

STEVE NOVAK

WRITER.EDITOR

Steve Novak

Copywriter | Copy editor |
Freelance journalist

SUMMARY

I have 19 years of experience as a copywriter and editor with work appearing in newspapers, websites, newsletters, and blogs, along with contributions to industry reports, technical proposals, and manuscripts. As a journalist for 17 years in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, I wrote and edited print and digital stories for The Express-Times, lehighvalleylive.com, The Star-Ledger, and NJ.com on topics including politics, environmental science, business, crime, human-interest and local history pieces. In addition to numerous state-level awards for writing and headlines, I won a 2021 Toner Prize for Political Reporting as co-lead reporter on the "Swing County, Swing State" project. I have produced freelance blog posts and newsletter copy for a fentanyl awareness campaign and edited research firm reports and publications. As a technical writer for a government contractor, I support multimillion-dollar government contract proposals in healthcare and national security through writing, editing, and interviewing industry experts for key personnel roles.

EXPERIENCE

Copywriter, copy editor, voiceover artist

VillaNovak Creative

Jan. 2024 – Present

- Develops content and provides editing services for clients including local news outlets, marketing agencies, and research firms.
- AP Style expert and proficient in Chicago Manual of Style.
- Notable projects include:
 - **"Farewell, old friend"**: 4,000-word long-form news feature on the history of The Express-Times for the newspaper's final print edition (Feb. 2, 2025), drawing from publicly available microfilm archives and direct experience.
 - **We Fight Fentanyl**: Series of blogs and newsletters written for three Pennsylvania counties' fentanyl public-awareness campaign.
 - **Public and industry reports**: Edited reports and other public materials on health and social topics for an Alaskan-based research firm.

- **Manuscript edits:** Provided first-time authors with editing resources to refine their manuscripts for clarity and consistency.
- **Voiceover credits:**
 - Additional voice on “Eyewitness WWII: Invasion Italy” (2023, Reda Films for National Geographic).
 - Mauch Chunk Trust Co., four online ads.

Technical proposal writer

RELI Group Inc.

Jan. 2024 – Present

- Writes and edits technical proposals for data and IT system contracts with federal agencies including Centers for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) and Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Supported more than 30 proposals in 2024 and 2025, with development timeframes ranging from one week to several months.
- As staffing-content specialist, writes over 100 resumes a year for key and essential personnel. Interviews candidates and subject matter experts to verify compliance with government solicitation requirements.
- Developed writers’ reference guide as a consistent resource for house styles and conventions, including spelling and punctuation, editing guidelines, and a list of acronyms and initialisms. Conducted technical edits, proofreads, or specific checks on at least 20 proposals.
- Experienced in Shipley method of phased proposal development. Collaborates with managers, section leads, and SMEs through document reviews.
- Developed understanding of government proposal evaluation through training by BARC Business Advisors and Melvin Broussard Consulting.
- Notable successful bids include:
 - **CMS Medicare Drug Price Negotiation Program Monitoring, Oversight, Compliance, and Auditing (MOCA) contract:** Contributed 11 key and essential personnel resumes and staff bios to the winning bid for contract worth up to \$59.9 million. Edited technical volume for compliance, checking deliverable frequency and timelines against requirements and collaborating with writers and subject matter experts to resolve discrepancies.
 - **CMS Making Care Primary (MCP) Model:** Approximately \$30 million contract awarded for monitoring and audit services for this program linking primary care clinicians to with health care specialists to address community and social health needs. Aided proposal development by interviewing eight key and essential personnel candidates and formatting their resumes; performed content mapping in technical volume.

Reporter, copy editor

NJ Advance Media (formerly Penn-Jersey Advance)

Primarily for The Express-Times and lehighvalleylive.com. Also appeared in

The Star-Ledger, NJ.com, and PennLive.com.
Aug. 2008 – Dec. 2023

Reporter, Dec. 2014 – Dec. 2023

- Produced copy and photography for daily news coverage with team of eight other reporters.
- Pitched and developed enterprise news features that added context to daily headlines, explained complicated topics, or elaborated on subjects or themes of regional interest, such as outdoors/environmental issues, local history, and weather and astronomical events, with pivots to breaking news as needed.
- Developed SEO proficiency, writing web-optimized content and researching keywords and trends. Successful posts included a COVID-19 shutdown explainer, weather forecast and storm-related information, and an annual calendar of astronomical events.
- Notable stories, achievements, and contributions:
 - **Swing County, Swing State:** Co-lead reporter on special project and story package covering the 2020 presidential election through diverse – and often-decisive – Northampton County in Pennsylvania. Wrote “Blue to red in 30 miles,” a centerpiece digital feature involving data, video, interviews and door-knocks along a single road spanning the county. Package won the 2021 Toner Prize for Excellence in Political Reporting from Syracuse University’s Newhouse School of Journalism and was a finalist for the 2021 Online Journalism Awards, with individual stories singled out for state journalism awards.
 - **COVID-19 coverage:** Part of three-person team compiling and visualizing state data daily through the pandemic, developing story angles based on new developments and trends. Unique coverage included a comparison to local headlines from the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic, a local air quality analysis, the choices Alcoholics Anonymous members and meeting hosts faced during the shutdown, and a personal connection to one of the first local patients to come off a ventilator and live. Team coverage was recognized with state media awards in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.
 - **Musikfest 40 for 40:** Researched and wrote package of 40 unique stories – one from each year of Musikfest – drawn from microfilm archives, with facts, quotes, and headliner lists.
 - **Lehigh Valley Then:** Pitched, launched, and wrote weekly history feature revisiting Express-Times headlines from 10, 25, 50, and 100 years prior. Researched via microfilm. Series lasted from May 2021 to January 2024.
 - **Stronger Than Steel:** Contributed historical content to special print section and digital series that highlighted the strengths of the Lehigh Valley region as an economic driver with unique and sponsored content and specialized ads. Section won state media awards.

- o **Edged Out:** Copy edited multipart series exploring effects of pandemic, local real estate market, and rising inequity in historically immigrant-rich Southside Bethlehem. Project supported through a USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism 2021 National Fellowship.

Content curator, news editor, assistant news editor, copy editor; April 2011 – Dec. 2014

- In copy-editing positions, proofread and fact-checked daily copy for accuracy, consistency and adherence to AP style. Wrote headlines and learned page design processes.
- In news editor positions, oversaw copy desk team of seven copy editors and paginators on tight deadlines. Responsible for daily print quality. Collaborated with senior editors and staff on layout plans, devising or approving alterations as necessary during late-breaking news situations.
- As a content curator, provided expertise to in-house style guide for NJ Advance Media after company branch merger. Responsible for Express-Times daily editing and presentation, providing editing support to other company papers such as necessary.
- Achievements included New Jersey Press Association awards for headline writing in 2012 and 2014.

Reporter, Aug. 2008 – April 2011

- Reported on politics, crime, and local interest features within a beat of northern New Jersey municipalities.
- Collaborated with team of 3 other New Jersey reporters on regional coverage.
- Notable stories included "Medicine or Mistake," team coverage of medical marijuana proposals, more than a decade before New Jersey would legalize marijuana use. The story package won a New Jersey state media award.

Reporter

The New Jersey Herald

June 2006 – July 2008

- Covered municipal and state-level politics, as well as crime and local interest features in northern New Jersey.
- Notable stories included "Newton's Nobel," an interview with NASA's Dr. John Mather – who won the Nobel Prize for his work on the COBE satellite confirming the cosmic background radiation – and some of the educators who taught him growing up in northwest New Jersey.

EDUCATION

B.A., Astronomy & Philosophy

Lycoming College, 2006

SKILLS

Copy editing
Copywriting
Interviewing
Resumes
SEO
AP style
Adobe suite
Microsoft Office suite
Google Docs
Google Sheets
Photography

AWARDS

- 2023 Professional Keystone Media Awards
 - 2nd place, Special Section
 - Stronger Than Steel (contributor)
- 2022 Professional Keystone Media Awards
 - Honorable mention, News Feature Story
 - Fear, isolation give way to hope on anniversary of region's 1st reported COVID case (March 12, 2021)
- 2022 New Jersey Press Association (NJPA) Journalism Awards
 - 1st place, Online Breaking News
 - Shooting at Musikfest
 - 1st place, Best Special Section
 - Stronger Than Steel (contributor)
- 2021 Toner Prize for Excellence in Political Reporting
 - "Swing County, Swing State" project (co-lead reporter)
 - Blue to Red in 30 miles
- 2021 Online Journalism Awards (finalist), Online News Association
 - "Swing County, Swing State" project (co-lead reporter)
 - Blue to Red in 30 miles
- 2021 NJPA Journalism Awards
 - 1st place, COVID-19 Coverage (staff)
 - Fear, isolation give way to hope on anniversary of region's 1st reported COVID case (March 12, 2021)
 - 1st place, Environmental Writing Portfolio
 - Don't drink the water: Local neighborhood thirsts for answers about the chemicals in their wells (Nov. 15, 2021)
- 2021 Professional Keystone Media Awards
 - 1st place, Feature Story
 - Blue to red in 30 miles
 - 2nd place, Enterprise Reporting
 - "Swing County, Swing State" project (co-lead reporter)

- 2nd place, Ongoing News Coverage
 - Donald Trump visits the Lehigh Valley (team coverage)
 - 2nd place, Diversity
 - Blue to red in 30 miles
 - Meet in person during coronavirus shutdown? For Phillipsburg AA, it's a necessary risk
- 2020 Professional Keystone Media Awards
 - 1st place, Ongoing News Coverage
 - And then it was gone; Martin Tower goes down in Bethlehem (staff coverage)
 - 2nd place, Business or Consumer Story
 - The Lehigh Valley restaurants with the most health code violations in 2018 (and what they did about it)
 - 2nd place, News Beat Reporting (Environmental beat)
- 2020 NJPA Journalist Awards
 - 1st place, Specialty Writing Portfolio (history)
 - 2 pandemics, more than 100 years apart
 - From Truman to Trump, presidential campaigns seek Lehigh Valley's important voters
 - 25 years after Bethlehem Steel's last cast, former workers gather to remember and reflect
 - 2nd place, Specialty Writing Portfolio (environment)
 - 2020 may go down as Lehigh Valley's warmest year yet
 - That's a peregrine falconer on the Peace Candle. Will the threatened bird call Easton home?
 - Lehigh Valley air quality improves (slightly) during coronavirus shutdown. Why science will benefit.
 - 2nd place, COVID-19 coverage (staff)
- 2019 NJPA Better Newspaper Contest
 - 3rd place, Online Breaking News (staff)
 - Salon owners married for 5 decades and set to retire killed in N.J. Their son is charged in their murders
- 2018 NJPA Better Newspaper Contest
 - 2nd place, Speciality Writing Portfolio
 - Mass grave on city's hillside hidden in plain sight
- 2017 NJPA Better Newspaper Contest
 - 2nd place, Breaking News (staff)
 - Trooper shot on Route 33
- 2014 NJPA Better Newspaper Contest
 - 1st place, Best Headlines
 - Who shovels path? It's unclear
 - Court unravels county's carpet contention
 - Painters gloss over roadkill
- 2012 NJPA Better Newspaper Contest
 - 2nd place, Best Headlines
 - Dark Night
 - Battered face sends warning

- Sajak, White drunk at 'Wheel'
- 2009 NJPA Better Newspaper Contest
 - 2nd place, Environmental Writing Portfolio
 - EPA steps up NJ site cleanup
 - 3rd place, Responsible Journalism – Enterprise
 - Medicine or Mistake? (Team)
- Eagle Scout