

Scrivener: a software tool for organization and writing

IRE 2016 - New Orleans

Panel: Tools and tips for the reporting process

Daniel Connolly, The (Memphis) Commercial Appeal

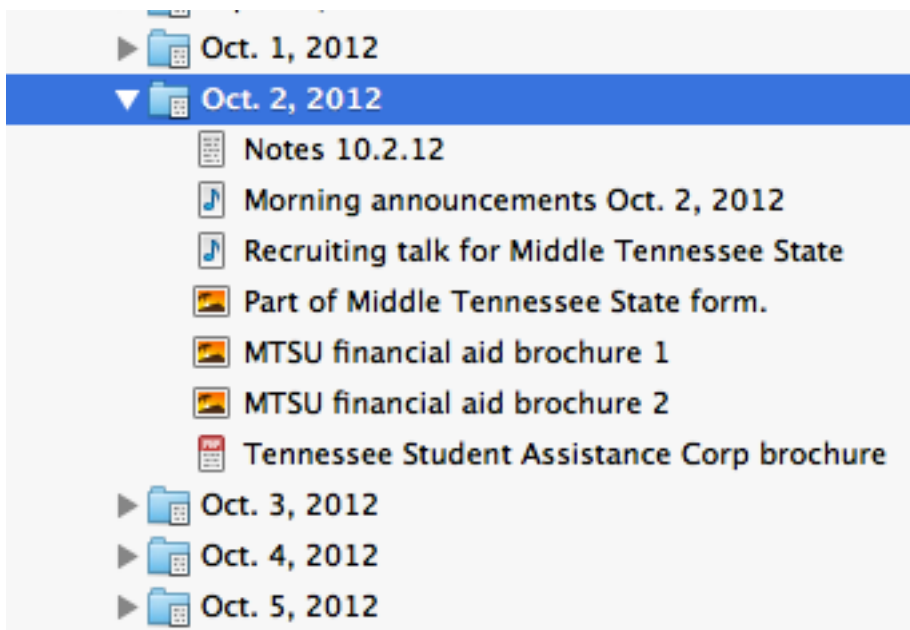
Author of *The Book of Isaias: A Child of Hispanic Immigrants seeks his own America*. St. Martin's Press, release date Oct. 4, 2016

Using Scrivener for organization

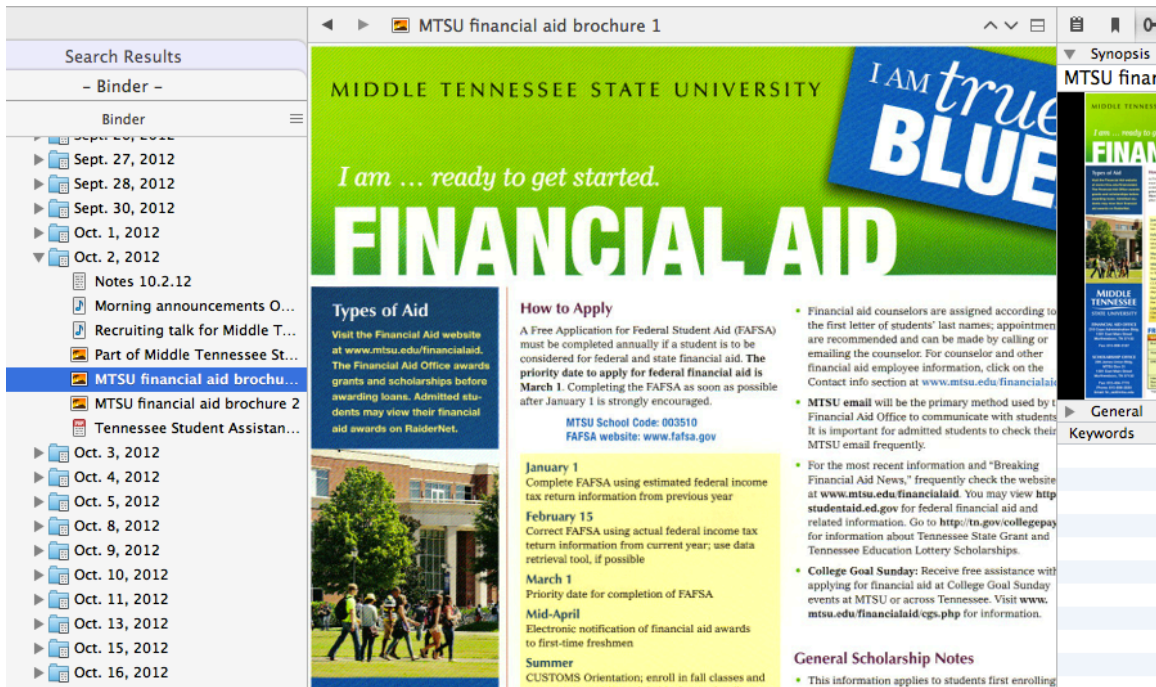
Scrivener allows you to store text, audio, video and documents in a single project file. You can create an infinite number of subfolders.

The Book of Isaias tells the stories of a group of children of immigrants growing up in Memphis. I reported for more than five years, including a full academic year inside a school. I created separate files for each day of reporting.

Later, I could easily pull up every photo, note and audio clip for each day. This example from October 2, 2012 has text, audio, photos and a PDF.



I can click on each item and it pops up in another window. For instance, here I'm clicking on the image of a financial aid folder I picked up on October 2, 2012.



You can listen to audio or video within Scrivener and pop up another window to transcribe it.

I was following multiple teenagers and adults. I flagged my notes, photos and audio recordings with keywords like these:

Keywords	
■	Magaly character
■	Isaias pivotal action
■	Hozyer character
■	Rigo pivotal action
■	Tuminaro character
■	Estevon pivotal action
■	Estevon character
■	Theme motivation

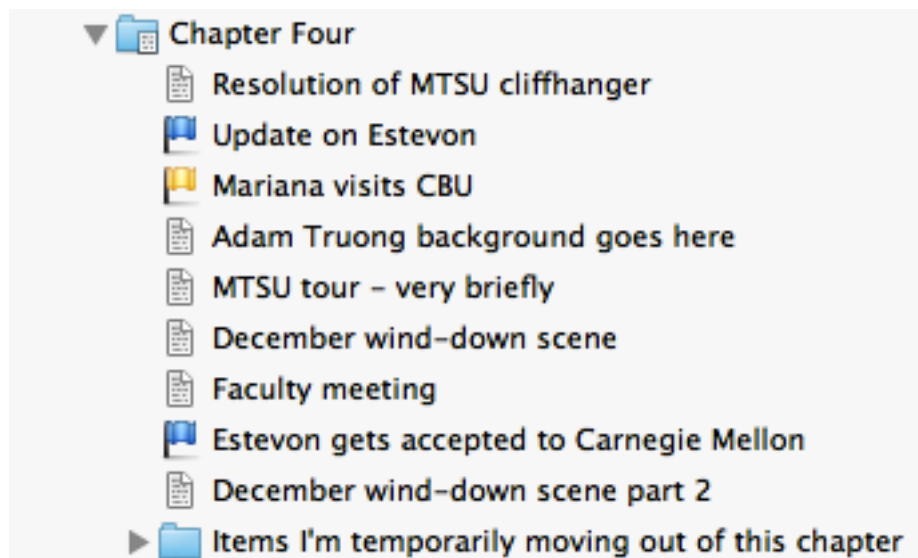
When it was time to write about a specific student, teacher or theme, I used keyword searches to pull up all the relevant material.

Using Scrivener for writing

Some longform writers use the following organizational method: They break up their project into scenes, like in a movie. They write descriptions of the scenes on index cards. Then they move the index cards around until they decide how to tell their story.

Scrivener allows you to do the same thing electronically: the "index cards" are on the computer screen. You can write sections and move them around until you have the order you like.

Here's an example from Chapter 4 of *The Book of Isaias*. In this case the sections don't look like actual index cards, but I can click a button and the appearance will change.



If I want my chapter to start with "Estevon gets accepted to Carnegie Mellon," I just click and drag it to the top of the list, and all the text associated with that section moves too.

Also, you can color-code the different sections. For instance, I color-coded all the sections about the student named Estevon with a blue flag. That way I can get a visual sense of how often I'm mentioning him in the book.

Pros and cons of Scrivener

Pros: It's great for long-term projects that require organization and presentation of large amounts of information.

I have used it to write *The Book of Isaias* and to write several shorter feature stories.

Cons: Scrivener works best for solo projects. You can combine Scrivener and Dropbox for collaboration, but it's a bit cumbersome.

For more on this, see <https://scrivener.tenderapp.com/help/kb/cloud-syncing/using-scrivener-with-cloud-sync-services>

Scrivener does not handle databases and spreadsheets very well. If you have a data-heavy project, you probably will have to store and analyze your data outside of Scrivener.

Finally, Scrivener only works as an organizational tool if you carefully input and label all of your notes, audio recordings, video recordings and documents. This can prove surprisingly time-consuming.

How to get Scrivener

It's downloadable at literatureandlatte.com. You can use it for 30 days for free. (That's 30 days of actual use.) After that, you can buy a copy for \$45.

I recommend working through the tutorial that comes with the download.

Happy organizing - and writing!

Contact Daniel Connolly

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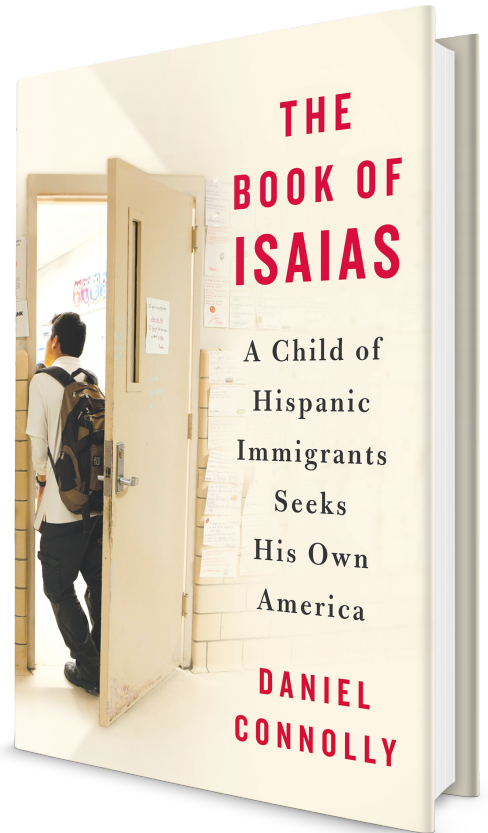
Coming October 2016

www.danielconnolly.net

Isaias, a bright 18-year-old Hispanic student living in middle America, is setting out on the journey to college. Despite his exceptional academic potential, Isaias doubts the value of school and says he might go to work in his family's painting business instead. Is Isaias making a rational choice? Or does he simply hope to avoid pain by deferring dreams that may not come to fruition? This is what journalist Daniel Connolly attempts to uncover as he follows Isaias throughout his tumultuous final year of high school.

Mexican immigration has brought the proportion of Hispanics in the nation's youth population to roughly one in four. In the tradition of *Friday Night Lights* and *A Hope in the Unseen*, this engaging, poignant book captures an American microcosm and illustrates broader challenges for our collective future

DANIEL CONNOLLY is an award-winning journalist who speaks fluent Spanish. He has reported on Mexican immigration to the U.S. for various publications for more than a decade. To get in touch directly: danieljamesconnolly@gmail.com.



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