

The Map to Publication

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1. Illustration

Every great article begins with a great illustration which can come from anywhere. Your own life, your Great Aunt Gertrude's life, or the news are places to start. This all-important beginning can be one line long or a couple paragraphs. Often when I write articles, I use the second illustration I come up with since for some reason this one is stronger than the first.

Strength is what is key. You want your reader to feel the emotion behind the words. You want them to be drawn into the article and not be able to stop reading. Before you write, ask yourself, "How can I make my opening so compelling that people will keep reading?"

One time a woman in my writing class read her opening which was a story about how she let the judgment of others get in the way of how she lived her life. Her opening was pretty good, but my attention was caught by the following sentence.

Sometimes I hate having people over for dinner since I worry they'll judge how I cook or keep my house.

In this case, one sentence was enough of an illustration.

2. Transitional sentence

This sentence transitions from the illustration to the essence of the article. For my previous example, the transition might be.

Since this was true for me, I knew other women probably felt the same way. When did we decide to live our lives governed by other people's opinions?

The transitional sentence can be a question or a simple statement of fact. The key is that it must move the reader from the illustration into the meat of the article.

3. Essence

The essence is why you are writing the article. The illustration might entice a reader to read the article but the truth of your subject must be developed enough so that it keeps the reader engaged. It must affirm in his or her mind that you understand the core issue and the reason behind your subject. Use statistics and quotations from experts here but also don't be afraid to share your own opinion as this is what makes the article uniquely yours and interesting to read.

4. Broaden

Take a few sentences to broaden to a wider audience. Sometimes writing instructors will say something like, "Keep a narrow focus but broaden it" and some writers, including myself in the beginning, might find this confusing. But this key part of the map will keep your article from seeming to be only about yourself.

Who will be reading this piece? Is it geared to men ages 25-30? What are some subgroups? In my example, the article is written to working mother. There are many other types of working mothers than just her ones her age and personality type. There are part-time working mothers, working mothers with young children, working mothers with older children, and divorced or single working mothers.

A few sentences broadening your focus to a wider audience makes your reader really identify with you and the truth of the article. Broadening your writing makes you reader centered instead of author centered. Here's how my writing student did this.

Maybe you work only part time but still compare yourself to those who work full time feeling like they get everything done so you should be able to also. Perhaps you have to do all the work in your home by yourself but don't want to ask for help because somehow you feel you should be able to handle it all.

These statements resonate with the reader bringing the truth closer to home.

5. Invite a decision

Invite your reader to make a decision. This doesn't have to be a life-changing decision like "Would you commit to keeping your house perfectly clean for a month?" or "Decide today to never speak irritably to your children again." Instead ask the reader to make an easy decision. Give her something concrete to do, something that will make a difference. This part of the map is sometimes called the takeaway or bringing it into the reader. My student did it this way.

During a break at work, take five minutes and consider how your fear of other people's opinion might be keeping you from developing friendships and experiencing life. Journal some positive steps you will take your new journey to personal happiness. Baby steps are still steps, so record your progress and observe even the smallest change.

6. Tie it all together

Tie the article together by briefly referencing the beginning illustration. This makes everything coherent and leaves the reader feeling satisfied. Here's the ending.

Next time I have people over, I won't worry about their opinion. Instead I'm going to celebrate my friendships and enjoy our journey together.

Use this map and find yourself getting a lot more acceptances. I know I did