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for the environment

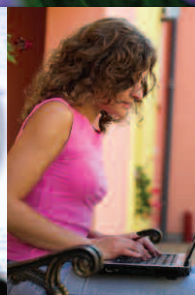


YOUNG REPORTERS

FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Youth-Led Environmental Journalism

Guide to Writing like an Environmental Journalist



www.youngreporters.ca

YOUNG REPORTERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Youth-Led Environmental Journalism



**Young Reporters
for the environment**

YOUNG REPORTERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT is an international project from the *Foundation for Environmental Education*. In Canada it is coordinated by *Environmental Defence*.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENCE

We are Canada's most effective environmental action organization. We challenge, and inspire change in government, business and people to ensure a greener, healthier and prosperous life for all.

FOUNDATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

FOUNDATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION (FEE) is a non-governmental and non-profit organization aiming to promote sustainable development through environmental education (formal school education, training of staff and general awareness raising). FEE is mainly active through our five environmental education programs: *Blue Flag*, *Eco-Schools*, *Young Reporters for the Environment*, *Learning about Forests* and *Green Key*.



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Hey, Young Reporters!

If you're reading this guide it's because you care about your environment. You understand that writing is a powerful tool for telling people about what's happening in the world and want people to be aware of what's happening in their own backyards.

You also might know that by submitting an article to **Canada's Next Green Journalist** you have the chance to have your article featured on www.youngreporters.ca, win cool prizes, and use your article to gain valuable attention on an important issue.

In this guide, you will discover everything you need to know to become an effective *Young Reporter for the Environment*.

We have all the tips for writing a great news article from our resident writing expert *Vanessa*, and by the time you're done you will have an excellent piece that will educate people about a significant environmental issue in your community.

Before you jump in, check out the next page for a brief overview about everything you need to know to submit your article and then, you are good to go!

With students from all across Canada, we can't wait to see everyone's submissions. So what are you waiting for?

YOUNG REPORTERS TEAM

yre@environmentaldefence.ca

Editor's Guidelines

Part of the fun of **Canada's Next Green Journalist** is the chance to have your article featured on www.youngreporters.ca and to win cool prizes. In order to be eligible, there are just a few quick things you'll need to keep in mind:



1. *Stories should investigate an environmental issue and propose possible solutions:*
 - **climate change**
 - **coastlines**
 - **energy**
 - **water**
 - **agriculture**
 - **cities**
 - **waste**
 - **biodiversity**
2. *Make sure you include **local** content. We're interested in how this topic affects your community!*
3. *Your article should be **no more than 1000 words**.*

THAT'S IT! Now let the writing begin...

YOUNG REPORTERS
FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Youth-Led Environmental Journalism



Young Reporters
for the environment

Top Tips for Writing

If you have a knack for the written word, this book is for you. Becoming an effective journalist will take a little practice, but the process will also be fun and leave you with a great article and superb skills.



Vanessa Farquharson is a veteran environmental writer. As the resident environment reporter for the *National Post* she knows all the tips for writing a great piece. She has put together six steps for writing an article that is engaging and interesting. Use this guide as a quick overview on how to write a news article, or check out www.youngreporters.ca if you want more advice from Vanessa.

Step #1: Choosing Your Subject

While **Canada's Next Green Journalist** requires that you choose one local issue to focus on, the difficult part can sometimes be narrowing it down. Here are Vanessa's tips for selecting an engaging and exciting story.



Vanessa's Top Tips:

Be In the Know. Reading other people's stories will help you know what is being talked about and what other aspects of the story could be covered.

Discover Your Passion. It's important to write about something you feel passionate about. If you are interested in the subject, it will come through in your writing.

FOR MORE TIPS FROM
VANESSA, PLEASE VISIT
www.youngreporters.ca



Step #2: Keeping It Local

One of the easiest and best ways to appeal to your readers is to relate a big issue back to what is happening in your own community. The challenge of **Canada's Next Green Journalist** is to let the world know what environmental issues are happening in your town or neighbourhood. For an interesting article be sure to find the local appeal.

Vanessa's Top Tips:

Remember Your Readers. *The first thought we have when we read an article is usually 'So what?' So think about what would matter to your readers if you were writing for your local newspaper.*

Levy the Local. *We all tend to be most interested in things that are happening near to us, so act as if you are writing for your local newspaper and talk about how your subject affects your community.*

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QUESTION: *What are the first three questions that come to mind when you are thinking about your subject on a local scale?*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Step #3: Do Some Digging

To be an effective reporter you're going to have to get the facts. There will often be many people and sources to choose from and making a careful selection of sources will help create a factual and engaging article. Performing interviews is ideal, but you should do some digging as well – check out the Resources section of the YRE website for more tips.

Check out www.youngreporters.ca for a list of resources. Better yet, when you find a good one share it with other *Young Reporters* by emailing it to:

yre@environmentaldefence.ca

MY TOP WEBSITES:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Step #4: Writing

By now, you should have a head full of information and a blank page in front of you – don't worry! Now is when you will turn all your research into a news article. Below you will find Vanessa's top tips for how to write an effective piece. Check out the next page for a sample story from Vanessa.

Vanessa's Top Tips:

Get Them Hooked. *Begin with the most interesting part of the article before going into the facts. You want to get people interested and reading more!*

Leave Your Opinions At Home. *The job of a reporter is to present all the arguments and facts in a piece so the readers can come to their own conclusions.*

Keep 'Em Short. *Keeping your paragraphs to a couple sentences each can help to make the reading manageable and ensure people will keep reading to the end!*

The Golden Rule of Plagiarism. *Don't do it. Any ideas you get should be credited to the original source. If you're not sure, check with someone.*

**Now go on –
get writing!**

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CODE GREEN STAT!

Vanessa Farquarson
learns that what's
good for the earth
is also good for our
health care system

From biohazard waste to faxing and photocopying, leftover cups of Jell-O and disposable gowns, hospitals can be among the worst offenders when it comes to environmental stewardship.

As most doctors will affirm, the health of any population is dependent upon the health of the land, air and water around it — less pollution, for example, translates into fewer instances of asthma and lung disease, which means fewer people in hospital and on drugs, thus easing the strain on the health care system.

That said, making the effort to, say, re-sterilize medical equipment instead of throwing it out can require harsh chemicals and high temperatures in an autoclave, not to mention increased labour costs. And from a patient's point of view, a never-been-used disposable syringe in a vacuum-sealed package will just seem cleaner than one where only the needle is replaced after each use.

The difficult task of weighing patient health and safety with pressing environmental concerns — not to mention economic ones — is a job Michael Young understands well.

As vice-president of Toronto's Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre, Young recently committed to a massive green renovation that will see drastic reductions in energy consumption at the hospital.

"Safety is paramount, whether or not something's green," he says. "Often, in the short term, it can be more expensive to make the eco-friendly choice — that's where the tough decisions are."

But in terms of Sunnybrook's electricity use and the need for a more efficient system, Young admits it wasn't a tough decision at all. Last month, hospital executives announced a partnership with Honeywell to make the following changes:

Light fixtures will be replaced with fluorescent bulbs; motion-sensors will be installed to switch lights off automatically; reflective sheets slid between walls and radiators will contain heat; programmable thermostats for individual rooms will mean heat and air conditioning is only produced when needed; chillers and boilers will be upgraded to more efficient models; and, as the *coup de grâce*, what is slated to be the country's largest solar panel will be mounted on top of the hospital's roof.

"Altogether," says Young, "the figure that's been quoted to us is about \$2.7-million in energy savings, and the equivalent of taking over 1,400 medium-size cars off the road each year."

These numbers — particularly any preceded by a dollar sign — are important to keep in mind, especially when dealing with a publicly funded health care system. Unfortunately, in the grand scheme, \$2.7-million only alleviates a major hospital's budget by a minor amount. Back in the early '90s, for instance, the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto averaged an annual waste expenditure of nearly \$1.2-billion.

According to a 2002 article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, "the average North American hospital produces about nine kilograms of solid waste per patient-day, and even though most of it is innocuous office trash or cafeteria scraps,

According to a 2002 article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, “the average North American hospital produces about nine kilograms of solid waste per patient-day, and even though most of it is innocuous office trash or cafeteria scraps, some of it is potentially hazardous.”

Furthermore, according to an audit of another local hospital at that time, “about 80% of the so-called biomedical waste was comprised of items such as paper, cans, bottles and packaging that did not belong there.”

This misclassification is a major financial drain, too, because disposing of infectious waste can cost 16 times the amount of regular garbage.

Fortunately, things have been improving dramatically over at Sick Kids, thanks to the installation a while back of Valerie O’Grady as director of environmental services. She originally joined the hospital to supervise its housekeeping staff, but quickly became concerned with the amount of waste being generated and set about making changes. Eventually, the new full-time position was created.

Within a few years, the hospital had managed to decommission its incinerator, reduce biomedical waste in its labs and patient areas by 35% and launch a recycling program. Garbage cans in office areas were also replaced with small desktop containers, each of which got dropped off with a note reading, “Congratulations. This is your new garbage can. No, this isn’t a joke” — a move that single-handedly diverted more than 4,500 kg per month from the landfill.

Because of these efforts, the hospital cut its annual waste management costs by 58%.

While O’Grady has moved on from this position, the staff at Sick Kids continue to engage in various green initiatives, most recently focusing on a reduction of steam and water use and the installation of solar panels.

“Things are getting better,” says Gideon Forman of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, a Toronto-based organization for both doctors and concerned citizens with more than 3,500 members. “There’s a growing awareness of the links between environmental degradation and people getting sick.”

Forman and his colleagues have been working for years at the institutional level to remove toxic substances such as lead and mercury from hospitals and encourage medical staff to recycle and take public transit. He also worked with the government to ban lawn pesticides and is now involved in seeking alternatives to plastic intravenous drip bags.

“There’s a concern there because of the phthalates and hormone disruptors embedded in the plastic,” he says, “which can leach into the solution and enter a patient’s bloodstream.”

As if hormone disruptors, inefficient boilers and misclassified garbage weren’t enough, Young says there are lots of other concerns when it comes to greening hospitals, such as Styrofoam and plastic packaging in cafeterias and on individual food trays for patients.

It can seem overwhelming but, as Honeywell’s Luis Rodrigues says, it’s really just a matter of tackling the most important stuff first and making sure every cent is invested wisely.

“Putting up a large-scale wind farm in an area that has a lot of wind, for instance, makes sense,” he says, “but putting up a single turbine at Sunnybrook wouldn’t because it doesn’t have a significant payback.

“We have to remember that hospitals are a unique market when it comes to anything green,” he adds. “These are facilities that are occupied 100% of the time, so lighting and heating systems must be changed carefully.”

The last thing anyone wants, of course, is to have the lights go off in the middle of a surgery, or the heating suddenly shut down in the neonatal ward.

But both Rodrigues and Young are confident that all the eco-renovations at Sunnybrook will go smoothly. They also hope to prove that such initiatives are not only feasible but essential when it comes to maintaining the health of Canadians and their environment.

“The good thing is,” Young says, “I think that everyone I talk to — all my colleagues, at various hospitals — have this on their mind. Some are more active than others, some are leading the way and some are following, it’s just a matter of how far people want to go.”

National Post

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Step #5: Editing

This is where you will turn your decent writing into a rockin' piece of environmental journalism! You can edit your story as you write it, but Vanessa says she finds it easier to write the whole thing and then start going over it with a fine tooth comb.



Vanessa's Top Tips:

Here are my top tips for editing. Use this as a checklist while you review your article.

Spelling. *Use the spell check function on your computer and try reading your article backwards. It will help you look at the spelling of each individual word.*

Check the Facts. *Did you cover all the basic questions in your article?*

Read out Loud. *Does your article make sense? Reading your article out loud or to someone else is a good to make sure your article is grammatically correct.*

Finding Balance. *Did you strike a fair balance between all opinions and sources on the issue?*

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www.youngreporters.ca

Step #6: Final Touches and Submitting

You're almost finished your first piece – Congratulations! Now there are just a few touches that will help make your pieces especially interesting

Vanessa's Top Tips:

Choosing a Headline. *It should be clear from the headline what the story is about, although you won't want it to be a whole paragraph long! Check out some headlines from your local paper to help get the idea, or read more at www.youngreporters.ca*

A Picture is Worth... you know. *As wonderful and descriptive as your piece may be, the right picture can go a long way in bringing it to life. Be sure you have permission to use the photo you're choosing, or better yet, take your own! (For photo tips, visit www.youngreporters.ca)*

FOR MORE TIPS FROM
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www.youngreporters.ca



Submitting Your Piece

By the time you have finished this book, hopefully you will have tried out all the tips and tricks and created an article you want to submit to **Canada's Next Green Journalist**. You now only have to submit it for a chance to win amazing prizes. It's easy!

Log on to www.youngreporters.ca. Go to the "Enter Canada's Next Green Journalist" section and fill in the requested information – this will make you eligible for Canadian prizes and to have your piece on the YRE Canada website.

Winners of Canada's Next Green Journalist will automatically be considered for the international competition

For more information visit the website, or email: yre@environmentaldefence.ca

Thanks for participating in **YOUNG REPORTERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT!** Check out the website for more ideas to stay involved with environmental issues in your area.

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