



**Santa Clara  
University**

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Markkula Center  
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Ricardo Sandoval Palos  
Senior editor  
NPR's Morning Edition

**Bust your own  
assumptions**

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## The Anatomy of a Robot Journalist

June 12, 2014 by [Nicholas Diakopoulos](#)

4 Reactions



17



75



Given that an entire afternoon was dedicated to a “[Robot Journalism Bootcamp](#)” at the Global Editors Network Summit this week, it’s probably safe to say that automated journalism has finally gone mainstream — hey it’s only taken close to 40 years since the [first story writing algorithm was created at Yale](#). But there are still lots of ethical questions and debates that we need to sort out, from [source transparency to corrections policies for bots](#). Part of that hinges on exactly how these auto-writing algorithms work: What are their limitations and how might we design them to be more value-sensitive to journalism?

Despite the proprietary nature of most robot journalists, the great thing about patents is that they’re public. And patents have been granted to several major players in the robo-journalism space already, including [Narrative Science](#), [Automated Insights](#), and [Yseop](#), making their algorithms just a little bit less opaque in terms of how they operate. More patents are in the pipeline from both heavy weights like [CBS Interactive](#), and start-ups like [Fantasy Journalist](#). So how does a robo-writer from Narrative Science really work?

Every robot journalist first needs to **ingest a bunch of data**. Data rich domains like weather were [some of](#)

### About the Blog

We’re always looking contributors to pitch and [cover events](#), tell us [How It’s Made](#) or write [tips and tutorials](#). Current and former students are encouraged to pitch. Contact Tow’s DMA Shiwani Neupane at [sn2512@columbia.edu](mailto:sn2512@columbia.edu) if you’d like to contribute.

### Recent Posts

#### [The Anatomy of a Robot Journalist](#)

Nicholas Diakopoulos, June 12, 2014

#### [Knight Foundation joins The Tow Foundation as a sponsor for the Initiative headed by Columbia University’s Tow Center for Digital Journalism](#)

Smitha Khorana, June 11, 2014

#### [Tow Center Program Defends Journalism From the Threat of Mass Surveillance](#)

Smitha Khorana, June 11, 2014

# It’s so easy now



- Many outlets just use snippets of AP copy, or announce just headlines based on the first one or two sentences.


[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/09/hispanic-majority-prison\\_n\\_955823.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/09/09/hispanic-majority-prison_n_955823.html)

- Then there's climate change and insurance companies

[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/15/business/insurers-stray-from-the-conservative-line-on-climate-change.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/15/business/insurers-stray-from-the-conservative-line-on-climate-change.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

# Short on substance?

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<http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/digital-strategies/199834/programmers-explain-how-to-turn-data-into-journalism-why-that-matters-after-gun-permit-data-publishing/>

<http://towcenter.org/blog/on-the-ethics-of-data-driven-journalism-of-fact-friction-and-public-records-in-a-more-transparent-age/>

**Just because we can?**

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<http://www.sacbee.com/statepay/#req=employee%2Ftop%2Fyear%3D2013>

**Privacy?**

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