll need to research your round and to establish contacts, but you'll also need to start producing stories. Here are some ideas.

First find out how your paper has been covering the arts round. Go back over previous issues. This will clarify expectations from your chief of staff. Is there a weekly page to fill? How much is pre-set copy – regular columns, reviews etc? How much is your responsibility?

Further questions to ask yourself: How much of the arts is generally covered – how much scope is there for a broader take on the arts? What are the local issues and do any stories 'escape' the arts pages to become general news? Who are the major spokespeople?

Then find and talk to the arts buffs among the newspaper staff. They'll appreciate being approached for their expertise and support.

Map out a picture of the arts in your patch, so you can start writing and establishing contacts.

For stories: The city council website is a good place to find out what's on and what's coming up. Search more widely too – local tertiary institutions are a great source of arts activities as are schools. Libraries can host writers and poets talking about their work. Then there are professional visiting acts, artists, dance and music groups etc. Do your research and check with colleagues – the local college might be renowned for putting on daring plays, the NZ ballet often has local kids performing as part of the show, the visiting comedian may have grown up in your region. All good stories.

Developing contacts: Find out what are the major spheres of action and begin visiting people. Art galleries, for instance, are an easy place to start – the public or city gallery and smaller private ones. Find out about them online, then visit and talk to the directors about what's on and what's coming up. It's a good idea to start with the public or city gallery and to remember you can go beyond painting and sculpture to video, live installations and so on.

Be systematic about investigating all the major performing and fine arts from drama (amateur to professional, from long-established to pop-up street theatre), music (from vocal to orchestral, rock, folk, rap experimental), through to wearable arts and various crafts. Museums will be part of your round. Māori arts are a significant part of the New Zealand art scene and you should get to know local artists. Your region may also have ethnic groups who will put on performances.

You also need to know about funding. Arts work on a shoestring and the vagaries of their funding, the struggles for audiences, to build facilities and so on are important to know and form stories in themselves.

Systems will be important as there will be many activities and people keen to talk. Compile a list of organisations, places and people. Start setting up your diary from the beginning.

Always address the challenge of finding the element of stories – what’s different, does something local reflect a new trend, is there a controversy? You don’t want to end up just describing upcoming events.

A hint for maintaining a successful round (partly applicable to other rounds): People in the arts are highly dedicated to their specialties, often working hard for little recognition. News coverage is important to their reputation and maybe to their income. Local people have hierarchies, histories and sensitivities. Always be polite and professional, don’t gossip about anyone. The arts are extremely varied and there’s much scope for writing about new ventures. However, even if you want to revamp your paper’s arts reporting, you shouldn’t completely ignore the established in favour of the novel. Your readers also have their expectations too, so don’t ditch all coverage of the local repertory in favour of the punk revival movement. Keep the spread of coverage – there’s news across your whole round. Go out and get it.

Exercise 2: Answer

The New Zealand Herald

The *Herald’s* website is presenting itself as a national online news service, so you find stories from around the country and around the world. Also, the nature of online news (with its rapid turnover, featuring more ‘clickbait’ crime, celebrity and disaster coverage than hard copy newspapers) is evident in the homepage stories

‘Why I believe David Bain is guilty’. This top story reignites the story of the murder of five Bain family members in Dunedin 1994. David Bain was convicted of the murders in 1995, but was later retried and acquitted in 2009. The story arises from a Newstalk ZB interview with Christchurch Press reporter Martin Van Beynan who’d just released a 10-part podcast telling why he believed Bain was guilty.

The story reveals the close links between all parts of the media and the power of follow-up. It is of course ‘bad news’ and has the strong pull of crime news. While it is a national story it has long been prime news retaining its relevance as Bain battled for compensation.

‘Gutless’ road-rage: Woman punched in face. One may ask why this unpleasant incident in New South Wales received such high-profile NZ coverage New Zealand. The answer probably lies in it having been captured on video and the victim taking to Facebook to vent her feelings. Bad news with an emotional/personal impact, the story trended highly in the ‘most popular’ column.

Verging on ridiculous. This quirky story comes from Tauranga where locals are amused at a newly laid footpath with regular kinks to give space to growth of newly planted trees. Again,

it's accompanied by a short music-backed video. This light story provides the balance editors sometimes seek to lift the grimness of the front page.

The sidebar stories

Driveway death: Shotgun blast fired '30cm away from toddler'. The latest news from a trial of a father accused of killing his child in their Auckland driveway. It's a crime story with strong emotional appeal that attracted national attention.

Synthetic drugs making city feel unsafe. This was about the use of synthetic cannabis in downtown Auckland and was linked to problems of 'rough' behaviour and begging on the street. This story with its visceral appeal to our fear of 'the other' was rapidly replaced by a report from Middlemore hospital about recent deaths from a new type of synthetic cannabis on the streets.

Apple urges iPhone owners to update now. More bad news about internet security. A 'bug' in the WiFi chip opens the door for hackers and owners are advised to add an update to protect themselves.

Zac ditched for Bachelor girls' night out. This was a short-lived entertainment story featuring TV Three's *NZ Bachelor* contestants.

Steven Adams linked with move to Knicks. This sports story about NZ NBA star Steven Adams had more traction. While American men's professional basketball has relatively little following in NZ, Adams is a homegrown success story with an envy-making earning capacity in the USA.

Tumultuous Thursdays – the new week day weather curse. Weather/disaster stories always rate highly with the audience and this prediction of yet more torrential rain – this time in the North Island – follows two previous Thursdays where rain had caused flooding havoc in both islands.

East & Bays Courier

This paper fills a different niche in the market. It's delivered three times a week and many who read it will also read *The New Zealand Herald*, but here they are looking for different news. Community news is frequently about celebrating the local area and its people. So it's often good news, although community give-aways will also tackle local issues – note the concern with local vandalism, rubbish collection difficulties, traffic and so on.

Again, the online paper differs from the hard copy and features on the sidebar a variety of Auckland headlines. The *Courier* is part of the Stuff group whose reporters work seamlessly for their local paper(s) and for the nationwide online news service. Stuff (the major competitor to NZME and *New Zealand Herald*) is promoting its wider Auckland presence through the *Courier* website

Raising a glass to knowledge. This feel good, future event story is typical community newspaper fare. It's about a University of Auckland plan to send 20 academics out to public bars to give lectures as part of the international 'Raise the bar' initiative. This story, like a number featuring on the *Courier* site, shows the reliance on shared Stuff content.

Police urge caution on wet roads. This Auckland police story is an example of the community service element of community, and a number of provincial, papers.

Court battle over 32-year home. This Glen Innes story of state house tenant Niki Rauti taking her eviction case to the High Court is bang in the *Courier's* circulation area. This David versus Goliath story is packed with human interest, touches on the fraught issue of demolition of state houses and allows the paper to demonstrate its tagline 'Championing the local community'.

Auckland's big rubbish shake-up. A whole of Auckland story is humanised.

Auckland reserve targeted by vandals. This is a bad news local story about a Mt Wellington reserve being littered and vandalised by groups of up to 100 drinkers a night. It details frustration of local residents and businesses, pointing out that the local pre-school can no longer use the park. A council spokesperson is sought for a response.

Butts our most littered item. Another story that affects a lot of Aucklanders. Note how the headline refers to "our", thereby identifying the news organisation with its audience.

Altogether, this snapshot of the two websites demonstrates the continued importance of micro-local stories, but also the fluidity of what is seen as 'local' and the changing nature of what audiences view as their 'backyard' and their concerns.