



ATLANTA | SEPTEMBER 18-21

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE AUDIENCE INSIGHTS TO THE NEWSROOM

Best practices for sharing and contextualizing insights —  
to improve pitches, commissions and newsroom strategy

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# HELLO THERE



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US Editor, Audience Engagement  
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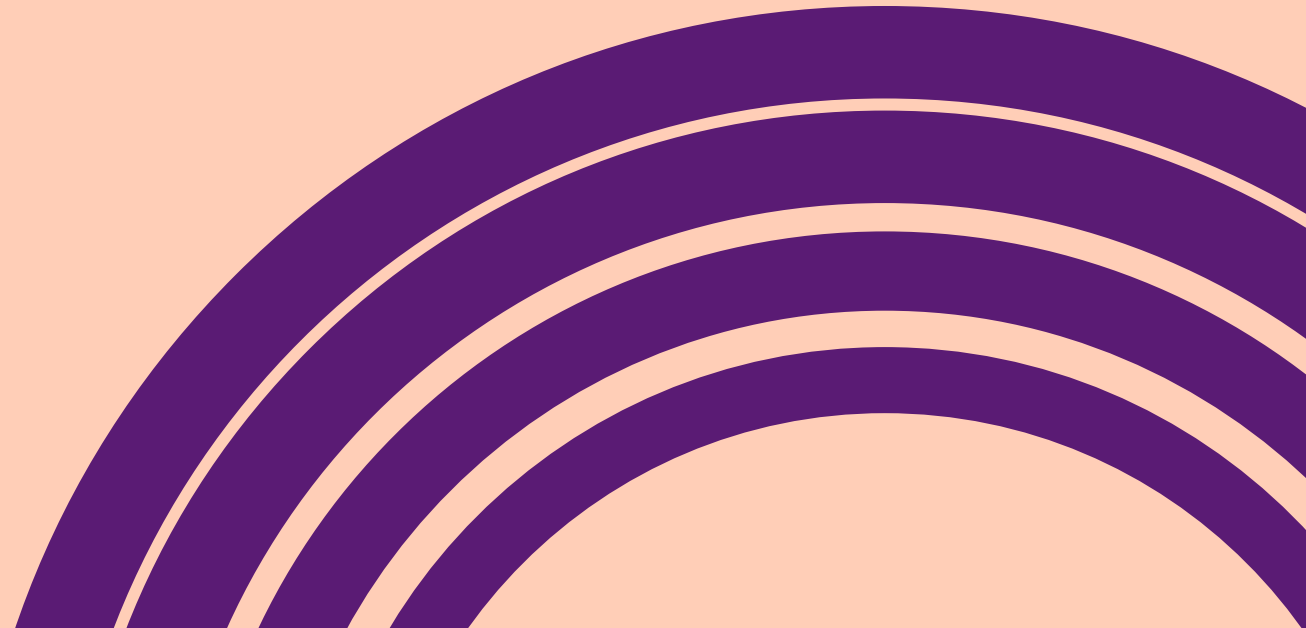



TESS JEFFERS  
Director of Newsroom Data and AI  
The Wall Street Journal



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# AGENDA


- 1 Intro — What are audience insights? Who do they serve? “Shift Left” thinking
  - 2 Reader Insights & Article Insights — Personification, commissioning, sharing “bad news”
  - 3 When to talk about insights?
  - 4 How to talk about insights?
  - 5 Final considerations — Do’s & don’ts, Q&A
- 



# 1 WHAT ARE AUDIENCE INSIGHTS?



# AUDIENCE INSIGHTS



## Understanding our audience

It's important to understand who is reading / watching / listening to your journalism.

### Key goals:

- identifying demographics
- locating your audience
- pinpointing news habits

This will help to humanize the audience inside your newsroom, and is especially helpful if your coverage is multi-regional, national or global.

## Understanding our journalism

It's important to understand what your newsroom is covering in text / video / audio formats.

### Key goals:

- identifying what topics and themes your beats / bureaus / teams are covering
- learning how well this journalism is being read

This will help you and your newsroom understand what coverage is succeeding — and where to improve.

# WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DON'T COMMUNICATE AUDIENCE INSIGHTS?

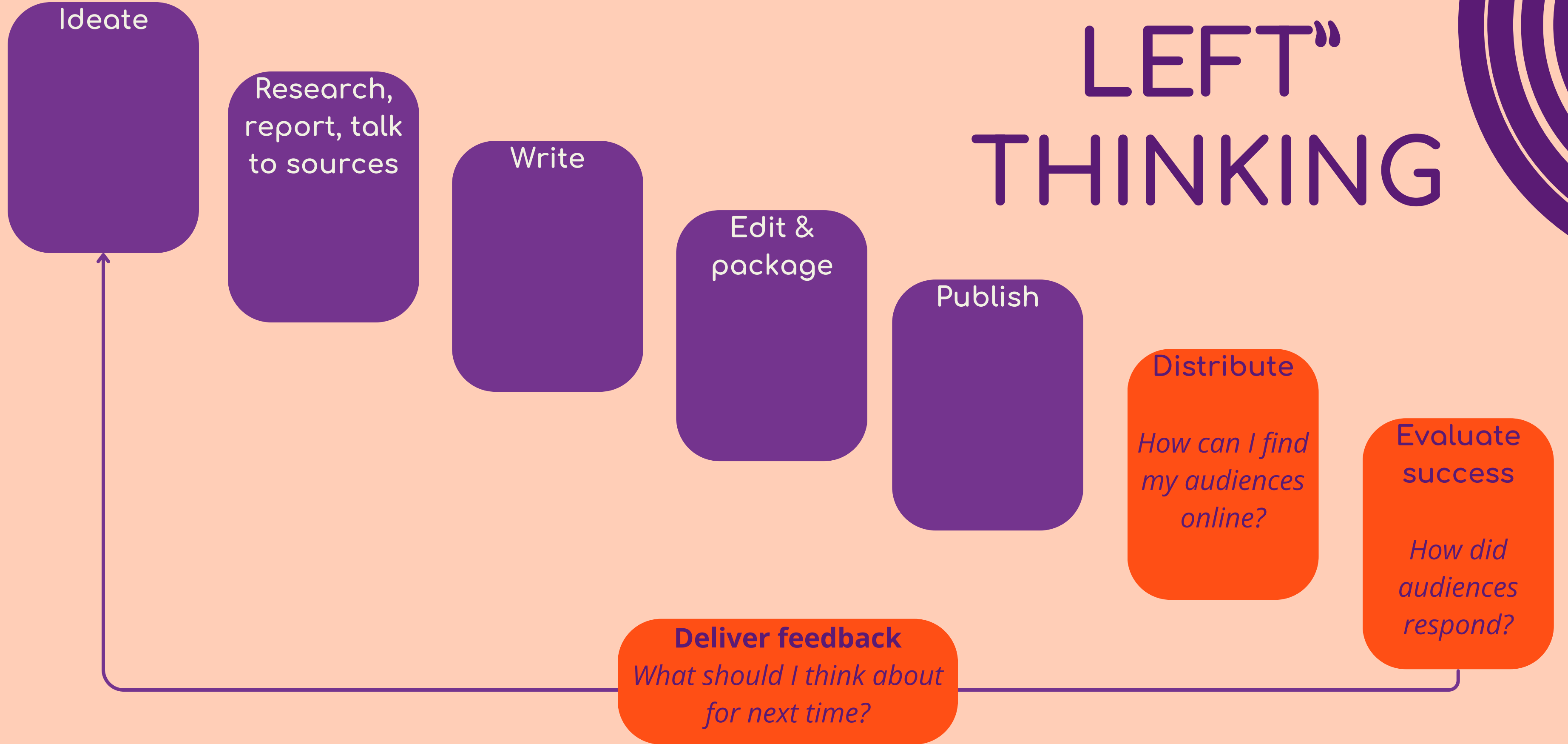


Presenting audience insights is a way to advocate for your readers — what they like to read, where, at what time, in which format.

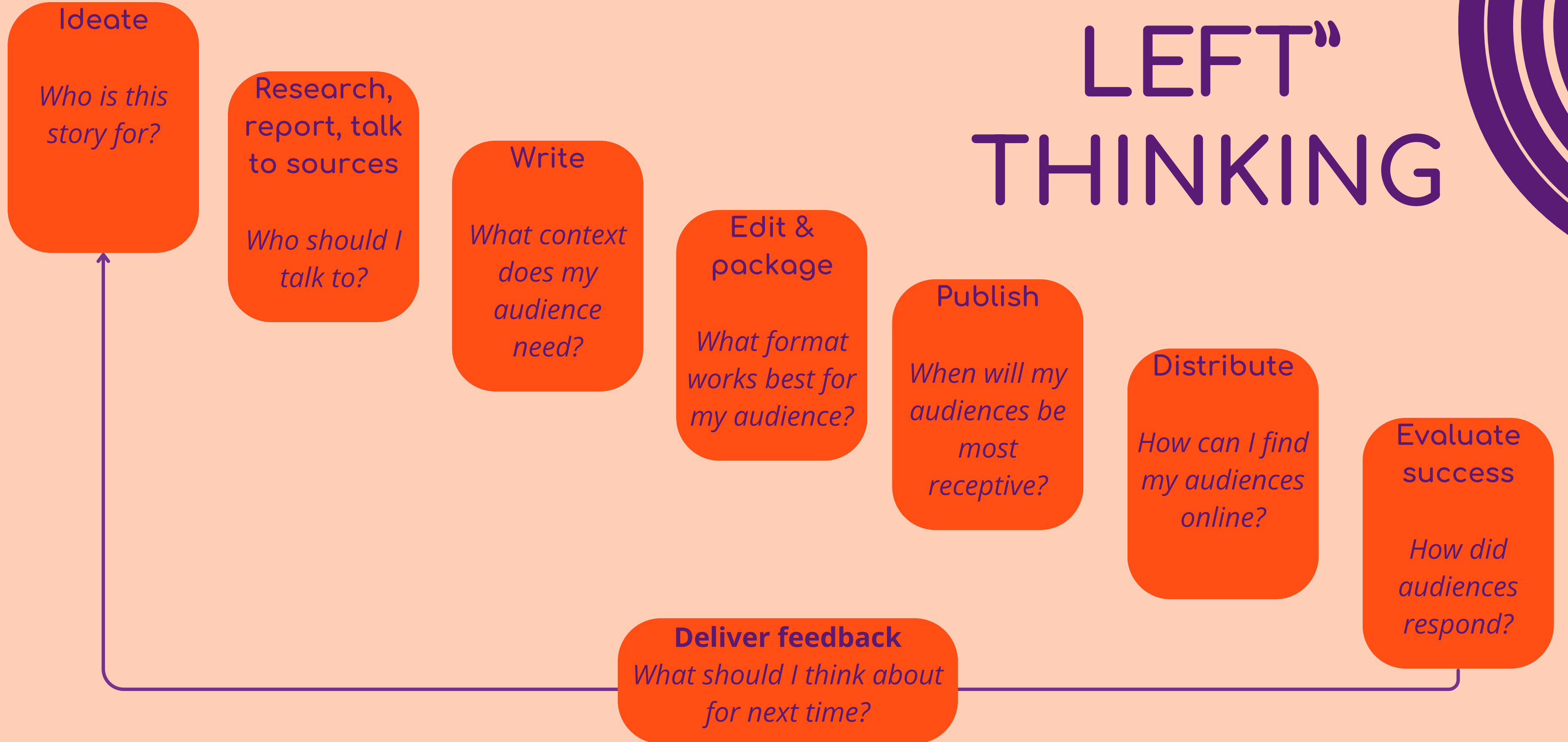
## Goals

- Help time-constrained editors make the right decisions
- Counter the legacy perspective that readers don't matter
- Put journalists in the readers' shoes
- Add value to the audience engagement team

# “SHIFT LEFT” THINKING



# “SHIFT LEFT” THINKING





# INSIGHTS COME IN DIFFERENT FLAVORS...

This article over-performed with female readers

This story received X comments, which is higher than our median of Y

Our average reader is X years old with a \$Y household income

Real estate is our top converting theme

Time on page for Election 2024 stories was higher than usual in the month of July

# ... AND DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS NEED DIFFERENT INSIGHTS

|                     | Article                            | Topic or Theme                  | Section or Bureau                              | Whole Site                     |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|
| Reader Insights     | Reporters                          | Bureau leads, Chiefs            | Bureau Chiefs, Advertising, Leadership         | Marketing, Strategy            |
| Traffic Insights    | Platform teams, reporters, editors | Bureau leads, Chiefs            | Bureau Chiefs, Advertising, Business           | Business, Product              |
| Engagement Insights | Reporters                          | Reporters, Bureau leads, Chiefs | Bureau Chiefs, Marketing, Business, Leadership | Marketing, Product, Leadership |
| Revenue Insights    | Marketing                          | Marketing                       | Leadership                                     | Marketing, Product, Leadership |





# WHAT ARE READER INSIGHTS?



## GOALS

- Make the reader more personable
- Build a narrative on reader needs
- Expand reach to new readers

# READER INSIGHTS: PERSONIFICATION



## DATA POINTS

- Age
- Gender
- Income
- Industry
- Job Level
- Location

As we present audience insights to the newsroom, readers may start looking like numbers. Part of our job is to make readers more relatable so that journalists can start putting themselves in the readers' shoes during the process of building out the story

# READER INSIGHTS: BUILDING A NARRATIVE



## DATA POINTS

- Age
- Gender
- Income
- Industry
- Job Level
- Location

As we try to make the reader more relatable, it's important to build a narrative around that reader.

Most importantly, journalists have assumptions about their readers. It's our job to move them from assumptions to a more clear picture of who they are.

# READER INSIGHTS: EXPANDING REACH



## DATA POINTS

- Age
- Gender
- Income
- Industry
- Job Level
- Location

Focusing on profiling your reader will also help you if you're trying to expand to a certain region or demographic.

Helpful questions:

- How do they get their news?
- How can we differentiate ourselves from the competition?



# WHAT ARE ARTICLE INSIGHTS?

Article insights are when you focus on the content rather than who is reading it. It can come in the form of an individual story or a topic (like stories about the US election) or a brand or a type of story (like news, analysis or opinions).

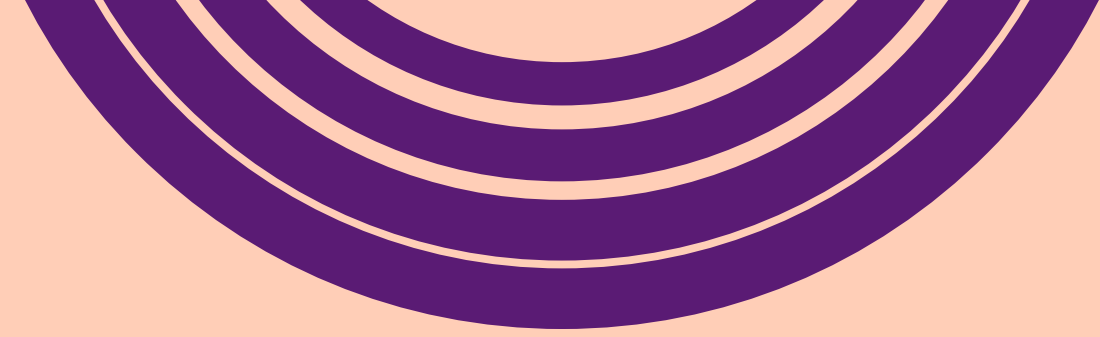
The goal is to keep answering the question ‘what is the best way to cover xx?’ and inform commissioning (on the editors side) and pitching (on the reporters side).





# ARTICLE INSIGHTS: INFORMING PITCHES & COMMISSIONS

- Let reporters know how their stories performed and why
  - Positive reinforcement: what works and what to keep doing
- After a big news cycle — e.g. a market crisis — let the relevant desks involved know how the stories did
  - A simple, short deck with five takeaways about their coverage + actionable points (e.g. start / stop / continue)
- In a long news cycle — e.g. US Election — send quarterly updates about readership
  - Compare current data with previous ones
  - Put numbers in context
  - Make actionable recommendations



# ARTICLE INSIGHTS: SHARING “BAD NEWS”

Build relationships with senior editors to the point where you feel comfortable sharing negative news with them without being afraid of the consequences.



# ARTICLE INSIGHTS: SHARING “BAD NEWS”

Build relationships with senior editors to the point where you feel comfortable sharing negative news with them without being afraid of the consequences.

What are “bad news”?

- Topics that are underperforming compared to benchmarks
- “This could have been a blog post”
- “If you were our reader, would you have clicked on this headline?”



# ARTICLE INSIGHTS: SHARING “BAD NEWS”

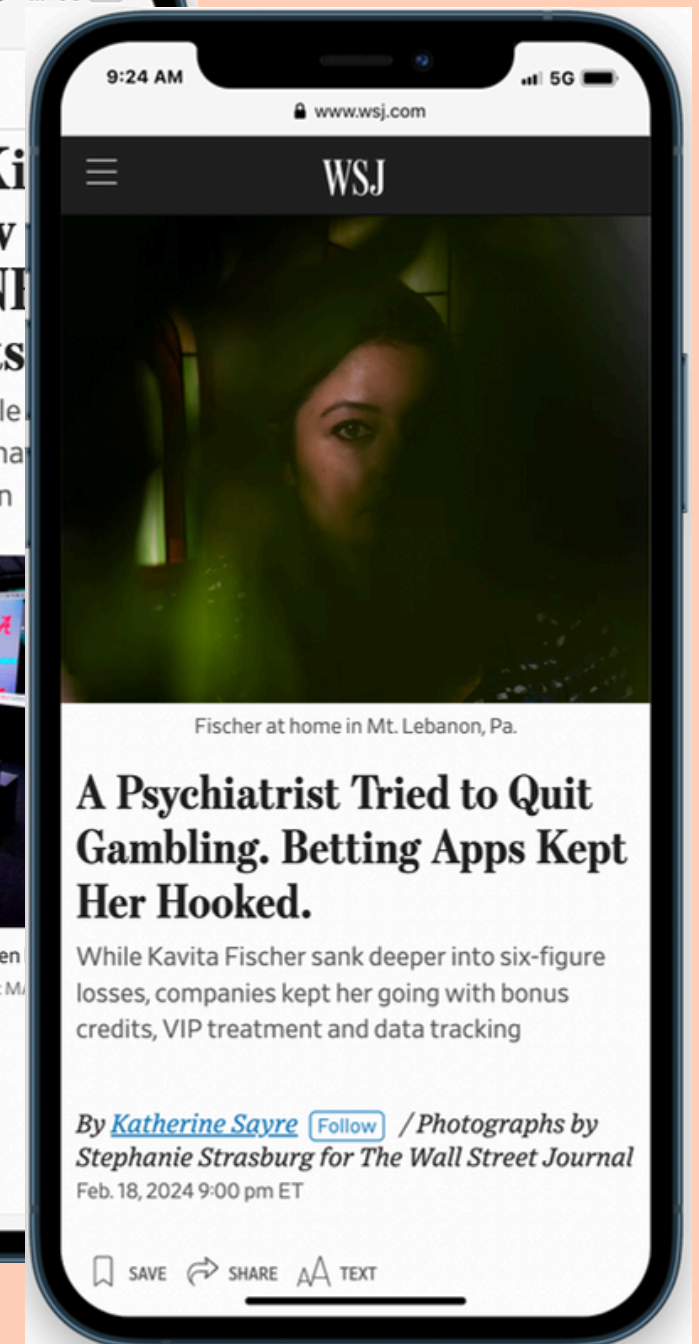
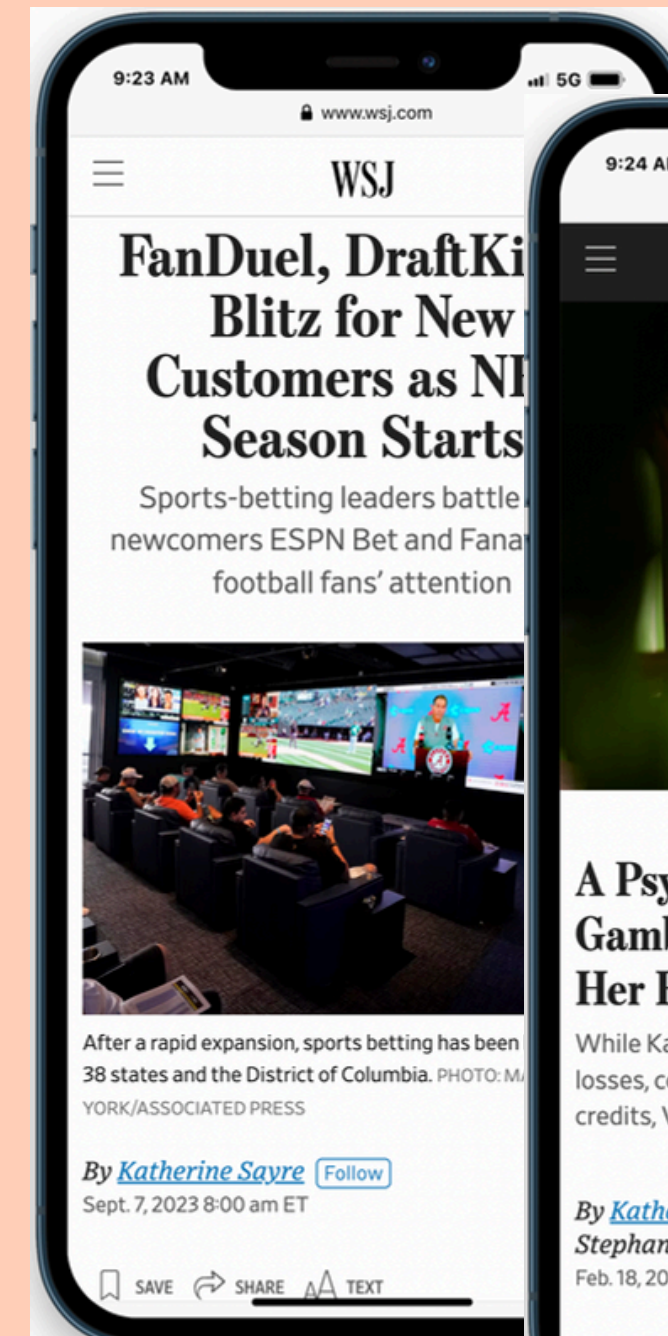
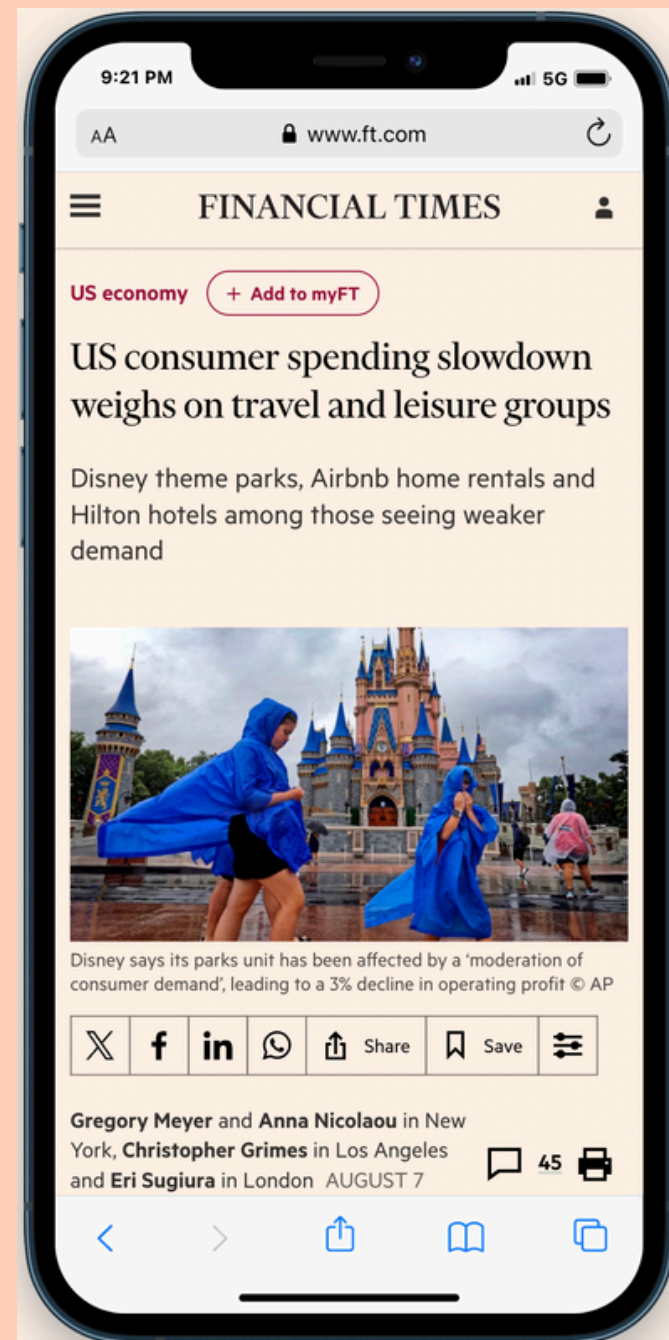
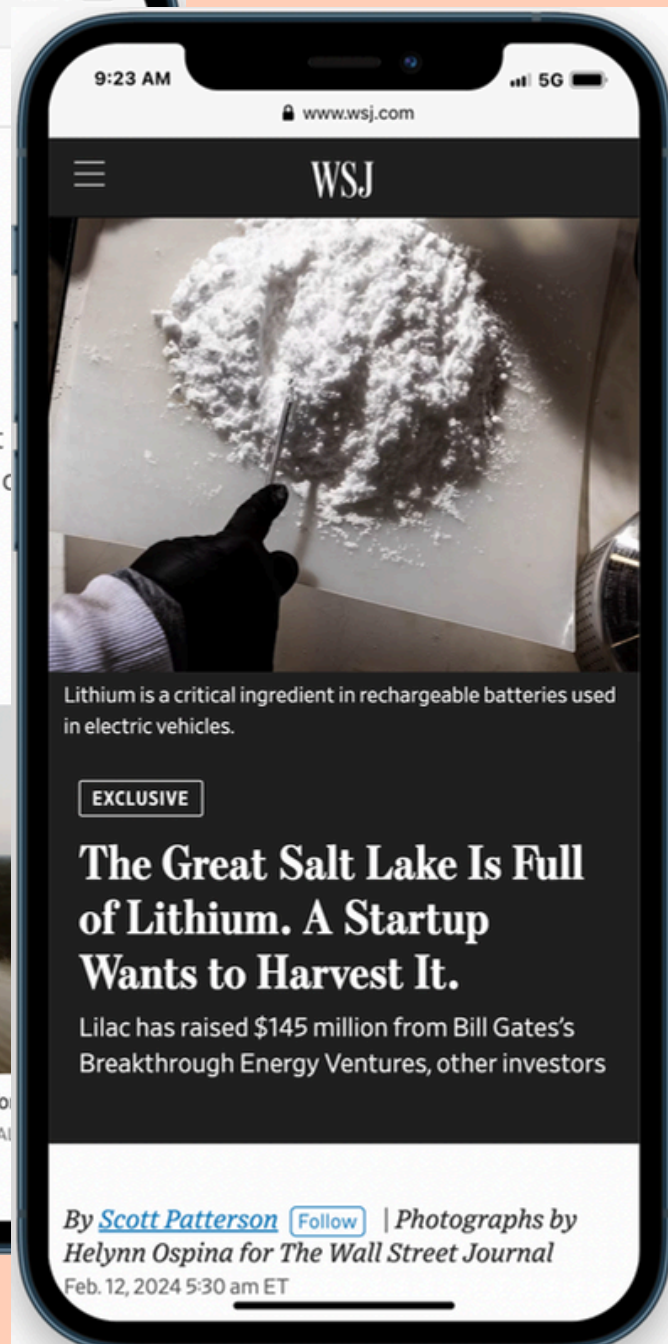
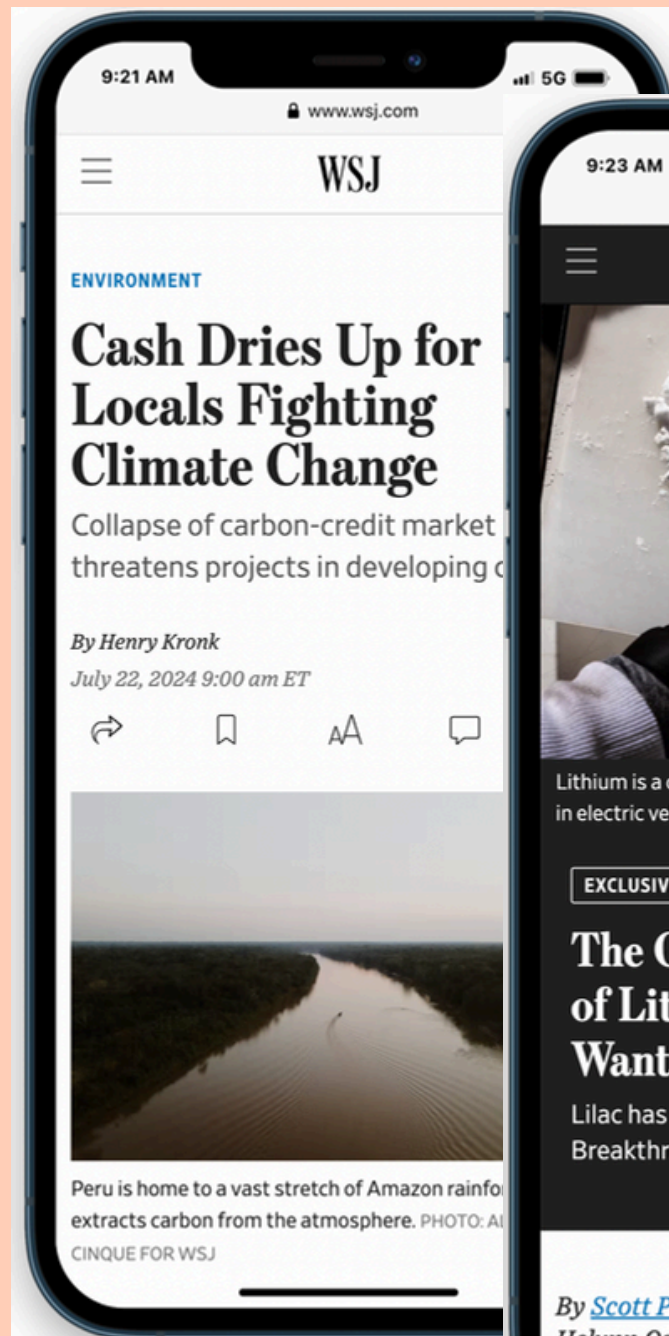
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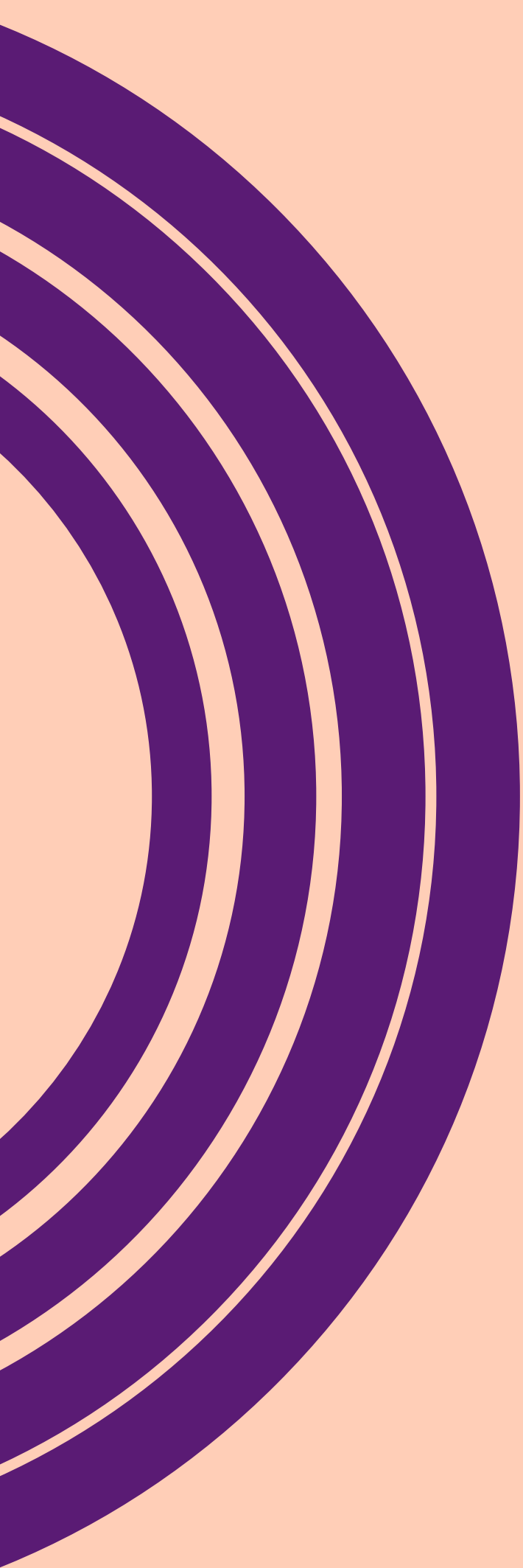
What’s the goal of giving “bad news”?

- The goal is not to stop writing about a certain topic
- Reframe what types of stories are commissioned
- Cater to readers’ needs
- Make sure reporters’ time is being well-utilized



# ARTICLE INSIGHTS: REFRAMING COVERAGE





# 3 WHEN TO TALK INSIGHTS?





# WHEN TO TALK ABOUT INSIGHTS?

Early, often and always!



Daily — Morning news meeting

- What succeeded yesterday?
- What's trending today / coming up?
- Typically single article successes; sometimes thematic roundups



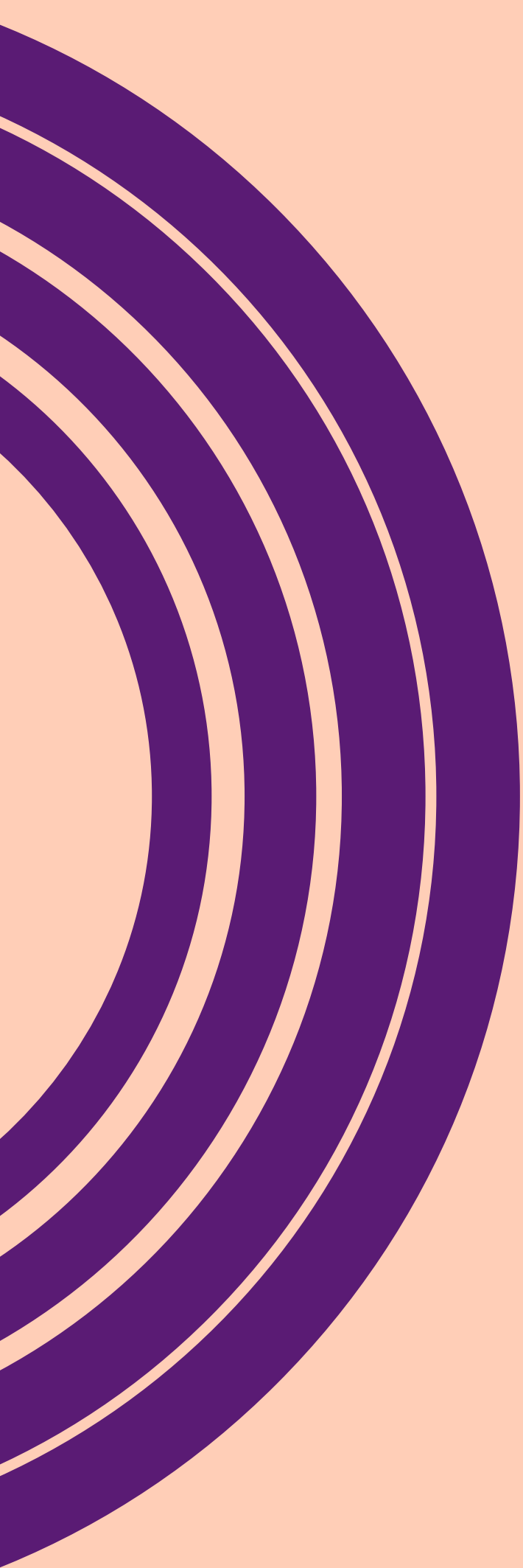
Weekly — Coverage team meeting

- Takeaways from the week
- What follow-on reporting should we tackle?
- News thread roundup, lessons learned



Monthly — Audience team + town hall

- Big wins
- Lessons learned
- Experiments that we're trying



# 4 HOW TO TALK INSIGHTS?







# HOW TO TALK ABOUT AUDIENCE INSIGHTS?

1

Be consistent  
about what  
success looks  
like

2


Build shared  
language &  
templates

3

Use TL;DRs  
and executive  
summaries

4

Always deliver  
data with  
sufficient  
context



# 1. BE CONSISTENT ABOUT WHAT SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- If your “North Star” metric is unique readers, no need to call out a story that didn’t reach young readers
- What’s essential vs. nice to have?



This article earned 50K page views from subscribers, 30K page views from nonsubscribers but only reached 2K young readers under age 35.



This article achieved its primary goal of reaching subscribers

- It’s interesting to note that it struggled to reach young readers under age 35.



This article achieved its primary goal of reaching subscribers

- For next time: to reach more young readers, consider cross-post to LinkedIn, where we’ve seen success on similar stories in the past 6 weeks.

# Data Dictionary Template

|   | A                                    | B  |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | <b>Data Dictionary</b>               |  |
| 2 | <i>Total Pageviews</i>               | A page is viewed when the website is loaded by the browser. Total pageviews are summed across Desktop, Mobile Web, iPhone, iPad, and Android apps - herafter referred to as "all devices". |
| 3 | <i>Subscriber Pageviews</i>          | Total pageviews across all devices generated by logged in subscribers.   |
| 4 | <i>Susbriber Unique Readers</i>      | The count of unique individuals who are paying subscribers to WSJ. Readers are deduplicated across multiple browsers and devices.  |
| 5 | <i>Non-Subscriber Unique Readers</i> | Unique individuals who are not paying subscribers to WSJ. Readers are deduplicated across devices where possible.  |
| 6 | <i>Subscriber Active Time</i>        | Average subscriber active engaged time on articles, measured on desktop + mobile web. Active time is when a reader is scrolling, clicking, or otherwise "actively" engaged with the page.  |
| 7 | <i>New Orders</i>                    | Total new subscriptions purchased, where this article was the last article visited before purchase.  |
| 8 | <i>Scroll Depth (%)</i>              | Average subscriber scroll depth on desktop + mobile web as a % of the full length of the article page  |
| 9 | <i>Bounce Rate (%)</i>               | Fraction (as a %) of pageviews to article that were the last in the user's visit.  |

+ ≡ Data Dictionary and Methodology ▾ Median Article Performance ▾ Corp ▾ Markets/Finance ▾ Enterprise ▾ World

## 2. BUILD SHARED LANGUAGE & TEMPLATES

- Use templates, so every report has a similar structure
- Use data dictionaries to define metrics — what's a page view? what's engagement?
- Be specific, consistent & clear about what you're measuring



# 3. USE TL;DRS AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES



| Headline                 | Total Pageviews | Sub Uniques | Engaged Time | Non-Sub Uniques | New Orders |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <a href="#">ArticleA</a> | 46,938          | 32,302      | 1.22         | 7,444           | 0          |
| <a href="#">ArticleB</a> | 41,142          | 32,774      | 0.57         | 3,668           | 3          |
| <a href="#">ArticleC</a> | 39,509          | 30,864      | 1.05         | 4,092           | 4          |
| <a href="#">ArticleD</a> | 39,212          | 25,967      | 1.16         | 7,030           | 2          |
| <a href="#">ArticleE</a> | 34,485          | 28,608      | 1.08         | 2,546           | 1          |
| <a href="#">ArticleF</a> | 33,529          | 22,777      | 0.72         | 6,205           | 6          |
| <a href="#">ArticleG</a> | 30,865          | 21,979      | 0.91         | 3,980           | 3          |
| <a href="#">ArticleH</a> | 18,696          | 9,325       | 0.84         | 6,376           | 12         |
| <a href="#">ArticleI</a> | 18,096          | 12,475      | 1.16         | 2,562           | 4          |
| <a href="#">ArticleJ</a> | 13,084          | 9,308       | 0.86         | 1,917           | 1          |
| <a href="#">ArticleK</a> | 11,938          | 7,886       | 1.09         | 2,220           | 0          |
| <a href="#">ArticleL</a> | 11,334          | 7,334       | 0.98         | 2,533           | 0          |
| <a href="#">ArticleM</a> | 11,212          | 7,053       | 1.01         | 2,299           | 6          |

Data sheets with lots and lots of information quickly turns into “data wallpaper”.



| Headline                 | Total Pageviews | Sub Uniques   | Engaged Time | Non-Sub Uniques | New Orders |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|------------|
| <i>12 Week Baseline</i>  | <i>29,534</i>   | <i>15,067</i> | <i>1.00</i>  | <i>6,036</i>    | <i>5</i>   |
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Add conditional formatting and benchmarks to help guide the eye to key takeaways.



## TL;DR. 5 Key Takeaways:

1. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit,
2. Engaged time, our north star goal, is up +10% MoM and + 35% YoY.
3. Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud.
4. Sagittis class aliquet sollicitudin ridiculus nunc
5. 7 out of 13 articles this week were a new audience success, surpassing our benchmark

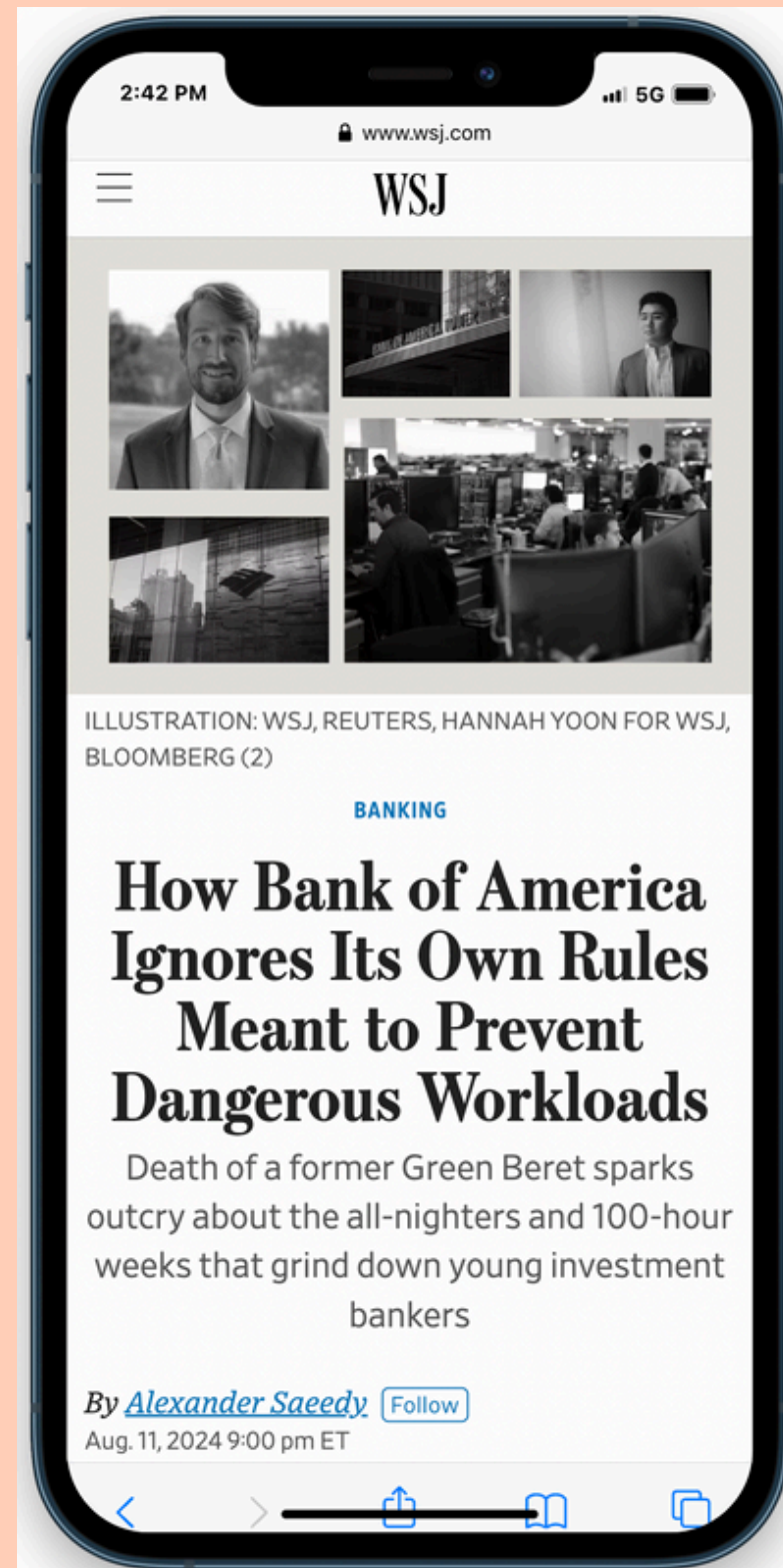
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## Findings in more detail:

- [Link to dataset](#)
- Reference 1,2,3

Your stakeholders are busy! Write out the key takeaways in a TL;DR and share references to the original dataset.

# 4. DELIVER DATA WITH SUFFICIENT CONTEXT



Readers spent on average 5 minutes reading this article on web.

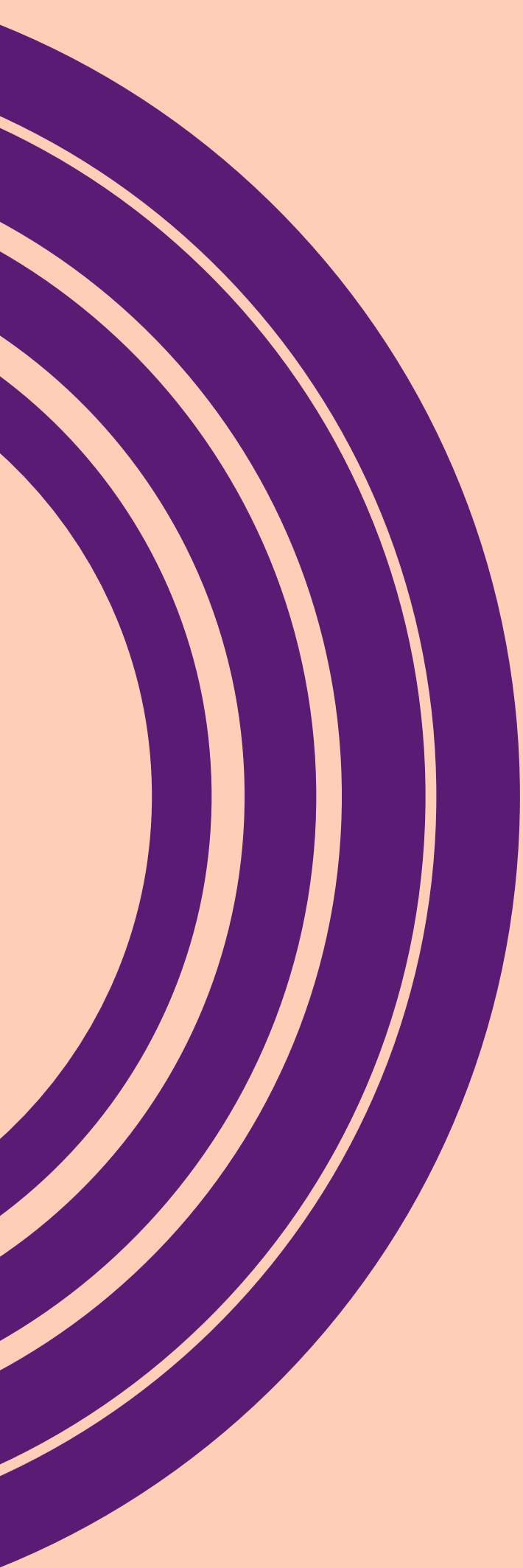
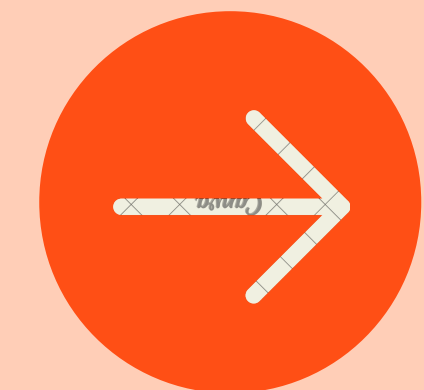


Readers spent 40% longer than expected on this article (compared to stories of similar length and topic).



This article scored in the 92nd percentile across all articles in the past 12 weeks for engaged time (after taking into account length and topic).

# 5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS & TAKEAWAYS



# DON'TS

- DON'T show a chart that you don't fully understand
- DON'T forget to contextualize a number
- DON'T forget to share your presentation with the people who watched it
- DON'T call out an individual
- DON'T forget to edit. Details matter a lot, especially to your audience (reporters and editors)

# DO'S

- DO show examples of new ideas you're presenting
- DO make sure you tell the interested parties that you're going to present about 'opportunity' areas
- DO talk about different areas of coverage (people get jealous if they feel you favor a certain desk)
- DO repeat yourself often. People forget!
- DO memorize some audience facts
- DO get to know your data person
- DO get to know your reporters and editors



# SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS



How much data support do you have?

- Engineers, analysts, data scientists?
- If none, this will be tough. You'll have to learn how to use the available tools.
- If some, pick your areas where you'll make the most impact.

Is the newsroom bought in on audience insights? Do you have leadership support?

- If yes, great. You'll make a lot of progress, fast.
- If not, it'll be tough. But find your crowd. There's always SOMEONE who's willing to listen and wants to learn and grow. Find your crew!



# THANK YOU.



Email

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Social Media

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[linkedin.com/in/tess-jeffers/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tess-jeffers/)

Q&A

## WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGES?



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