



# THE NUT GRAF

The "Nutshell Paragraph." Explaining to your reader what your topic is, why it matters and why they should care!

WHO CARES?



WHY NOW?

In a recent article in the New York Times' section on mentor texts, called "Explaining why a Topic Matters," the author asks students to think about their own articles:

Why do you care — and why should [your reader] care? Whom or what does your topic affect? How is it relevant to broader questions in the field, to the world today and to our own lives? (Schulten).

You can (and should) answer at least **SOME** of these questions.

As you read , try to put your finger on the paragraph or paragraphs in which the writer explains to you why this topic matters now, and what questions it raises about our world. We'll look at some published examples, and then work on writing nutshell paragraphs of our own!



This is what journalists call the **“nut graf,”** shorthand for **“nutshell paragraph,”** because it explains the context of a topic and gives you, more or less, the essence of the story. It often follows the **“lead,”** or opening paragraph or paragraphs that attempt to get your attention. Poynter, a global journalism institute, explains it as when the writer **“backs up to provide context for the scene in the lead, like a filmmaker drawing back from a close-up to a wide-angle shot,”** writing:

This is the **“nut section,”** that provides the background by addressing **“How?”** and **“Why?”** the scene described in the lead came to be. Without context, the reader who is hooked by an arresting lead may feel left dangling .

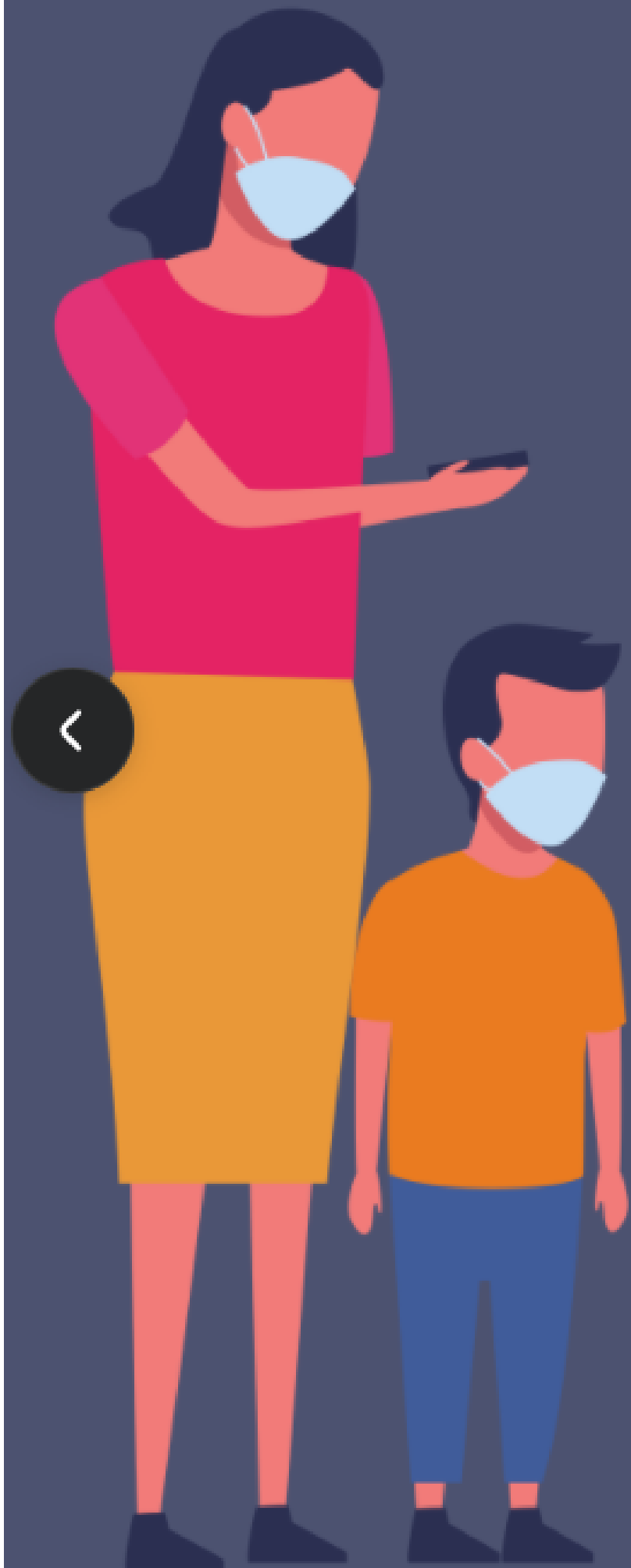
## Let me clarify "new, unique or timely:"

**NEW:** An engaging article might tell us about something new (hence the word "news!") For example: a new medical technology, some political intrigue, a new album, etc... Something our readers don't know about yet.

**UNIQUE:** This might be a unique perspective on something we've heard a number of times-- an old story from a different angle. For example, a college student telling the story of living through Covid in the Bronx while raising their daughter is still going to be compelling, even though we all know about Covid, because we're learning something about a person's unique life and experience!

**TIMELY:** Timely means the story is important right now. This doesn't necessarily mean "new," though. It means the information is useful to readers in this moment. You could write an article about The Black Death, a plague in 1347, which was 674 years ago, and it would probably be timely right now in light of Covid.

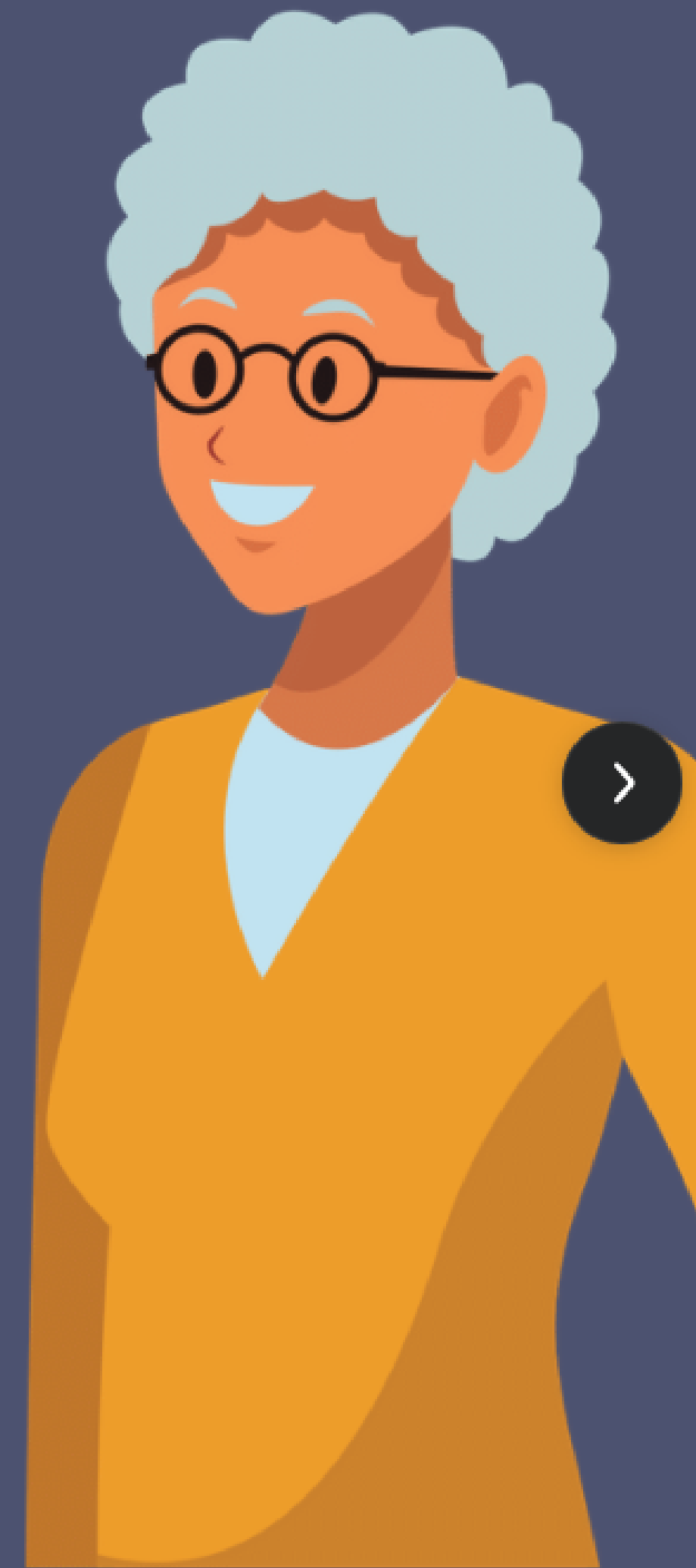
**Sometimes an article is new, unique AND timely, but you really only need one of these ingredients.**



**From “Looking on the Bright Side May Be Good for Your Health,” a section that explains why a positive attitude might literally help extend your life:**

An increasing number of recent long-term studies has linked greater optimism to a lower risk of developing cardiovascular disease and other chronic ailments and to fostering “exceptional longevity,” a category one team of researchers used for people who live to 85 and beyond.

**Why should the reader care? Who does this affect?  
What new, unique or timely information is the writer bringing to the discussion?**



# WRITE A NUTSHELL PARAGRAPH FOR YOUR OWN UNIT TWO ARTICLE!!

Step back from whatever topic you're writing about and focus on why it is important. Try answering these questions first so that when you get to the point in your piece where you might include a kind of "nut" paragraph of your own, you're prepared with ideas:

- Why is this topic worth writing about?
- What is the wider context for this? Why might it help to explain to show why this is an important topic? How is it relevant in the world today?
- Whom or what does it affect? Why? How?
- What makes what you're saying new, unique or timely?

When you put a "nut" paragraph in your article, think closely about where is the best place to put it. You can look to your mentor texts, or these articles we've read in class for help!

