

# Oops, we broke the article machine

#ONA13, #articlemachine, @AmPress

## INSTRUCTIONS

Momentarily you will work in assigned groups. Each group has a hypothetical story scenario. We want you to brainstorm as freely as possible new ways to cover the story, or present your reporting, that opens up coverage—that sees alternative storytelling not as a bell or whistle, but each form having its own different strengths. Appoint a note-taker for each group. One of us will help facilitate and/or keep you on track for time. You'll present your best ideas briefly at the end of the session.

Remember, for this session, you may not use the traditional news story as a solution to storytelling. The article machine is broken.

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## SCENARIO 4: Complex story with a long view

A major report comes out that includes new research as well as summarizes the state of academic research from the last five years on climate change. The report concludes that predictions about climate change have been both too alarmist and too cautious at the same time. The climate has been warming faster than expected. There is even more evidence to support the scientific consensus that human activity is a major cause. Yet some of the effects of the warming have played out over the last five years in ways that are both in some cases more dire and in some cases less dire than predicted.

- Two other pieces of data have also come out in the last two weeks. One is an internal content analysis of your publication, which finds that your newsroom devotes only 1% of its coverage to climate and environmental news.
- Another is a new survey that finds public knowledge of climate change has not increased in the last five years. Awareness of the facts is no greater than it was. And the number of people who are unsure of whether climate change is occurring or who doubt it is occurring, is the same as it was in 2008.
- Your editor asks you and a small team to increase coverage, but do it in a way that is different than the conventional approach. “Don’t give me a story list. Tell me how your coverage will be different. And imagine a micro-site about this topic that we would build that would begin to really inform people more effectively.”

*Curious where to start? Look at the back of this sheet for some questions to think about.*

# Questions to think about

## Consider the challenges of your audience in this scenario:

Who are the audience(s) you want to serve?

How will you reach out and cater to the most knowledgeable as well the person who knows very little and someone in between, a person who cares but doesn't read these stories that often. Try to identify 3-5 "types" of readers.

## Some of your storytelling decisions:

What does each reader group need from you?

What might prevent them from understanding?

What are some foundational things the people should grasp to understand this issue? For example, what role does CO2 play?

How will you deal with the fact that many people form an opinion about an ongoing phenomenon such as climate change and then feel they know what they need?

How do you try to educate those who have a hard time moving beyond their opinions?

(Think about vocabulary, definitions, "common" terms, and "dumb" questions. Think about the different "doorways" to entry — what are those and what are the things standing between the door and understanding?)

## Story levels: Good stories are more than just facts -- How do you serve all three levels?

How will you deliver facts about an ongoing story or phenomenon that requires significant foundational knowledge to understand? And also, how do you deliver the facts about a story that takes place across three "times": 1) what has happened, 2) what is happening, and 3) what we can reasonably expect to happen with climate change? Think about how each form fills a need or serves the reader.

How will you deliver analysis and sensemaking?

How will you capture the emotional impact and human reaction and tell that story?