ESSAYS & MEMOIRS

Prison Coding Program Helps Participants Reboot Life

Persevere was started by a formerly incarcerated individual. And while the technology we get to use may be aging, the skills we learn are vital for our present and future.

BY VICTORIA A. DENNIS  |  Victoria A. Dennis writes from West Tennessee State Penitentiary, Tennessee.

I received my first computer in 1989. It was a Kaypro II and came with a game that entertained my 9-year-old imagination.

Day after day, I fed one of my 16 floppy disks into the computer slot, flipped down the switch lock and waited for the command prompt to come up in pale yellow writing on the sickly green screen. Then I explored caves and caverns, battled monsters and demons, and collected a multitude of treasures.

Although the name of the game has been lost to the fog of time and memory, I remember clearly that if I took the wrong path or made a bad decision, all I had to do was put in the previous disk and I would get a chance to make a different choice.

In prison I have lived in a technology drought for two decades. I am not the only one. A 2020 University of Kansas study of 75 women recently released from prison found that a lack of relevant skills was one of the main reasons they were not using the internet. "Lack of self-confidence or self-efficacy in learning technology emerged as an important theme," the authors wrote in an article published in 2022 in the journal New Media & Society.

But steps are being taken to change that.

Four years ago, I was one of five lucky women selected...
ON JUNE 12, PJP HELD A SPECIAL EVENT: A VIRTUAL "ALL HANDS" MEETING, WHERE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS GATHERED ONLINE TO CATCH UP ON PJP NEWS AND WITH EACH OTHER.

WHAT MADE IT SPECIAL WERE TWO GUEST SPEAKERS — COREY MINATANI AND RYAN MOSER, WRITERS WHO PUBLISHED REGULARLY WITH PJP DURING THEIR TIME INSIDE, AND WHO ARE NOW TRAVELING IN THE WORLD.

MINATANI NOW WORKS AS AN EMPLOYMENT SPECIALIST AT GOODWILL INDUSTRIES IN SEATTLE. HE STILL WRITES. THIS SPRING, PJP PUBLISHED A BEAUTIFUL ESSAY ABOUT HIS JOURNEY TO MEND HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS DAUGHTER. HE VOLUNTEERS WITH PJP, TRANSMITTING YOUR SUBMISSIONS INTO DIGITAL FILES.

WE ASKED MINATANI WHAT MADE HIM INTERESTED IN TRYING OUT JOURNALISM. "THE JOURNALISTIC POINT OF VIEW FORCES YOU TO REALLY GET TO THE POINT AND TO DEVELOP YOUR STORY," HE SAID. "BUT THE MAIN THING IS THAT I WANTED TO PUT POSITIVE STORIES INTO THE WORLD... PEOPLE INSIDE NEED TO KNOW THAT THERE IS HOPE." "I WORKED ON A CAREER AS A JOURNALIST," HE SAID, "BECAUSE I FALL IN LOVE WITH THE TRADE AND WITH THE CRAFT INSIDE." SINCE HIS RELEASE IN DECEMBER 2022, MOSER HAS PUBLISHED REGULARLY AS A FREELANCER AND CURRENTLY HOLDS A YEAR-LONG REPORTING FELLOWSHIP WITH RESOLVE PHILLY, A PHILADELPHIA-BASED INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER. "I'M ON TOP OF WORKING A DAY JOB AS A PROJECT MANAGER FOR A TURF MANAGEMENT COMPANY.

MOSER EXPLAINED THAT HE'S EVEN WITH SEVERAL ARTICLES BY HIS NAME, AND TWO YEARS OF TRAINING WITH PJP AND THE ENDENAVOR, A PRISON TURF MANAGEMENT COMPANY, "I STILL FACED CHALLENGES." "IT'S HARD FOR ANY WRITER TO MAKE A LIVING AS A JOURNALIST BUT IT'S ESPECIALLY HARD," MOSER SAID. "IF YOU COME FROM A NON-TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND, NEWSMAGAZINES MAY INITIALY THINK YOU ARE LESS RELIABLE IF YOU HAVE NO COLLEGE DEGREE OR PRIOR MEDIA INTERNSHIPS.

IT ALSO TAKES SOME TIME TO FAMILIARIZE YOURSELF WITH ALL NEW TECHNOLOGY, LIKE CREATING GOOGLE DOCUMENTS OR SETTING UP ZOOM MEETINGS. AND ON A PERSONAL NOTE, HE SAID, "WHEN YOU GET OUT, LIFE HIT YOU PRETTY FAST AND HARD. YOU'RE RECONNECTING RELATIONSHIPS, TRYING TO FIND EMPLOYMENT AND AN APARTMENT. THAT TAKES A HIT ON YOUR TIME THAT YOU HAVE TO WRITE.

WITH THIS IN MIND, PJP IS PLANNING TO DEVELOP MORE RESOURCES TO HELP WRITERS PROFESSIONALLY. WE WANT TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH OUTSIDE EDITORS AND BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH COLLEAGUES IN THE MEDIA INDUSTRY. TO START, CHECK OUT THIS ISSUE'S LEARN SECTION ON HOW TO PITCH STORY IDEAS TO EDITORS, AND STAY TUNED FOR OUR COMPREHENSIVE WRITER'S HANDBOOK THIS FALL.

WITH APPRECIATION,
THE PJP TEAM

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

WHO: First-time and experienced writers who are incarcerated, formerly incarcerated, family members, corrections officers, prison educators and others involved in the criminal legal system or affected by the experience of prison or jail.

WHAT: Submissions under 1200 words. No more than ONE STORY or TWO POEMS per submission per month. Please submit only your best work.

FACTS IN YOUR PIECE MUST BE INFORMATION YOU GATHERED FIRSTHAND, NOT SPECULATION OR INFORMATION THAT YOU'VE OBTAINED THROUGH SOMEONE ELSE. WE CANNOT ACCEPT STORIES ABOUT INDIVIDUAL CASES OR THAT ARE ACCURATE ABOUT A SPECIFIC PERSON, GROUP OR INSTITUTION. WE DO NOT PUBLISH ACADEMIC RESEARCH PAPERS, RELIGIOUS SERMONS OR WORK NOT INTENDED FOR A GENERAL AUDIENCE. ANY DATA THAT IS MENTIONED MUST BE ATTRIBUTED TO A SOURCE. WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO ELIMINATE PORTIONS OF YOUR WORK THAT DON'T CONFORM TO THIS POLICY.

WRITERS MUST SIGN AND RETURN THE PJP PERMISSION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM IN ORDER TO BE PUBLISHED. (PLEASE WRITE TO US TO REQUEST THE FORM IF YOU DO NOT HAVE ONE ALREADY.) AS A PJP MEMBER, YOU CAN PUBLISH YOUR WORK FREE OF CHARGE, UNLESS IT'S BEEN PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED IN A PRINT OR ONLINE OUTLET.

SUBMISSIONS SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- A BRIEF ABOUT YOUR PUBLICATION (IN YOUR OWN WORDS)
- A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY (IN YOUR OWN WORDS)
- A JUST A FEW SENTENCES TO SHOW WHAT YOU'VE COLLABORATED ON IN THE PAST
- A SHORT STORY OR A FEW SENTENCES THAT DEPICT YOUR ARTICLE. WE CAN'T RETURN ANYTHING THAT'S BEEN PUBLISHED PREVIOUSLY.

WHERE TO SEND SUBMISSIONS

PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT

2053 Philadelphia Pike #1015
Claymont, DE 19703

PHOTO/ART ONLY:

PO BOX 1625
Alcatraz Ave. #328, Berkeley, CA 94705

ELECTRONIC MAIL:

GET CONNECT NETWORK, GETTING OUT AND CORRILINKS:
ppj@prisonjournalismproject.org

NOTES: GTL GETTING OUT IS FOR MESSAGES ONLY. SUBMISSIONS MUST BE SENT VIA USPS.

SOURCE:
prisonjournalismproject.org

E-MAIL:

ppj@prisonjournalismproject.org

THE PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT IS AN INDEPENDENT, NONPROFIT, NATIONAL ORGANIZATION. WE WORK WITH INCARCERATED WRITERS AND THOSE IMPACTED BY INCARCERATION TO TRAIN THEM IN THE TOOLS OF JOURNALISM AND HELP THEM REACH A WIDER AUDIENCE THROUGH OUR PUBLICATION AS WELL AS THROUGH COLLABORATIONS WITH MAINSTREAM MEDIA. WE BELIEVE THAT THE DEEPER REFORMS THAT ARE NECESSARY TO FIX THE U.S. CRIMINAL LEGAL SYSTEM CAN ONLY HAPPEN BY SHIFTING THE NARRATIVE. INTENTIONAL, RESPONSIBLE AND WELL-CRAFTED JOURNALISM FROM WITHIN THE INCARCERATED COMMUNITY CAN BREAK STEREOTYPES, INCREASE TRANSPARENCY AND DRIVE CHANGE.

JOTA, JAIL OUT TERESA TAUCH DIANE JONES
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT

MELONCA LANGFORD
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PRISON JOURNALISM PROJECT

38 STATES
38
650 WRITERS
2000 STORIES

3 COUNTRIES
210 PRISONS

PIJP BY THE NUMBERS

(AUG. 31, 2023)

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WE PROMOTE A WRITING PROGRAM (CONTESTS, SUBMISSIONS CALL, ETC.) IN A FUTURE PJP INSIDE EDITION. CONTACT PJP AT info@prisonjournalismproject.org.
Snakes in the Grass

BY AARON LONDON | Aaron London writes from Salinas Valley State Prison, California.

I've heard there's life after death and the end is where it begins
If it's anything like this I don't want to live again
It's not hard to tell that I've been to hell and back
I can tell you how it feels but just can't tell you where it is
Lying face up to keep the devil off my back
Fighting to stay woke for 27 hours flat
Scared to go sleep afraid to fall in his trap
Never looking in mirrors cause I see him in the glass
Demons in the darkness I can see them when they pass
Moving silent as snakes that slither through the grass
Never seen them coming till they're in the middle of your path
Face to face with no intent of giving you a pass
Thinking why me with every minute of the past
Wishing things were different it should have never been this bad
I'm alone my only friends are cellmates where I'm housed
Sick of hearing you're almost there prepare and be patient
Dig deep take a deep breath there's no air in the basement

I wonder what happened to my childhood. I hear chains
and shackles, I see the main tower, and I stand up
in the face of the exercise yard. I want a new pair of eyes, eyes that will help me see my role in life differ-
ently. I am a juvenile.

I pretend this is a dream, while I stare disbelieving.
I feel the wind in my face. I listen intently to the sounds, I feel alive. I touch a risk; the great hazard
in life is to risk nothing.
I worry how a man endures, how he can be so cold. I cry sometimes because I have not a thing to
my name. I am a juvenile.

I understand the size of my heart, and discovered the luster to life. I say to you, “happiness is good health
and a bad memory.” I dream I invent something new, I try to fall in love many times with the same person.
I hope she is strong enough to love me. I pray to be forgiven and be a father. I am a juvenile...

COVER STORY: PRISON CODING PROGRAM
[ cont. from page 1 ]

to train as peer facilitators in the first cohort of Perse-
vere, a competitive one-year programming course that
instagrams us to be full-stack developers in the hopes of re-
ducing generational incarceration.

Persevere has 11 classes in prisons in Tennessee, Ariz-
ona, Ariana, and Georgia, with more coming soon.
My class was the first. One of the best things about this
program is that its founder is formerly incarcerated and
classes are at times taught by previously incarcerated in-
dividuals who understand our challenges firsthand.

As a student or peer facilitator, we work on a
series of lessons and projects to earn certificates in sub-
jects such as JavaScript, web design, data structures and
information security. These certificates lead to a certifi-
cation as a front-end developer or back-end developer.

Once we show a completion score of 79% or higher
and finish a capstone project, we can earn a full-stack
devolution certificate.

Classes were canceled because of the pandemic for
a year, and since the program resumed instruction is
meant to participants of the program.

A month was about theory. The impostor syndrome
looms close, but I’m also confident in my abilities. I
have gained entrepreneurial and job-hunting skills and
am currently gaining experience as an instructor. I have
a solid understanding of coding. Because of this oppor-
tunity, I have built people skills, social skills and criti-
cal thinking skills. I have learned to diffuse situations,
ignore irrelevance, resolve conflicts and solve problems.

By the time I am released, I expect to have more than
12 years of experience as a coding facilitator and more
than 15 years as a developer. I am and will be surround-
red by a lifetime network of front-end and back-end
developers and computer engineers. I’ll also be able to
take advantage of job services, mentorship, transitional
housing, social service assistance and much more offered
to participants of the program.

My hope for the future is that the technology drought
will continue to shrink and access to the program’s full
curriculum will expand.

But no matter what happens, Persevere has shown me
that I don’t have to be stuck in this cave called prison
dragging around my past and fighting my monsters and
demons.

I may have lost freedoms, family, opportunities and
life experiences, but I have gained more of the same in

 أمر : لا يمكنني كتابة المخطوطة المطلوبة هنا.
Learn How to Pitch

WHAT IS A PITCH?
A pitch is a letter, message or email to an editor in which you share an idea for a story you want to write and explain why you are the right person to author it. Pitching is useful for writers and for editors. The process helps you, as a writer, because you’ll know whether a publication is interested before you spend the time and effort writing the article. If they like it, it will help you think about how you’re going to assemble the story before you put a lot of work into it. Editors like pitches because they create an opportunity to provide input on the reporting and composition of a piece. By giving this feedback early on, they can help you tailor it for their publication and their readership.

It’s important to keep in mind that there are many good story ideas, but not all of them are the right fit for every publication. Editors have to consider whether the publication already has a similar story planned or they recently published a story on the same topic. You might have a right fit for every publication. Editors have to consider whether the publication already has a similar story planned or they recently published a story on the same topic. You might have a really good idea that just needs to be tweaked. Or your story might require a little more context that the editor feels their readers need.

Bottom line: You’ll have a better chance of getting published if you get feedback from an editor first. PJP is now accepting pitches for these same reasons. We want to help you shape your idea and provide suggestions for how you might report on it and structure your story, so it can represent your best work.

We also know that, as outside editors, there are many story topics, ideas and angles we may not see, so pitching your own ideas is a good way to grow beyond the prompts PJP occasionally publishes.

HOW DO YOU PITCH A STORY TO PJP?
1. Open your pitch by briefly introducing yourself. This is where you can mention whether you’re a first-time writer for PJP or what stories of yours we’ve previously published. This is important because some of our editors are new and may not recognize your name.

2. Explain the story you want to pitch in one to two sentences - be specific. For example, don’t just say you have a pitch saying you want to write about an event. That’s too vague. Instead, say: “I want to write a story about a memorial event being held at my prison to honor those who died from COVID-19.”

3. Tell us in no more than one or two sentences, why now? Why is your story relevant? This is one of the most important parts of a pitch letter, where you have to convince your editors why their readers will want to read your story. If the story is about a common topic such as education or mental health, explain how your story offers a fresh take or insight.

4. What makes it different from other stories about the same topic? PJP wants you to be a part of public conversations happening right now, so stories are strongest when they have a timely hook. That could be something as simple as “It’s almost Mother’s Day, and I thought that moms out there might want to know about how I parent my 10-year-old from inside prison.”

5. Pitching is useful for writers and for editors. The process helps you, as a writer, because you’ll know whether a publication is interested before you spend the time and effort writing the article. If they like it, it will help you think about how you’re going to assemble the story before you put a lot of work into it. Editors like pitches because they create an opportunity to provide input on the reporting and composition of a piece. By giving this feedback early on, they can help you tailor it for their publication and their readership.

6. Explain why you, besides your experience, what makes you qualified to write this story? Have you published personal or reported essays before? Do you bring particular expertise to this topic? If you are writing about an issue that is in the national conversation, explain how your firsthand experience and perspective will add to an outside journalist’s coverage of the story.

7. Ask for and welcome feedback about your pitch from editors. More often than not, editors want to help improve the story idea, so trust they are responding in good faith. Anticipate rejections: This is a fact of life for even the most seasoned writers and journalists. Don’t be discouraged. Flattening your story idea or find another one, and soon something will land.

8. Be open to deviating from your original plan, but know that you can always say no, especially if you feel your story is too sensitive. You feel you or your target audience are being targeted.

9. The number of stories John J. Lennon - a successful prison journalist whose work has appeared in The Washington Post Magazine, Esquire, The Atlantic, Sports Illustrated and elsewhere — pitched unsolicited last year. Three of them were accepted.

HOW DO YOU PITCH A STORY TO OUTSIDE PUBLICATIONS?
The basic structure for a pitch to editors at other publications is the same, but with a few additions:

1. Choose your publication. Do your research. Before you reach out to the editor, check to make sure the publication is a good fit. Try to find out if they’ve recently published a story on the topic you’re pitching. Most news publications won’t publish stories on the same subject back-to-back.

2. Explain why you, besides your experience, what makes you qualified to write this story? Have you published personal or reported essays before? Do you bring particular expertise to this topic? If you are writing about an issue that is in the national conversation, explain how your firsthand experience and perspective will add to an outside journalist’s coverage of the story.

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The number pitches an editor at The New York Times, reads in a day. A senior editor can expect to get twice as many.

10-20

The number of times you can expect to go back and forth with an editor about your story idea. From pitch to publication. The longer your story is, the more contact you can expect to have with your editor. PJP tries to cut down on the frequency because of communications difficulties.

According to a recent study, the average number of submissions PJP gets in a week (including pitches). Multiply this by ten and you’ll get the number of stories and poems currently making their way through PJP’s editorial process.
THE ANATOMY OF A PITCH
The PJP team annotated this pitch to give you an idea of what we thought worked really well.

Clear first sentence that concisely states the article’s topic.

Immediate context that also grabs the attention of the editor. Keep in mind that editors are looking at pitches and drafts all day.

A captivating hook with concrete details that pulls the reader in, always effective.

We redacted the name of the prison for this lesson just to protect the privacy of this family but adding it in the final pitch is a good idea.

Here we have a clear explanation of what the essay is going to be about and how the editor can see the possibilities. This also answers the question editors will have: What is the point you’re going to try to make through the story? Why is the story important? What is it going to show?

You don’t need to provide an exact date, but being specific about length and general delivery data can also help your editor get a better idea of what you plan to deliver. If your story is time sensitive, it’s good to mention that here too.

Headlines are the gateway to stories. They help potential readers decide whether they want to invest time in an article when they have an infinite number of stories, video content and other entertainment at their fingertips.

Publications almost always rewrite headlines so that when readers come across a link to a story — through a Google search, social media or on the publication’s website — the headline grabs their attention. Editors are particularly well placed to do this work since they know their readers’ tastes and reading habits. PJP is no exception. We rewrite headlines because we want your story to reach as many readers as possible.

The point is this: It doesn’t matter how good a story is if readers aren’t enticed to click on its headline.

Here’s what’s on our radar when we write headlines and a few examples.

A Good Headline Is…

• Short, concise and easy to understand.
  Ex. “Hurricane Ian, From My Prison Window”

• Focused, specific and avoids vague or abstract language that could apply to other stories about a similar topic.
  Ex. “A Michigan Prison’s Investment Club Sees Dividends”

• Grabs a reader’s attention or curiosity.
  Ex. “In Prison, They Call Me Picasso”

• Accurately represents what a reader can expect to encounter in the piece, including the story’s tone. We wouldn’t want to run, for example, a lighthearted headline on a serious topic.
  Ex. “The Unexpected Power of Sharing In Prison”

• Contains words that reference current newsworthy topics.
  Ex. “How Synthetic Marijuana is Ravaging NY Prisons”

May 19, 2023

Dear PJP editors,

I’d like to pitch you an essay about the things I wished I knew when my brother went to prison.

My younger brother Isaac was sentenced to 19 years in 2019. He is currently serving time at [State Prison].

When Isaac first went in, I knew nothing about how to support him while he served his time. I didn’t even know how to do simple things like accept collect calls. I remember fumbling with my credit cards while pressing 5 on my phone to input the card number so I could accept the call. Through Googling, I later learned about Global Tel Link, the company that provides inmate calling services. I also had a difficult time finding out how to visit Isaac in person. For example, I understood from the prison website that I had to get the visitation form from the incarcerated individual, but it failed to mention where to mail the form once it was filled out.

This essay will show what I went through in the early days of navigating confusing prison websites and what happened the first time I visited my brother.

I know Prison Journalism Project mostly publishes incarcerated writers. However, I believe it’s important for me to share stories from the other side of the wall too, in this case from the perspective of an older sister of an incarcerated brother.

And I hope that my perspective and knowledge as a loved one of someone inside can be helpful to other people in my position. My goal is to write an article that serves family members and friends of the incarcerated.

In my experience, there is limited anecdotal information online to find practical tips for how to deal with a newly incarcerated family member.

I can write a 1,000-word article with the first draft delivered to you by June 2, 2023.

Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

Sister of an Incarcerated Person

Concrete details like these help the editors imagine what kind of information or anecdotes could appear in the final article. And they give the editors a taste of the author’s reporting and writing style.

This paragraph clearly shows the challenges the author experienced and how she had to teach herself how to navigate the system. She could have just said she struggled to learn the basics. Instead she shows what kinds of things she realized she didn’t know. This is what we mean by show, don’t tell.

This sentence is useful because it puts the pitched column into broader context. An editor will be interested in knowing if your piece is going to fill an information gap or provide a unique perspective on your topic.

www.prisonjournalismproject.org/newsletter.
What is News Literacy?

In this issue, we’ve partnered with the nonpartisan education nonprofit the News Literacy Project to bring you this quiz—a fun, interactive way to test your ability to determine the credibility of news and other information and tell the difference between fact, opinion and misinformation. We call this “news literacy.”

It’s an important skill, particularly in today’s age because the internet makes it easy for anyone to spread conspiracy theories and false information by creating professional-looking content quickly and sharing it widely. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and TikTok encourage users to read and pass along stories without considering the truth. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and TikTok encourage users to read and pass along stories and sharing it widely. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and TikTok encourage users to read and pass along stories and sharing it widely. Social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook and TikTok encourage users to read and pass along stories.

As a result, many people have a hard time recognizing the difference between fact and opinion, and between credible and non-credible sources of information. Studies conducted by the Pew Research Center found that only 35% of U.S. adults surveyed could accurately tell the difference between opinion and fact. A 2019 Stanford Graduate School of Education study similarly reported that 96% of high school students surveyed were unable to evaluate and challenge the credibility of information presented to them.

The News Literacy Project was established in 2018 and has been endorsed by leading news organizations because they felt that this spread of misinformation and disinformation could threaten the very fabric of our democracy. A democratic society cannot function without a well-informed public. PJP agrees.

News literacy helps us develop a healthy skepticism as well as critical thinking skills, so you will be in a much better position to know what information to trust.

As consumers of news, we need to be able to evaluate and interpret information so we can distinguish between legitimate news outlets — ones that share verifiable information gathered through ethical practices — from outlets designed to exploit or bias readers.

But news literacy isn’t just about identifying ill-intentioned sources. Even legitimate news outlets can be vulnerable to putting forward biased or otherwise compromised sources on a deadline (even heard the expression “Speed is the enemy of accuracy?”).

No matter what the news organization, a news-literate user is always mindful of what they are reading.

News literacy is especially important for you as a writer of journalism. You need to know that you are sharing solid information from reliable sources with your readers. (By “sources,” we’re talking specifically about news articles, research papers and other documents you might reference in your work.)

This can be difficult inside prison. Incarcerated writers have limited access to sources and some of them may be outdated. They also may face more initial skepticism from readers about their facts and assertions. Developing a critical eye and a high standard for selecting sources can lead to strong, persuasive and credible articles that readers can trust.

Being transparent about the limitations of your ability to fully fact-check stories can help too. That’s why PJP editors sometimes come back to you with questions about your story, asking you how you know such and such information. It’s why we sometimes insert a sentence in your story that makes it clear what you know and what you don’t know. Readers will trust you because you’re upfront about this. It doesn’t weaken your story; it strengthens it.

We hope this quiz will help you better understand what “credibility” looks like and how to recognize it.

**QUIZ**

**How news-literate are you?**

1. Which statement best describes the difference between a reporter and a columnist? (Circle all that apply.)
   - A. Reporters can generally write about any topic they like, while columnists are assigned to a fairly narrow range of topics.
   - B. A reporter produces straight news reports and aspires to be objective; a columnist expresses an opinion.
   - C. A reporter and a columnist basically do the same thing, depending on the news organization.
   - D. A reporter is generally reporting from the scene of events; a columnist stays in the newsroom to write news reports.

2. How free is the press in the United States? (Choose the best answer.)
   - A. The most free in the world.
   - B. Among the 10 freest in the world.
   - C. About average among other nations.
   - D. In the bottom 25% in the world.

3. Which of the following are common guidelines for the use of anonymous sources in news reports at standards-based news organizations? (Circle all that apply.)
   - A. Anonymous sources are often allowed to remain truly anonymous so that even the reporters and editors working with them don’t know who they are.
   - B. Anonymous sources should only be used when the information they have is extremely important and cannot be obtained in any other way.
   - C. Anonymity should be granted to sources only when they have a compelling reason to remain anonymous, such as personal safety.
   - D. Anonymous sources must demonstrate their credibility to the journalists they’re providing information to in some way.
   - E. Many news organizations try to avoid unnecessary use of anonymous sources by finding other sources that will provide the same information on the record.

4. How to fill in the blank: An __________ board is a group of opinion writers that meets regularly in private to discuss the news and to write pieces that represent the opinion of the news outlet as an organization or institution.
   - A. Eyewitness
   - B. Official
   - C. Expert
   - D. Anonymous
   - E. Document

5. Matching: In this section, match each of the five source types with their description. (Note that there is only one correct description for each source type.)
   - A. Provides valuable information from the scene of an event, but can be unreliable.
   - B. Often has exclusive access to important information, but may not be independent.
   - C. High degree of knowledge about a specific subject and independence, but lacks firsthand knowledge of specific events.
   - D. Used to provide concrete verification of specific facts, but generally do not provide greater context.
   - E. Typically provides extremely valuable and important information, but readers or viewers may not trust that information without a name attached.

6. True/False: When a news organization makes a serious error or fails to follow the ethics and standards of quality journalism, other news outlets ignore it out of solidarity.
   - A. False
   - B. True

7. Giving equal coverage to all ideas and perspectives related to a subject, even when they’re not equally supported by evidence, is a problem in journalism known as __________.
   - A. false balance
   - B. neutrality
   - C. maintaining objectivity
   - D. being fair

8. Which of the following are important standards or guidelines in the practice of photojournalism? (Circle all that apply.)
   - A. Photographers should never pose their human subjects except when taking portraits.
   - B. Photographers should only try to take images that represent ordinary life.
   - C. Cropping an image (changing it by removing unwanted or irrelevant subjects or details around the outer edges) is never OK.
   - D. Photographers should never use editing software to erase anything from a digital image, even when it doesn’t change the picture’s meaning.
   - E. Photographers are allowed to crop an image as long as it does not change the picture’s meaning.
   - F. None of the above.

9. The innate habit of people seeking reasons to discredit or dismiss information that complicates their existing beliefs, and to accept information that upholds their existing beliefs, is called __________ bias.
   - A. “me first”
   - B. ego
   - C. confirmation

... answers on PAGE 7
The Topic No Man in Prison Wants to Talk About (But Needs To)

Incarcerated men are particularly vulnerable to prostate cancer.
In Florida, one man is raising awareness about the taboo topic.

BY GERVasio “JULIO” Torres JR.

Gervasio “Julio” Torres Jr. writes for Everglades Correctional Institution, Florida.

I had never seen my dad so angry. It was two decades ago in a Florida examination room. My dad had just been diagnosed with cancer, and he was directing an outburst at my mom. Her face expressed unconditioned love and support, but I knew what hid beneath that mask: fear. She was afraid, and I was too.

That memory has left an impression on me to this day. At Everglades Correctional Institution, in south Florida, a large portion of the 1,800 residents I live alongside are men over 50 who suffer from various disabilities and conditions, including cancer.

The chances of being diagnosed with prostate cancer rise rapidly after age 50. About 60% of instances of prostate cancer are discovered after age 65, according to the American Cancer Society. And for those who are diagnosed while incarcerated or recently released from prison, the risk of dying from cancer is higher than for those who had never been incarcerated, a study from the Yale Cancer Center found.

In prison, cancer is the leading cause of death, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. An analysis of mortality in state and federal prisons, from 2001 to 2019, found that cancer accounted for 27.5% of all prison deaths over that period.

A STIGMA PERSISTS

How has the prison population reacted to such frightening statistics?
Many have chosen to avoid the topic, said ECI resident Al Burgess, a staunch proponent of raising awareness of prostate cancer.

“Men are not talking about such controversial or challenging subjects,” he said.

Burgess has been self-testing for prostate cancer since he was 52 years old and detained in a county jail. He has been afraid of the disease since he was 19 years old when he was visiting his grandfather and saw large lumps protruding from his groin — tubes to drain his urine and control prostate enlargement.

Fear is one reason the topic is avoided. But Burgess believes the reluctance to discuss prostate cancer is more than about fear and has to do with machismo. Many men don’t want to be tested because it commonly requires a digital rectal examination.

“There is a fear of the exam itself and finding out you may have [cancer],” Burgess said. “It’s an extreme that men aren’t willing to talk about.”

When men find out the prostate is a gland that helps make semen, they feel that a prostate cancer diagnosis means “something is wrong with them as a man,” he explained.

“Men are actually afraid of a health exam,” Burgess said. “You can run from the examinations only to discover the cancer years down the line.”

RAISING PROSTATE CANCER AWARENESS

In the weeks leading up to National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October, pink ribbons can be seen almost everywhere — on TV and in print, as well as proudly worn on many a lapel, by men and women. This is largely due to the meteoric growth and popularity of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, a nonprofit that has helped make the ribbons a ubiquitous sighting. It is also due to the fact that breast cancer is the second-most common form of cancer in the U.S. behind skin cancer.

The estimated cases of prostate cancer for 2023 are not far behind breast cancer, and the estimated number of deaths for both cancers are also close, according to the National Cancer Institute. Despite being similarly prevalent, breast cancer has historically garnered much more funding than prostate cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute.

Burgess believes women are socially conditioned to better deal with the emotional implications of breast cancer than men are with prostate cancer.

“We [men] haven’t even started the conversation,” he said.

A health services administrator for ECI’s medical provider reported that our prison has seen six cases of surgical removal of the prostate over the past year.

“We don’t see [these patients] until it’s a little too late,” she said. “Why won’t men speak up and notify medical staff?”

But how do you have the conversation no one wants to have?

Over years of incarceration, Burgess has freely talked with men about prostate cancer. He suggested we start the conversation within our own communities.

“There are people among us that do have information, residents who were formerly doctors. Medical staff could offer seminars to help get the men talking,” Burgess said. “We are conditioned to stay quiet about most things. But, by providing a safe forum and a sympathetic ear, you will find those willing to open up.”

If ECI residents can already openly talk about alcohol addiction or drug dependency in support groups, why shouldn’t we open up about prostate concern? Why shouldn’t we exchange our fears and misconceptions of masculinity for awareness, prevention and longevity?

If ECI residents can already openly talk about alcohol addiction or drug dependency in support groups, why shouldn’t we open up about prostate concern? Why shouldn’t we exchange our fears and misconceptions of masculinity for awareness, prevention and longevity?

“Are we doing the same?” Burgess asked. “Are we doing it in the same way we do breast cancer?”

If ECI residents can already openly talk about alcohol addiction or drug dependency in support groups, why shouldn’t we open up about prostate concern? Why shouldn’t we exchange our fears and misconceptions of masculinity for awareness, prevention and longevity?

“Are we running from it?” Burgess said. “Are we running from it? Fear of the unknown? If you detect it early, the treatment isn’t that severe. … We have to establish a pattern of dialogue to leave a better legacy for the generation coming up.”

I still vividly remember my dad consumed by an anger outburst at my mom. Her face expressed unconditioned love and support, but I knew what hid beneath that mask: fear. She was afraid, and I was too.

That memory has left an impression on me to this day. At Everglades Correctional Institution, in south Florida, a large portion of the 1,800 residents I live alongside are men over 50 who suffer from various disabilities and conditions, including cancer.

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In Prison, They Call Me Picasso

A resourceful incarcerated artist uses colored pencil and floor wax to create his own acrylic paints.

BY JOHN W. ZENC  |  John W. Zenc writes from California Health Care Facility, Stockton, California.

I’ve been making art for decades. I came to prison in 1977 on a 7-years-to-life sentence, and began drawing — I’ve created some 1,500 pieces in all. The prisoners and staff here have nicknamed me Picasso.

I’m 65 years old and have Parkinson’s Disease and the onset of dementia, yet I strive to keep creating. Sometimes I’ll work for 25 hours without pause. My goal before I die is for people to see my creations — to know I did not waste my time in prison but gave back to society by creating and sharing my art.

Sometimes I’ll work for 25 hours without pause. My process is this: I first make a sketch using white or brown regular colored pencils. Next I add a few highlight with my watercolor pencils. Then I get my Q-tips or toothpick and begin to dot the work until all the dots are where I want them to be. Then I clear coat each entire painting several times to seal up the paint so it doesn’t come off. It works great.

Reading my life story is like being in prison again. Sometimes I even feel that the prison is no different from my life today. But when I am sitting down and concentrating on creating art, I feel as if I am in the moment. I feel like a whole person. I feel like I am not just living my life but actually experiencing it.

I have a real odd style but can paint and draw nearly anything. My process is this: I first make a sketch using white or brown colored pencils. Next I add a few highlights with my watercolor pencils. Then I get my Q-tips out and dip them into my paints, filling in the sketch. I fill in a 2-by-2-inch section at a time. I let it dry, then fill in another. I do this so I can add the floor wax at each step. As I continue in this manner, I clear coat each section until the whole painting or drawing is covered. Once that’s finished, I take a Q-tip or toothpick and begin to dot the work until all the dots are where I want them to be. Then I clear coat the entire painting several times to seal up the paint so it doesn’t come off. It works great.

When I turned the key and started the engine for the first time, I thought to myself: This alone makes my job worth it. When I pressed the gas and drove into the building, I felt human again.

Getting a prison maintenance job has given me a renewed sense of purpose. I sat in the driver’s seat of the John Deere, holding the key and preparing to drive for the first time in nearly a decade. I felt a sense of normalcy I had not felt in years.

I have a renewed sense of being on the team of those who have no problem getting their hands dirty. I am simply another person on the team who has no problem getting their hands dirty. I have a renewed sense of being on the team of those who have no problem getting their hands dirty.