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News Reporting in a Digital Bubble

MARCH 25, 2020 BY [ABBY LUBY](#)

Most writers and reporters are used to solitary work. We hunker down in our word-cave to craft a story that makes sense to the reader. We pick out the hard facts, toss out the fluff.

We crawl out of our caves for that refreshing, human interaction. There's the telling handshake, the community event, board meeting or celebratory gathering, moments that convey mood, conviction, uncertainty, expectation, the nuanced, non-verbal clues that inform a writer. The vibe.



But now in the self-quarantine lock-down because of the corona virus pandemic, we're all isolated, in our caves, working, existing. No more meetings for at least a while.

Now we connect within a digital bubble.

Teleconferencing via Facetime, Skype or Zoom is surreal. Faces float in boxes on the screen — you could be watching Jeopardy or a Hollywood Squares rerun, or, if things are contentious, Family Feud.

Board members engage with their colleagues differently when 'broadcasting' solo from their dining room table as opposed to sitting side by side. Maybe it's a chemistry change induced by rays of blue light. Glued to a screen, you enter a sensory vacuum where body language is non-existent and subtle facial expressions are hard to read. When folks are sitting right next to one another, a vote might be swayed; on the screen, not so much.

At a meeting, a quick gesture, a slump in the chair, a deep frown can suggest a bunch of things. Our job as reporters is to find out what's behind the frown, the smile, the nod. There's the board member's raised eyebrow, a resident's anxiety at a public hearing, the strained or relaxed exchange between a public official and constituent.

Now, as we gaze at the screen, all we have is our instincts and our past experience.

All in all, the internet keeps us connected. (Be grateful we don't still have dial-up!)

Without our screens, mouses and keyboards, we would shutter in our caves and literally be in the dark. Our digital tools may be less-than-ideal, but they are, right now, a saving grace.

– *Abby Luby is an Examiner reporter*

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