

My Turn Workshop

A workshop for community members interested in sharing their views on the issues that affect the greater Concord, NH area

A Project of

CONCORD  **MONTOR**

Granite State
NEWS COLLABORATIVE
Connecting New Hampshire

 **NEW HAMPSHIRE**
humanities

Created and by facilitated by: Dan Marcus,
Carisa Corrow and Allie Ginwala

About this Booklet

We created this booklet for both in-person sessions facilitated by the authors and to use as a standalone guide for future My Turn or Letter to the Editor writers for the Concord Monitor. While this is specifically geared toward the goals and policies at the Concord Monitor, the advice and tips can be applied to many other news outlets who accept opinion pieces from community members in New Hampshire and beyond.

The booklet is divided into two sections: being the editor and being the writer. Both will help participants understand the quality the Concord Monitor is looking for and the process for submitting either a Letter to the Editor or a My Turn opinion essay. Participants will also learn the difference between the two types of submissions.

About the Facilitators

Dan Marcus is a social studies teacher at John Stark High School and a regular contributor to the Monitor's 3 Minute Civics column series.

Carisa Corrow is a public school advocate and founder of Educating for Good. She has written both Letters to the Editor and My Turns.

Allie Ginwala is the audience engagement editor for the Concord Monitor. She manages the opinion section as well as various outreach and community engagement initiatives for the paper.

MY TURN

The aim of the Opinion section, both in print and at concordmonitor.com, is to elevate the conversation in our communities by giving space to thoughtful, reasoned perspective. The section features a range of perspectives and ideas and offers a platform for people to share their voices directly with readers in the form of a My Turn or Letter to the Editor.

YOUR TURN

What's your 'why' for writing?
What topics are interesting to you?
What would you like to share?



FIRST THINGS FIRST: WHO CAN SUBMIT?

You must be in New Hampshire or have a clearly stated direct connection to the state.

Only submissions with an author's full name will be considered

Preference is given to submissions from people of the Capital Region, our main coverage area

OTHER RULES OF THUMB

We will not accept submissions that do the following:

- Praise or criticize private businesses, unless a larger issue is being addressed
- Attack a person based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or other characteristics.

When you submit a My Turn or Letter to the Editor, please be aware that:

- We do not have the capacity to respond to every submission.
- We edit for spelling, grammar, style and clarity.
- We fact-check when we feel a statistic, quote or assertion is suspect, but we do not and cannot check every fact in every submission.
- We do not under any circumstances pass along contact information received during the submission process to others outside Newspapers of New England, the Monitor's publishing company.

It's more than just word count

My Turn

400-800 words

My Turns speak to a broader issue. It's not just refuting another stance or opinion, it's offering your own. It brings together expertise, understanding, lived experience, and research. You may be inspired to write your own My Turn based on what you read in another, and state that it caused you to write your own take. That's great. But as My Turns are given a bigger platform and spotlight in the section, they should be centered on your experience, perspective or understanding of the topic at hand.

LTE

No more than 250 words

Letters to the Editor is a space to respond to what you're reading, seeing, hearing or experiencing in your neighborhood, community and state. It's a space to respond to another letter, My Turn or news article and add your insight or stance.



Use the QR Code to see examples of My Turns

6 Tips from the editor

Make it narrative,
not a list of statements

Write like you're
addressing a friend

Reframe the open letter

Show your receipts

Check your tone

Consider these
questions. Is it true? Is it
necessary? Is it kind?

If an editor asks you
to rewrite or refine,
keep trying.
Remember...





You be the Editor

On the next few pages, there are examples of submissions to the Concord Monitor in their original form and then final version.

Look at the first drafts.

What would you give as feedback on the highlighted section?

Look at published drafts.

How did the writer improve their argument?

First draft: Benefits of timber harvesting

Chris Balch, author of “Forest Management Flaws,” Concord Monitor “My Turn” published on May 12, is entitled to his opinions regarding timber harvesting. However, I dispute several of his statements including:

First. The greatest threat to the future of our forests is development, not timber harvesting. Roads, houses, shopping centers, etc. are permanent changes to the land. The impact of forestry is temporary. Landowners can ensure their property never is developed with a conservation easement, a real estate transaction that extinguishes the development rights.

To ensure that our woodlot, the Woods Without Gile, will never become a parking lot, we protected it with a working forest conservation easement.

Second. Older trees sequestered carbon decades ago. Young to middle-age trees, around 30 to 40 years old, sequester the most carbon – today and in the future – when we need it most. Having a balance of young and mature forests is important for carbon storage and sequestration. Age class diversity also benefits wildlife.

Forests cover about 85 percent of New Hampshire. In New Hampshire, annual forest growth exceeds removals (harvesting and land use change) by almost 2 to 1. This means that every year our forests contain more wood and the trees capture more carbon than they did the previous year. This trend has been going on since just after World War II when researchers started tracking forest data.

More information about the science behind carbon sequestration is available at www.northeastforestcarbon.org.

Third. White-throated Sparrow and Eastern Towhee, which Mr. Balch cites in his opinion piece, are two shrub land/young forest bird species that have general habitat needs. However, studies show that populations of these two species are declining.

In New Hampshire, the best source for specific details about bird population change is the "State of NH Birds" by Dr. Pam Hunt, senior biologist, Avian Conservation for New Hampshire Audubon. This document provides a data-driven summary of current bird population changes and a habitat-by-habitat look at how bird populations are changing.

In 2002, when my husband and I purchased our woodlot, we heard primarily Crows, Ravens and Blue Jays. Why did we hear so few birds? The crown closure of our forest was too dense for songbirds.

Since 2004, we have conducted four timber harvests on our property. As a result we have seen and/or heard myriad bird species – including upland game birds, songbirds, owls and raptors.

To provide scientific data to corroborate what my husband and I have observed at the Woods Without Gile, we engaged two professional biologists to survey the pre- and post-timber harvest animal and plant species on the property. The goal of this scientific work is to ascertain the impact of timber harvesting on our land. When the work is complete in 2026, we will share the findings with landowners, foresters and scientists engaged in important research about forests in New Hampshire.

What feedback would you give?

Published My Turn

With about 85% of its land cloaked in forests, New Hampshire is the second most forested state (after Maine) in the United States.

Well-managed forests make a positive contribution to the state's biodiversity and economy, and its ability to sequester carbon. These forests also provide myriad hikers, hunters, anglers and others with an opportunity to enjoy the outdoors.

Development, not timber harvesting, as was written about in a recent *Monitor My Turn*, is the most significant threat to New Hampshire's forests. The impact of forestry on the landscape is temporary; development is permanent.

To ensure that their land continues to be a forest for future generations, many landowners extinguish the development rights on their property by donating or selling a conservation easement to a land trust.

According to the [2020 NH Forest Action Plan](#), more than 1.68 million acres of forested land in New Hampshire, or 95% of all protected lands in the state, are permanently conserved through various methods. This is one of the highest percentages of land protected through easements east of the Mississippi River.

Since 2007, Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust has held a conservation easement on the Woods Without Gile, property my husband and I own in Springfield, New Hampshire. This ensures that our property will never become a housing development or a shopping center.

A study completed by Innovative Natural Resource Solutions, LLC in 2020 for the NH Timberland Owners Association, the statewide organization that represents the forest products industry, shows that private landowners own 76% or 3.42 million acres of the forests in the state. Public entities, including municipalities, the state of New Hampshire and the federal government own about 1.14 million acres.

Many of these woodlands are managed. This means the owner plans timber harvests, often years in advance; provides recreational opportunities for the public; creates a diverse habitat that benefits plants and animals; and protects water resources. These are the tenants of the New Hampshire Tree Farm program. In New Hampshire, more than 1,500 landowners, including me, are enrolled in this voluntary program.

Working with our licensed consulting forester, we set goals and objectives for our woodlot that are codified in a management plan. For us, timber harvesting is never an arbitrary exercise. Our goals center on improving the quality of the trees that grow on our land while also opening views, establishing meadows and creating trails that are open to the public. The 1998 ice storm damaged most of the hardwood trees on our property. With crunched crowns, these trees were alive but could not thrive. During our four timber harvests we extricated some of these trees. When we do, the resulting growth of young trees is stunning.

Enhanced carbon sequestration is another significant benefit of a well-managed forest. Older trees sequestered carbon decades ago. Young to middle-age trees, 30 to 40 years old, sequester the most carbon, today and in the future, when we need it most..

Annual forest growth in New Hampshire exceeds removals (harvesting and land-use change) by almost 2 to 1. This means that every year our forests contain more wood and the trees capture more carbon than they did the previous year. Researchers have been tracking this trend since just after World War II. More information about the science behind carbon sequestration is available at northeastforestcarbon.org.

Many songbird species are declining in New Hampshire. Loss of habitat is among the reasons for this. The best source for specific details about bird population change in New Hampshire is the "State of NH Birds" by Dr. Pam Hunt, senior biologist, Avian Conservation, for NH Audubon. This document provides a data-driven summary of current bird population changes and a habitat-by-habitat look at how bird populations are changing.

When we bought the Woods Without Gile in 2002, I asked the forester who was walking the land with me why we were not hearing songbirds. "The crown closure is too dense," he said. "To create openings and edges, habitat that many songbirds require, you'll need to cut some trees."


We did. The results have been dramatic. More birds and a greater variety of species now inhabit the Woods Without Gile.

To provide scientific data to corroborate what my husband and I have observed at the Woods Without Gile, we engaged two professional biologists to survey the pre- and post-timber harvest animal and plant species on the property. The goal of this science-based project is to ascertain the impact of timber harvesting on our land.

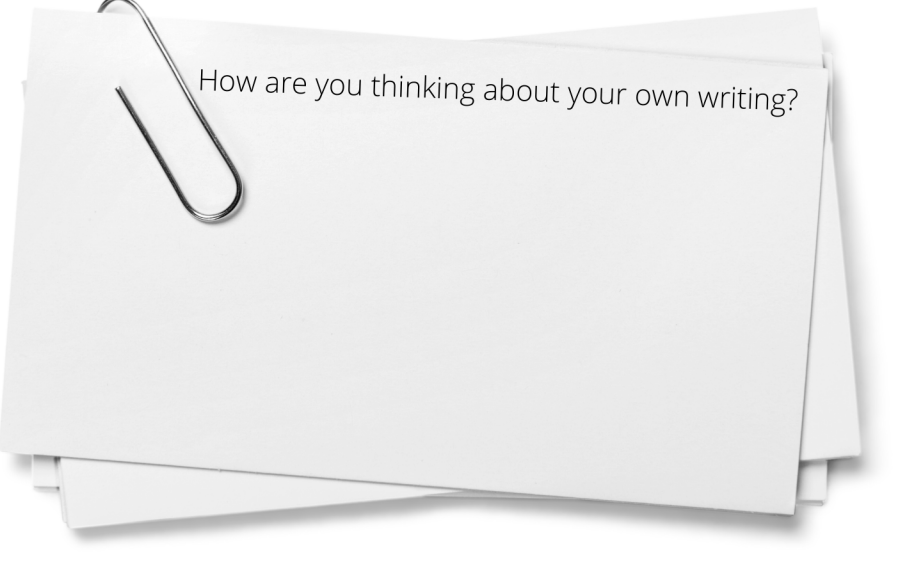
When the work is complete in 2026, we will share the findings with landowners, foresters and scientists engaged in important research about forests in New Hampshire.

Rather than wanton destruction of the land, a timber harvest, guided by clear objectives, enhances biodiversity, provides many recreational benefits and supports the local economy

Notes to self



What did you learn about editor's expectations?



How are you thinking about your own writing?

First draft: Open letter to Casella board of directors

As a Casella Waste Systems (CWS) shareholder and a resident of NH's North Country, I've watched the years-long process of CWS being forced to close its NCES landfill in Bethlehem NH and trying to permit a new greenfield landfill about 5 miles away in Dalton NH. It has not been pretty. I write because the CWS Board of Directors needs to hear from the public, prior to the CWS annual meeting on June 2nd, about the missteps and irresponsibility of CWS management. For example:

1. A Trail of Bad Blood Everywhere. CWS has infuriated the residents of Bethlehem by proposing repeated expansions at NCES, contrary to promises made. This has caused Bethlehem to incur legal expenses topping \$2 million.
2. Hiding Potential PFAS Contamination. The recent leachate spill at NCES was the largest in New England, and it took NCES two days to discover the spill. CWS' response was to hire its engineering firm to perform an "audit" knowing full well that the firm had a significant conflict of interest. And CWS has so far refused to do soil sampling near the spill for the presence of PFAS for the simple reason that it was not required to do so under its existing permits.
3. CWS is a Poor Landfill Operator. The long list of rules violations in the Northeastern states in which CWS operates is damning evidence that CWS is not a good steward of the environment. CWS' track record does not stack up well against other landfill operators or other vertically integrated waste management companies.

4. Dalton Had a Target on its Back. In its now withdrawn wetlands permit, CWS' evidence of its search for a good landfill site did not pass the laugh test. It's apparent that it targeted NH from the start because NH has the most lax landfill siting laws in New England. And it's also apparent that Dalton was targeted because the town is one of the poorest in NH, and at the time it had no zoning ordinance. Note that as a result of CWS' bullying, Dalton now has a zoning ordinance.

5. Bullies Pick on the Weak. Dalton is a small and relatively poor town that CWS assumed could be easily steamrolled. Littleton, on the other hand, is a larger, more prosperous, and more politically powerful town. CWS employees freely admit that is why their planned truck route bypasses Littleton, even though a route through Littleton to the Dalton site is as much as 25 miles shorter than the planned route.

6. What Were They Thinking? The Dalton site chosen by CWS is effectively in the middle of a sand and gravel pit, the worst soil type imaginable for a landfill. But the land was cheap, and apparently that is all CWS cared about. The Dalton site is so inappropriate for a landfill that if the site were in Maine or New Jersey (or a number of other states) it would not even be considered by state environmental regulators as a site suitable for a landfill.

7. What Are They Hiding? The Dalton site is prime habitat and the landfill would destroy 17 acres of wetland and 5 vernal pools. Dalton's wetlands expert has made repeated attempts to access the site during the critical growing season so that it can advise Dalton on the impacts of landfill development on the site. CWS has refused each time, citing legal reasons why it is not obligated to provide such access.

8. What Hubris. In a public hearing on the Dalton landfill John Gay, the chief engineer for NCES told NHDES and the public that landfill technology is so good and the topography of the Dalton site is so appropriate that it would be impossible for the landfill to contaminate nearby waterbodies. He said it twice: “Can’t happen”. But in fact it most certainly can happen, and any company with that level of hubris should not be trusted to operate dangerous projects such as landfills.

9. Cooperation with Host Communities—What a Farce. Bethlehem has been trying to kick CWS out of their community for years. As for Dalton, CWS has been asked repeatedly by town officials to submit a zoning application, but CWS has refused. It effectively has told Dalton that the Town has no say in the permitting or siting of a landfill. incorrectly citing to NH Supreme Court precedent.

10. Mistruths Abound. There’s mounting evidence that NH has sufficient landfill capacity for years to come, including testimony and repeated statement from NHDES’ Director of Solid Waste. Nevertheless, CWS is clinging to their bogus and self-serving argument that NH faces an imminent landfill capacity crisis if the Dalton landfill is not built. In a recent oped in NH newspapers John Casella claimed that a consultant’s study, paid for by CWS, shows how NH will suffer if the Dalton landfill is not built. But despite repeated requests, CWS refuses to release the consultant study to the press or the public so that John Casella’s claims can be fact-checked.

In summary, I ask the CWS Board to come to the same conclusion that virtually everyone in NH’s North Country has reached, including the people affected, town officials, and NH Legislators—that CWS’ landfill planning and operations in NH are dysfunctional, and the right thing for CWS to do going-forward is to focus on other parts of the integrated solid waste business in NH.

Published My Turn

New Hampshire lags badly when it comes to enacting laws on siting landfills and regulating PFAS contamination. Look on both sides of us — Vermont and Maine have been far more proactive in terms of recognizing the risks associated with new solid waste landfills and creating incentives for alternatives such as recycling and composting.

Moreover, other New England states have taken steps to help ensure that for-profit landfill developers have the state's needs, and not their own profits, as central to solid waste management. We're on a slippery slope. If we aren't vigilant, New Hampshire may slowly but inexorably slide into becoming the dumping ground for all of New England.

Thankfully, the New Hampshire Legislature has passed a number of laws this session designed to help New Hampshire catch up with the rest of New England, and a number of these laws are already on the governor's desk for his signature. One of these laws, HB 1454, would deny a permit for any new landfill that would put at risk contamination of a nearby water resource, including our lakes, rivers and seacoast.

One thing New Hampshire's residents and legislators can do is to encourage Governor Sununu to sign these laws. But something else needs to be done as well. New Hampshire leaders need to tell the solid waste industry that New Hampshire is not going to be their patsy, and is not going to become the dump for all of New England.

Casella Waste Systems (CWS) has one large landfill in New Hampshire, the NCES landfill in Bethlehem. CWS has been trying for years to get permits to expand capacity at the NCES landfill, but as of now, the facility will close in two years. To keep its New Hampshire profits going, CWS has submitted permits to build a brand new landfill in Dalton, about 5 miles away from NCES. CWS says that up to half of the trash to be landfilled in Dalton will come from out-of-state.

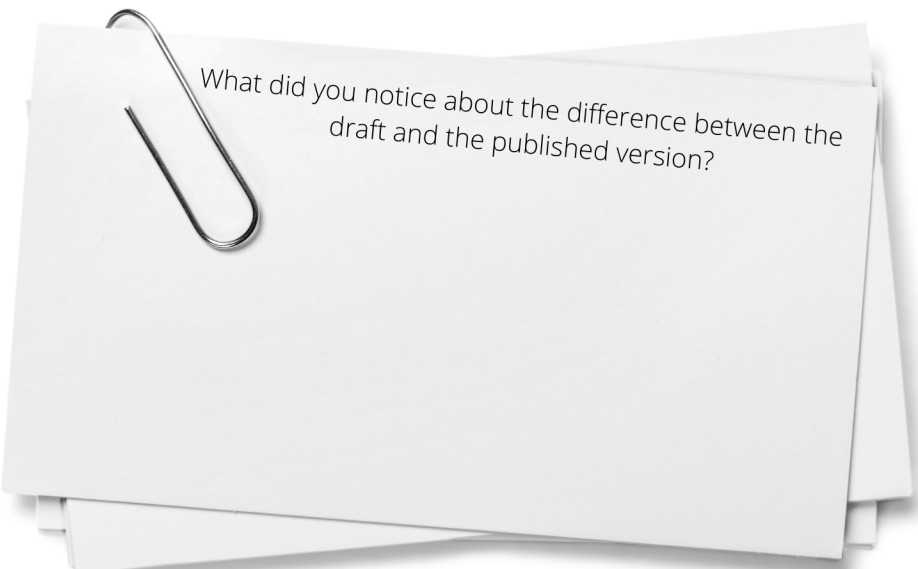
- CWS' annual shareholder meeting is June 2nd. This is the perfect time for New Hampshire's leaders to let CWS know that its business model, to use New Hampshire as a dumping ground for all of New England's trash, is not acceptable.
- CWS' actions in New Hampshire demonstrate its cavalier attitude toward our state. For example:
- CWS has lobbied hard to prevent the passage of sensible landfill regulation laws in this and previous New Hampshire Legislature sessions.
- The recent leachate spill at NCES was the largest in New England, and it took NCES two days to discover the spill. CWS' response was to hire its engineering firm to perform an "audit" knowing full well that the firm had a significant conflict of interest. And CWS has so far refused to do soil sampling near the spill for the presence of PFAS for the simple reason that it was not required to do so under its existing permits.
- CWS targeted Dalton for a new landfill without seriously considering other sites that would result in less environmental damage. The Dalton site is effectively in the middle of a sand and gravel pit, the worst soil type imaginable for a landfill. But the land was cheap, and apparently, that is all CWS cared about. The Dalton site is so inappropriate for a landfill that if the site were in Maine (or New Jersey and a number of other states) it would not even be considered by state environmental regulators as a site suitable for a landfill.
- Dalton's wetlands expert has made repeated attempts to access the site during the critical growing season so that it can advise Dalton on the impacts of landfill development on the site. CWS has refused each time, citing legal reasons why it is not obligated to provide such access.
- CWS has been asked repeatedly by Dalton town officials to submit a zoning application, but CWS has refused. It effectively has told Dalton that the town has no say in the permitting or siting of a landfill, despite NH Supreme Court precedent that gives towns such as Dalton certain rights.

- Despite the mounting evidence that New Hampshire has sufficient landfill capacity for years to come, including testimony and repeated statement from NHDES' director of solid waste, CWS is clinging to the bogus and self-serving argument that New Hampshire faces an imminent landfill capacity crisis if the Dalton landfill is not built.

In a recent opinion piece in New Hampshire newspapers, John Casella claimed that a consultant's study, paid for by CWS, shows how New Hampshire will suffer if the Dalton landfill is not built. But despite repeated requests, CWS refuses to release the consultant study to the press or the public so that John Casella's claims can be fact-checked.

In summary, I ask New Hampshire leaders to tell CWS' Board of Directors that enough is enough and that the company needs to earn the trust of New Hampshire before it considers building another landfill in New Hampshire.

Note to self

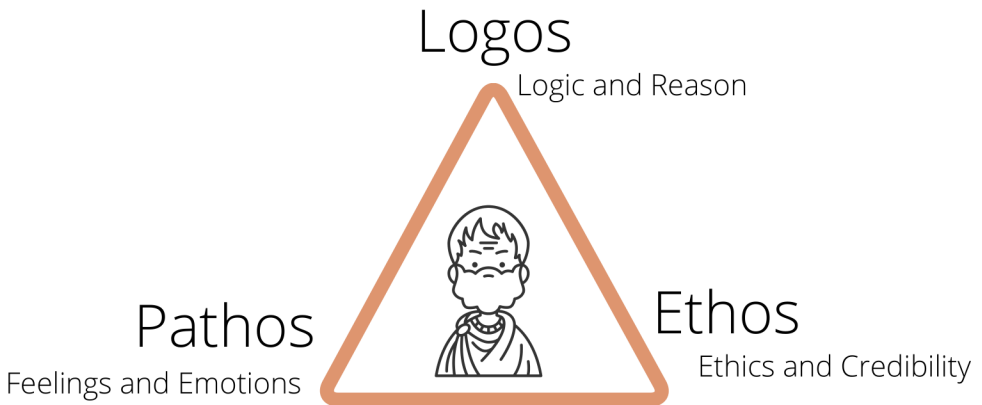
A stack of several white papers is shown, slightly offset to create a sense of depth. A silver paperclip is attached to the top-left corner of the top sheet. The top sheet has a handwritten note in black ink that reads: "What did you notice about the difference between the draft and the published version?"

What did you notice about the difference between the draft and the published version?

Let's get going...

- Brainstorm
- Free write
- Respond to others
- Read other opinions
- Talk it out with yourself
- Talk it through with friends

Choose a rhetorical strategy (or three)



Even if you don't plan on it, these rhetorical devices will guide your argument. Using them strategically can help you make your argument stronger. One is no more important than another, but knowing your audience helps to focus how you will share your perspective for impact.

Sources, Do I Need Them?

Including your sources can help solidify a point, especially if you are relying on them as part of your strategy. If it's common knowledge, a reference might be enough, but if it's only common knowledge to you or your circle of friends, folks might need to see the receipts themselves to be convinced!

Locating a good source

Tips from researcher Mike Caulfield

Do not attempt to verify a website by reading the website
Find the original source
Use fact checking sites

Hannah Logue's Fable Technique for Sources

Find original footage.

Analyze the headline – if it is trying to grab your attention too much, it may indicate that the article is not truthful.

Bias – are you able to look at this news with a neutral eye? If you check your bias, you have a better chance of getting to actual facts.

Look to fact checkers such as Snopes or Politifact to verify accuracy...also they aren't perfect either!

Exert self-control – if you cannot verify that the story is truthful, do not share it or use it.

**..and if you use
them, check them.**

Putting on your
thinking CAPP



C is for “context”

What was happening before, during or
after the document was created?

A is for “audience”

Was the document written for a certain audience?

P is for “purpose”

What was the author’s purpose in writing this document?

P is for “point of view”

What is the author's perspective or bias?

CAPP in Practice



On the next page, read the account from John Smith, of Jamestown fame, who was rescued by Pocahontas from being killed by Powhatan. How does CAPP help put things in perspective?

From John Smith...

"...then as many as could laid hands on him, dragged him to them, and thereon laid his head, and being ready with their clubs to beat out his brains, Pocahontas, the king's dearest daughter, when no entreaty could prevail, got his head in her arms, and laid her own upon his to save his from death: whereat the emperor was contented he should live..."

Context :The Pocahontas story took place in 1608. However, as pointed out by Historian Henry Adams, although Smith wrote about the colony and those accounts were published, the Pocahontas story in particular, was never included until 1624.

Audience and Purpose: Smith had fallen on hard times when his book was set to be published in 1624, and Pocahontas, by that time, was famous. Smith's audience may have primarily been potential buyers of the book as his main purpose may have been to make money.

Point of view: If the events that Smith described did occur, he may not be the best to explain what was actually happening. He was in an unfamiliar place and situation. Some historians believe that Powhatan was performing a ritual and it is possible that Smith was never in any actual danger even if he believed he was.

Note, the above analysis does not mean that the Smith story is absolutely wrong. It does raise some questions. A researcher could still use Smith's writing, but would be well served to acknowledge potential issues and proceed with caution. Hopefully, you can see how considering CAPP can help you think critically about sources.

Final Tips

Not every first draft is a final draft, and that's okay!

A request to edit or reframe your LTE or My Turn from an editor is not a rejection, it's a chance to work with you to make it better.

Collaboration is key

Get feedback and get sources!

Encourage others to write

To make positive change for good, we need to come at issues from different angles and perspectives. The more people that participate in the process, the better. Opinions that are opposite of mine often make my writing better and my resolve strengthened.

“

Freedom of the Press, if it means anything at all, means the freedom to criticize and oppose.

George Orwell

”