

Mike Fish gave 4 tips to OCC news writing students. Fish was supposed to give his speech in person however due to the Coronavirus he had to put his tips into a video for students to watch. Fish was a reporter for Post Standard for 35 years where he covered everything except for sports. He is now an editor for a wilderness journal in Toronto.

The first tip Fish gave was about writing a lede. Fish said Writing a lede is probably one of the toughest things to do. It has to be eye catching and make the reader want to continue reading the story. Something you can do to help you write a lede is use the telephone method. This is a method where you pretend to talk on the phone to a friend, your mom, or someone far away and explain the story to them since they weren't there. If you still feel stuck, share your idea with a friend. Fish said that the focus shouldn't be on being perfect or great. After you write something down then you can improve it.

Second tip is small talk. Your sources whether they are secret and taking a huge risk to talk to you or just your everyday police officer, attorney, or witness needs to feel confident in you and know that you are trustworthy, said Fish. Fish goes on to tell a story about how he used to be all business and no fun.

Until 1975 when he was covering a small town named Davie in Florida, and was involved in a 3 car pile up. It was 11pm on Interstate 45 and they ended up in the middle of the highway. Fish said the accident was so bad that he and the other drivers were lucky to make it out. The next morning while running on only 2-3 hours of sleep he had to go to Davie Town Hall. He describes the town Davie as a mix of the deep south and wild west, many of the residents rode horses and the McDonalds even had wooden hitching to tie up your horse. The town also had Ku Klux Klan rallies at night. Fish said that Davies felt like a different world. Nonetheless he still had a job to do and went to speak with the clerk. He almost gave her the usual responses but instead vented to her for about a minute about his accident and stress. This is when she turned into sort of a guide for him pointing him towards good stories and leads. Fish said that this is why small talk and building trust is so important.

The third tip is something that many might think of already, hard work. With this tip Fish said that being a journalist can be grinding but you need to do the job well if it's something you have a passion for. Your job is to keep the public informed. Fish shared a story from New York Times opinion columnist Russell Baker, who won 2 Pulitzer prizes which is the top award for journalists. Baker passed away in January 2019 at age 93. Before he passed away in an interview he was asked what class journalism students should take. His response was "students should be required to stand outside a closed door for 6 hours, the door opens, someone says 'no comment' and closes the door. Be required to write 800 words against a deadline." Fish laughs while telling this story and said that, that is sometimes how it is.

To further stress how important hard work is Fish goes on to tell a personal story from his own career. While working at the Standard Post and he was one out of three reporters asked to wait outside of a grand jury where inside they were discussing the former mayor of Syracuse Lee Alexander who was suspected of extorting bribes from businesses. Alexander was eventually sentenced to more than 6 years for his crimes but Fish said that there would be some days he and his colleagues would wait outside the door for 6 to 8 hours hoping to get something. Fish said that they were often the first to break many great stories in regards to this case. This is why hard work is important in journalism.

The fourth and final tip and Fish said the most fundamental out of them all is don't assume anything. "The worst thing you can do in journalism is make a mistake." Fish said, making a mistake about something critical is bad but simple mistakes are too. Be sure to ask plenty of questions even for things that might be considered simple. Fish says the question he finds opens up the most informative conversation is after you've asked all the questions say "Is there anything that I should've asked you about?" Fish says that oftentimes the person will give you information you weren't even expecting to get or talk about something you had no idea about.

After sharing his knowledge Fish closes by stating he can be reached by email with any further questions.

