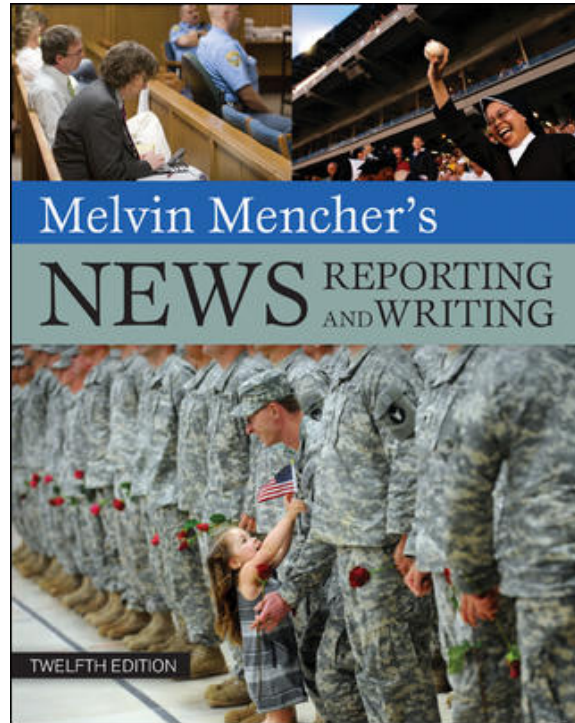


Pre-publication Copy

Chapters 1 through 3



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Part 1: The Reporter at Work



1 On the Job



Lori Gollas

Preview

Watching journalists at work we see that they report and write about events that interest people. They have a passion for accuracy and a determination to be fair. In this chapter, we will accompany print, online and broadcast reporters cover these events:

- A man wanted by the police barricades himself in his home. A SWAT team responds.
- Freshmen arrive on the campus and learn about a new graduation requirement.
- Nine firefighters die and a town mourns.
- An entertainer known as the King of Pop dies. The death is news around the world.
- A murdered Hells Angel is buried in a “Viking funeral.” A rival gang member is suspected.
- The underdog women’s basketball team defeats the top seed.
- A \$30,400 sinkhole has cost \$8.5 million to fill . . . so far.
- FedEx driver makes unusual delivery.



Follow the facts,
wherever they take you.

Journalists at Work

We learn about these events and situations because journalists tell us about them. These journalists, some just out of college and some veterans of 20 years in the newsroom, link us to the world beyond our direct experience.

The Guidelines

Directed by a set of guidelines, journalists select from the clutter of happenings and the swirl of ideas those that are worth calling to our attention, what is newsworthy. By newsworthy, journalists mean what’s happening that is important to readers and viewers, what will interest, affect and entertain them. Usually, the events and situations journalists consider newsworthy are current, impact many people and are close by. The activities of some people are newsworthy because the men and women are prominent, well-known.

Conflicts also make news, whether they are continents distant or at a local school board meeting. Sometimes, a long-smoldering situation flares and becomes news. Journalists themselves can make news when they discover a situation that they feel should be called to public attention.

We can break these determinants of news into eight categories: *timeliness, impact, prominence, proximity, conflict, the unusual, currency, necessity.*

Let's look at the first of these determinants, *timeliness*. First, to Phoenix, where a reporter is covering a tense situation, next to the arrival of freshmen at a college in New Jersey, and then to Pakistan where reporters are on the scene of an assassination with worldwide consequences.

Timeliness

Barricaded Man The police call came in around noon: An armed man had barricaded himself in his home. He was wanted by the police on a probation violation. Two women and a child were believed to be with the man. Within minutes, Christopher Kline of *The Phoenix Republic* posted a story on azcentral.com, the newspaper's Web site:

An armed man barricaded himself inside a central Phoenix house on Friday morning, according to police.

Officials believe two females and a child were also inside the home near 12th and Roosevelt Streets.

Police said the suspect is wanted on a violation of probation warrant but that they have not been able to communicate with him.

A 12News photographer on the scene said police were using a loudspeaker, telling the suspect, "Come out and no harm will come to you or your child, or anyone else who is inside."

A SWAT team is standing outside the home. . . .

Kline is based in the KPNX-TV newsroom to draw on the station's expertise in covering breaking news. Kline's job is to write such news for [azcentral](http://azcentral.com).

Seven minutes after Kline sent out the first story, he wrote another:

Two women and a child were freed by a SWAT team on Friday afternoon from an alleged barricade situation at a home in central Phoenix, according to officials.

Police said they believe an armed man was still inside the house near 12th and Roosevelt Streets. . . .

Thirty minutes later, the newspaper's Web site carried this story by Kline:

A SWAT team stormed a central Phoenix home on Friday afternoon, arresting an armed man who had barricaded himself inside, and freeing two women and a child held with the suspect, according to police. . . .

Within the next hour, Kline wrote two more stories. The longest story, the wrap-up at 1:22 p.m., ran around 150 words.

Web Writing An Essential Skill

More people read the news online than in the newspaper.

"When I say the paper, I also think of the Web site," says the managing editor of the *Los Angeles Times*. At *The Miami Herald*, all reporters have a Web responsibility, which means "using the Web site to its fullest potential for text, audio and video," says the executive editor.

At the *Times-Record News* in Wichita Falls, Tex., reporters who write for www.tronline.com are advised: "Write short. Keep as close to one computer screen as possible."

Write "radio/TV style," says the online editor of *The Providence Journal's* Web site: www.projo.com.

By its nature, online journalism emphasizes *timeliness*. Unlike the newspaper's one or two deadlines, there is a deadline every minute for the online journalist and for the wire service reporter as well.

Freshman Surprise When freshmen arrive on campus, they usually know what awaits them. But a graduation requirement surprised many newcomers to the College of New Jersey. Lisa Rich of *The Times* in Trenton, N.J., tells us about it:

EWING—When freshmen enter college, as many did this week at various area campuses, they already have an idea of what to expect:

Moving into a dorm and sharing space with others.

Community bathrooms and buying books.

A new sense of freedom that comes with the departure of mom, dad and other family members and friends.

But at The College of New Jersey, the 1,300 incoming freshmen also discovered another change: mandated community service, better known at the college as community engaged learning (CEL).

Notice the beginning of this story. Unlike the reporter in Phoenix, who immediately thrusts us into the situation, Lisa delays giving us the news about the new graduation requirement. We say she has written a **delayed lead** and that the Phoenix reporter has written a **direct lead**.

Assassination Associated Press reporter Sadaqat Jan had just called his bureau to describe a campaign rally for Benazir Bhutto in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Suddenly, he heard gunshots and an explosion. Jan raced to the chaotic scene: Bloodied fragments of clothing. Empty shoes. Screaming people everywhere.

Bhutto was injured, someone told him. A bomb had wrecked her bulletproof vehicle, the man said. Jan called his bureau again. The AP began to transmit his reports:

8:12 a.m. EDT
APNewsAlert

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan (AP)—A party aid says Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was injured in a suicide attack and is now undergoing surgery.

The AP team of reporters that had been assigned to cover Bhutto's campaign spread out, making observations, asking questions. One reporter talked his way into the hospital, where he interviewed one of the surgeons who worked desperately to save Bhutto's life. Others talked to Bhutto's aides.

8:29 a.m. EDT
APNewsAlert
FLASH

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan (AP)—A party aid and a military official say Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto died following a suicide bombing.

The Name of the Game is Speed

Within minutes of the announcement of the death of famed TV broadcaster Walter Cronkite, reporters were at work:

The online *Huffington Post*:

Walter Cronkite, the legendary TV news anchor known as "the most trusted man in America," has died at the age of 92.

CBS News:

The most trusted man in America is gone.

Walter Cronkite, who personified television journalism for more than a generation as anchor and managing editor of the CBS Evening News, has died.

8:32 a.m. EDT
BULLETIN

RAWALPINDI, Pakistan (AP)—Pakistani opposition leader Benazir Bhutto was assassinated Thursday in a suicide bombing that killed at least 20 others at a campaign rally, a party aide and a military official said.

The coverage won a prize for deadline reporting, which the judges said was “a textbook example of spot-news reporting.”

Pakistan plays a key role in the politics of the Middle East, which meant that the Bhutto assassination had international reverberations. We can say that the event had a wide *impact*, the second of our guidelines, as well as being *timely*. Many news stories meet the requirements of more than one of our guidelines. The death of nine firefighters from Charleston, S.C., is another example of a news event that was *timely* and had considerable *impact*.

Impact

Firefighters, Deaths The horns of the fire trucks sounded first. Then came the sirens of the ambulances piercing the night air. The roof of the Sofa Super Store on the Savannah Highway had collapsed on the men battling the blaze, and nine Charleston firefighters died. The death toll was the largest for firefighters since terror bombers struck the World Trade Center in 2001.

The first story reported:

Several firefighters were reported missing Monday night in a blaze that destroyed the Sofa Super Store on Savannah Highway in West Ashley Monday night.



Mourning Her Father

Jackie Drayton collapses at the memorial to the nine fallen firefighters, among them her father, James “Earl” Drayton.

Grace Beahm, *The Post and Courier*

A more complete account followed:

Nine firefighters died Monday night in a fire that destroyed the Sofa Super Store in West Ashley.

It was the worst single loss of firefighters since 9/11, according to a spokesman from the U.S. Fire Administration, which tracks fire deaths and injuries.

“Nine brave, heroic, courageous firefighters of the city of Charleston have perished in a most courageous and fearless

manner, carrying out their duties,” Charleston Mayor Joe Riley said at a news conference this morning. “To all of their loved ones, our heart goes out to them.”

The firefighters who perished in the blaze were:

Captain William “Billy” Hutchinson, 48, 30 years of service; Captain Louis Mulkey, 34, . . .

The staff of *The Post and Courier* in Charleston, S.C., went on to write more than 300 stories about the fire and its consequences to the community, including this summary of the disaster:

A rolling ball of fire sweeps through the building, overcoming the firefighters. At least two of them leap through the front windows of the store to safety.

Firefighters call for help, and a “May-day” call is issued. One firefighter can be heard praying. Another says, “Tell my wife I love her.” . . .

Fire shoots 30 feet in the air. Smoke and debris shoot across the street over firefighters. . . .

A year and a half later, the newspaper reported:

Eighteen months after the deadly Sofa Super Store fire, a team of counselors still is working to help Charleston firefighters and their families cope with the blaze that killed nine men and shook a proud department to its core.

As we’ve seen, the Charleston fire received massive coverage in Charleston. But aside from reports of the death toll, the event had little *impact* elsewhere. Had someone prominent died in the fire, the coverage would have been more extensive. Which leads us to the third of our guidelines, *prominence*.

Prominence

A Death and a Conviction The death of Michael Jackson was news all over the country and abroad. It was the first item on TV newscasts and front-page news in newspapers. Within minutes of the announcement that he had been taken in a coma to a Los Angeles hospital, scores of reporters gathered outside awaiting news of his condition. As soon as doctors announced his death, bulletins went out:

LOS ANGELES—Michael Jackson, the singer, songwriter and dancer who earned the title “King of Pop” in a career that reached unprecedented peaks of sales and attention, died Thursday, a Los Angeles city official said. He was 50.

At the same time, the death of a local musician was noted in an obituary that appeared only in his South Dakota hometown newspaper.

Jackson had worldwide *prominence*. The band leader was known only in his hometown.

Every week, hundreds of criminals are found guilty. Only a few are noted outside the city in which the crime was committed. But when O.J. Simpson was convicted by a Las Vegas jury, it was even news abroad. Here’s how the *International Herald Tribune* began its account:

LAS VEGAS—A jury convicted the former football star O.J. Simpson Friday of robbery and kidnapping, a verdict that came 13 years to the day after Simpson was acquitted in the highly publicized slayings of his ex-wife and a friend of hers.

Notice that direct leads call attention to the most important aspect of the event being written about. Direct leads also highlight unique aspects of the event. Here is how MSNBC began its account of the election of the 44th president of the United States:

Barack Obama, a 47-year-old first-term senator from Illinois, shattered more than 200 years of history Tuesday night by winning election as the first African-American president of the United States.

Here’s the lead from *USA Today*:

Democrat Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States on Tuesday, becoming the first African American to win the post and completing a stunningly rapid rise from state senator to the White House.

A newsroom adage is: Names make news. But the names are not restricted to those of people. The activities of well-known schools can make the network news. When Harvard disclosed it could lose as much as a third of its \$36 billion endowment—the largest by far of all school endowments—it was big news during the economic meltdown that also affected major industries in the country.

The activities of well-known organizations are also newsworthy. Here’s a front-page story by Matthew B. Stannard, a staff writer for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, about a funeral made newsworthy by the prominence of the biker organization the deceased belonged to:



The Gathering
For 60 minutes they
thundered down the
highway to the cemetery for
Papa's burial.

San Francisco Chronicle

Hells Angels touched by a mentor

Papa's final ride was a Viking funeral, his body borne to his final resting place by a river of chrome and thunder.

Mark "Papa" Guardado, 46, was killed Sept. 2 outside a Mission District bar. At the time, he was president of the Frisco Hells Angels, royalty of the outlaw biker realm. He was shot to death, police say, by Christopher Ablett, 37, of Modesto, a member of the rival Mongols Motorcycle Club, whose bad blood with the Hells Angels goes back in history. Ablett is still being sought.

But there was little talk of the Mongols as the Hells Angels gathered to remember Guardado at a vigil Sunday night and funeral Monday morning. . . .

Instead, those gathered remembered their Guardado, the friend or surrogate father, the man who many said bought them their first Harley-Davidson—or helped them get the job they needed to buy their own.

"To me, and everyone that knew him, he was the epitome of Hells Angels," said

Richard Goldhammer, who rode from his home in British Columbia to honor the man he called his mentor.

"He set an example for a lot of people, being straight up, honest and respectful to everyone," he said. "People form their own opinion about our club—we are who we are. We stand in our own social circle." . . .

Well over 1,000 motorcyclists gathered at Duggan's Serra Mortuary for the two-day memorial: Hells Angels chapters from Alaska to Maine, from Rhode Island to Hawaii, and from overseas—Norway, Germany, England, Australia, Italy and more. . . .

The caravan escorting Guardado's coffin to Colma's Cypress Lawn Cemetery on Monday went by way of San Francisco's Mission District, a river of thunder that flowed through the urban canyons for more than an hour. The caravan didn't stop for signals; it set its own speed limit. Some onlookers waved, some took pictures, some pressed hands to ears. . . .

Stannard has written a colorful lead. He knows he must follow it with documentation, proof. He has to elaborate on the lead in the body of the story, which he does: the Angels are the "royalty of the outlaw biker realm . . .," "Well over 1,000 motorcyclists . . . river of thunder that flowed through the urban canyons. . . ." Stannard also knows that quotations add realism to the news story, a sense that the reporter was there, on the scene. The colorful details and the quotes let us see the event.

While the biker's funeral was big news in San Francisco, it barely rippled through the country. This proves another newsroom maxim: The closer to home, the bigger the story. And it takes us to the fourth of our newsroom guidelines, *proximity*. We move from the west coast to the newsroom of *The Wichita Eagle* in Kansas.

Proximity

Serial Killer Dennis Rader went to the post office once too often. Although he had sent many letters and packets, some to *The Wichita Eagle*, during the decade following a series of grisly murders, police were baffled. The murders had faded from community memory and had been placed in the police cold case file.

But a new letter contained a photocopy of three blurred Polaroid pictures of what appeared to be a woman's body. A woman's driver's license was on the photocopy. The envelope bore a return address with the name "Bill Thomas Killman." Those initials—BTK—rang a bell for veteran police reporter Hurst Laviana to whom the letter was addressed. The newspaper had named the unknown killer the "BTK strangler" because he would bind, torture and kill his victims. Had the killer decided to reclaim his notoriety? "Most people believed that BTK was probably dead or in prison," said Sherry Chisenhall, the editor of the *Eagle*.

Laviana decided to take the letter to police headquarters where it was carefully examined. A few days later, a police lieutenant told Laviana, "I'm 100 percent certain it's BTK." The closed file was reopened. The FBI stepped in and the search for BTK intensified.

Newsroom Mobilized The *Eagle* broke the news of the reopened case on its Web site, Kansas.com. Chisenhall put every reporter she could spare on the story. Story after story moved on the newspaper's Web site. "The news rocked Wichita," she said, and "it showed the *Eagle's* news staff how different it was to cover this story in the age of the Internet and 24/7 TV news coverage. The Web made our news coverage vastly more interactive with readers," Chisenhall said.

The town also swung into action. "Residents armed themselves, installed security systems, and took other steps to safeguard their security," Chisenhall said. Meanwhile, the police investigated the tips that were pouring in, including one that named Laviana. Police asked him to provide a DNA sample.

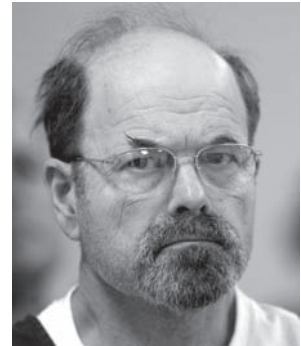
Tracing the Disk The police held news conferences designed to communicate with BTK, and he responded. He included a computer disk in one of his responses, which police and the FBI tracked to a church in a Wichita suburb. Eleven months after Bill Thomas Killman's letter arrived in the *Eagle's* newsroom the case broke open. Police had found BTK.

Dennis Rader, the president of the church congregation, a married man with two grown children and a former Boy Scout leader, was arrested and charged with 10 counts of first degree murder. Within two minutes of Rader being named, Kansas.com had the news online. "We updated that story about 25 times that day," Chisenhall said.

In all, the *Eagle* published nearly 800 stories, online and in print.

The BTK confession and sentencing was a national story. Here's the lead to a story of the sentencing:

WICHITA, Kan., Aug. 18—A judge today sentenced Dennis L. Rader, who confessed to being the so-called B.T.K. serial killer, to 10 consecutive life sentences for the murder of 10 people from 1974 to 1991, and said Rader would not be eligible for parole for 175 years.



He murdered ten.

The Wichita Eagle

The Basics**Journalism begins**

with the ABC's:

Accuracy in information and language.

Brevity in writing the story.

Clarity so there is no doubt about what happened.

These are moral requirements as well as the necessities for the practice of journalism.

Journalists take on the responsibility of informing people about the world around them so that they can act on what they read, see and hear. Their actions depend on clear and accurate information. Without reliable information, action can be misdirected or never taken.

Here's the beginning of a TV account of the sentence:

WICHITA, Kansas—BTK serial killer Dennis Rader was sentenced Thursday to life in prison with no chance of ever going free.

Rader, who is 60 years old, terrorized the Wichita area and taunted police during a 17-year murder spree from 1974 to 1991. He received 10 consecutive life sentences—one for each of his victims. That's a minimum of 175 years behind bars without the possibility of parole.

It was the longest possible sentence Judge Gregory Waller could deliver. Kansas had no death penalty at the time the killings were committed.

The former church leader and animal control officer confessed to the killings after his February arrest.

The punishment came down after family members of the victims spoke with outrage and pain of the man who murdered their loved ones.

Note the difference between the newspaper and the broadcast accounts. Newspaper stories are written to be read; broadcast stories are written to be heard. The newspaper stories have longer leads, longer sentences.

Broadcast reports usually are preceded by a **lead-in** that provides background for the report. Here is the lead-in by Robert Siegel to National Public Radio's account of Rader's confession:

On to a remarkable and disturbing confession. It took place in a courtroom in Wichita, Kansas, today and some of what we're about to hear is graphic description of horrible acts of violence. Dennis Rader confessed in that courtroom that he is BTK, the serial killer responsible for 10 murders between 1974 and 1991. Rader pleaded guilty to all 10 murders, and he spoke at length and in detail about killing his victims. NPR's Greg Allen reports.

Upset The followers of NBA and Big Twelve Conference basketball may believe they have no rivals as big-time rooters for their teams. Forget it. Go to any one of the thousand girls high school basketball games and see. And listen to the broadcasts on regional radio stations . . . and read local newspapers. This is big news.

We'll go to Hays, Kan., about 175 miles northwest of Wichita, to see for ourselves. Hays was the site of a big game for residents of the state's plains area. In the girls high school basketball championship tourney's first round, the top seed from Olpe, population 504 but always among the best teams, went to the state meet undefeated. Its forwards were six feet-plus. Olpe's opponent was the Wheatland-Grinnell team—populations 74 and 348 respectively—and not given much chance.

But it was a storybook game. The underdogs won in overtime . . . which practically everyone in the area knew by the time *The Hays Daily News* was tossed on

the porches of its subscribers. So for his story of the game, Nick McQueen dug deeper than the score. Here's the headline and how McQueen began his story:

Thunderous Upset: Thunderhawks Knock Off Top Seed

Going into the first round of the Class 1A State Basketball Championships, Tyler Flavin knew his team could match up physically with top-seeded and unbeaten Olpe, a perennially competitive team in both IA and 2A.

Truth be told, Flavin, the coach of the Wheatland-Grinnell girls team, singled his team out as one of the few teams that could handle all the Eagles had to offer.

"We're one of the few teams down here that we're going to be able to match up with them physically, and we did," Flavin said,

following the eighth-seeded Thunderhawks 58-55 overtime victory. . . .

The Thunderhawks got the job done with a heavy dose of senior post player Meagan Weaver in the paint, all the while holding Olpe's starting line, consisting of a pair of 6-footers in check.

"We knew we had some big people and they had big people," said the 5-foot-11 Weaver, who poured in 25 points on a 10-for-20 effort from the floor. "They didn't have the matchups we had off the bench, though."



The Joy of Victory

They were the underdogs, and for a while it looked as though they deserved the description. But the Thunderhawks fought back. Slowly, they caught up, then tied at the buzzer. Overtime was the same story—a stumbling start but a winning finish. "They had everything and we had nothing to lose," said the Thunderhawks high scorer, Meagan Weaver.

Steven Hausler, The Hays Daily News

McQueen concentrates on an analysis of the game, explaining *how* the Thunderhawks won by interviewing the coach and the players:

“We knew we had to shut down their two minutes of the overtime didn’t go the big people and their shooters.”—Weaver way we wanted it to, but we found a way to
 “We just wanted to keep it close and score.”—Flavin
 give ourselves a chance at the end. The first

McQueen knows the newsroom maxim: Good quotes make for good reading. He lets his readers feel the emotion of the players with this quote from Weaver:

“We heard from a billion people that we were playing the undefeated team and that we should be scared. It made us want to play even more. They had everything and we had nothing to lose.”

Games like this one can be said to belong to the category of *conflict*, one team or individual pitted against another. This takes us to another of our news determinants.

Conflict

Culture Wars Conflict and its coverage are not limited to warfare in the Middle East nor to the running gun battles between Mexican drug lords and the police. Some of the most intense and bitter battles are fought over ideas, policies, legal issues and the like. When a city adopts its budget, the arrayed forces are said to fight the Battle of the Budget. These conflicts are given full coverage.

In Whitehall, Ohio, when City Councilwoman Jacquelyn Thompson suggested that the council declare “Darwin Day” for Feb. 12 to honor Charles Darwin’s birth, she ignited a local firestorm that made the Associated Press newswire.

There was an even greater tempest in South Carolina when a federal district judge banned distribution of the state license plate bearing a cross and the words “I believe” following a legal challenge by four clergymen and the organization Americans United for the Separation of Church & State. The Spartanburg *Herald-Journal* reported that a “red-faced and angry” Rev. Arnold Hiette told 350 people at the People’s Baptist Church “that the four complainants—especially the Unitarian—and one judge who took away the people’s right to witness via their vehicle tags, along with the ACLU, they’re going to burn in hell.”

When the California Supreme Court invalidated the state ban on same-sex marriages, it was major news. Here’s how a wire service began its account of the ruling:

SAN FRANCISCO—The California Supreme Court struck down the state’s ban on same-sex marriage Thursday in a broadly worded decision that would invalidate virtually any law that discriminates on the basis of sexual orientation.

The 4-3 ruling declared that the state Constitution protects a fundamental “right to marry” that extends equally to same-sex couples. It tossed a highly emotional issue into the election year

while opening the way for tens of thousands of gay people to wed in California, starting as early as mid-June.

Notice that in two paragraphs the reporter tells us **what** happened (gay-marriage ban struck down); **who** made the ruling (state supreme court); **when** the ruling was made (Thursday). The dateline, San Francisco, tells us **where** the ruling was made. The second paragraph gives us the reason, **why**, the court ruled (the “right to marry” extends to same-sex couples). The second paragraph tells us **how** the ruling was made (by a 4-3 ruling).

These are the Five W’s and an H that have been instilled in journalism students surely since the first journalism school was established in 1908 at the University of Missouri and, possibly, since 1869 when a journalism program was initiated at Washington College, now Washington & Lee University.

This is good advice for writing breaking news stories, especially for online stories. But the formula is usually bypassed for features, for news features and for broadcast stories. Here’s a broadcast lead for the same court ruling:

The California Supreme Court has overturned the state’s ban on same-sex marriage.

That’s 13 words, easy on the ear, compared with the wire service lead of 35 words, written to be read.

These are serious stories. But news coverage is hardly confined to the serious. Reporters are on the lookout for *unusual* material that will leaven the news diet.

The Unusual

The Big Hole Jere Downs of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* say she finds good stories by “scooping up all the paper from an agency whenever I have the chance—operating budgets, capital budgets, requests for proposals, studies, board meeting minutes.” She goes through the material carefully, even the inch-thick operating budget of the local transit agency. “This is going to be boring,” she thought. But she kept reading and underlining items that seemed unusual. One item jumped at her—\$32 million for paying lawsuit claims. That item turned into a story.

Downs also chats with sources, at lunch with one on Monday, in the office of another on Tuesday. Wednesday she was shooting the breeze with a highway construction engineer.

“In the course of our chat about the Route 202 construction project, he mentioned that construction was bogged down by a troublesome sinkhole that had so far swallowed \$4 million in concrete,” Downs said. Sinkhole repairs had been budgeted at far less, \$30,400. But a warren of limestone caverns was discovered directly beneath the location of the \$224 million interchange. Downs knew at once she had a story, and after her chat with the engineer she set out to gather information.

Her story begins this way:

The long-awaited solution to one of the state’s worst highway traffic nightmares—King of Prussia’s congestion of cloverleaves—will take longer and cost more money because of unexpected and huge sinkholes in the construction zone.

“There is no bottom to it,” said Carmine Fiscina, the Federal Highway Administration engineer overseeing the Route 202 project. “We all knew there were sinkholes, but this is an unbelievable turn of events. “This is a Pandora’s box.”

That was just the beginning. “PennDot is still pumping cement into the ground—\$8.5 million to date,” Downs says. The agency exhausted the region’s supply of cement. “So it is building a cement plant on the construction site.” More holes, more cement, more stories.

Downs’ story brought a smile to those who read it, except for Pennsylvanians whose tax money was swallowed along with the cement. Here’s an unusual story that everyone enjoyed:

POOLE, England (AP)—“It was God who took out my tonsils,” the little boy told his mother after his operation at Poole General Hospital.

“When I was taken into the big white room, there were two lady angels dressed in white. Then two men angels came in. Then God came in.”

“How did you know it was God?” the mother asked.

“Well, one of the men angels looked down my throat and said, ‘God, look at that child’s tonsils.’

“Then God took a look and said, ‘I’ll take them out at once.’”

The conversation was reported by the hospital’s staff letter.

Funny, yes. But the youngster’s remark in the next-to-last paragraph would make a better ending. Let’s rewrite this story by putting the last paragraph elsewhere, perhaps at the end of the second paragraph.

FedEx to the Rescue Usually, Federal Express is in the business of delivering packages. But on a rainy day in March, a FedEx driver delivered 78-year-old Odell Bunch as Bunch’s car was sliding into a Missouri creek. Here’s the beginning of Peg McNichol’s story from the *Southeast Missourian* in Cape Girardeau:

Like many drivers on Tuesday, Odell Bunch decided to take a chance driving across a flooded road.

Bunch, 78, crossed the Byrd Creek Bridge and headed over water-covered Highway 34.

Wrong decision.

Bunch’s 1990 Ford Ranger slid off the road, carried by fast-moving water. The truck tilted and stopped. Bunch knew he had to get out quickly. The FedEx truck behind him pulled alongside and stopped. Courier Jay McMullin

stepped into the water, extending his hand as Bunch got out of his pickup. They drove to a nearby gas station. McMullin made sure Bunch was OK before resuming his route.

“I don’t think there’s any getting home tonight,” Bunch said, laughing while waiting for a tow truck. “I didn’t think it was that bad, because everyone else was going across. I’m 78 years old, but I feel like I’m 100 right now. If that man hadn’t stopped, I might not have seen 80.”

Notice that reporter McNichol uses a narrative approach to her story. She tells us a story about this rescue. We don’t reach the heart of the event until the fourth paragraph. We call the beginning of her story a **delayed** lead. Her approach



At the Water's Edge

Odell Bunch thought he could make it home though Highway 34 was slick and the rain was coming down hard. He was wrong. His Ford Ranger slowly slid off the road . . . and kept going. In the nick of time, a FedEx truck came by and pulled the 78-year-old Bunch to safety. "If that man hadn't stopped, I might not have seen 80," said a relieved Bunch.

Aaron Eisenhauer, *Southeast Missourian*

differs from that of the reporters who covered the barricaded man in Phoenix, the assassination in Pakistan, the deaths of nine firefighters in Charleston—stories that moved on the newspapers' Web sites and on the Associated Press newswire. The beginnings of these stories moved directly to the heart of the event. We call these **direct** leads.

Another couple of points about McNichol's story are worth noticing: It isn't any old truck that Bunch is driving but a "1990 Ford Ranger," she informs us. McNichol helps us see a specific model. Journalism is the art of the specific. Point two: McNichol doesn't paraphrase Bunch's remarks. She quotes him, and the quotes give us a feel for the man who, despite his harrowing ride home, is able to laugh.

Most of the stories we've been reading about consist of what we call breaking news, events that are timely. After all, journalists say they cover the insistent present. But there are some events, some situations, some ideas that lie dormant until something or someone comes along to make them newsworthy, to give them *currency*.

Currency

Fingerprint Scanning Thousands of schools in the country use fingerprint scanners for students to pay for meals, to check out library books and to board school buses. The scan is more efficient and effective than lunch cards and I.D. numbers, school systems find. But its use is being questioned by parents and civil libertarians. It could lead to identity theft and it constitutes an invasion of privacy, they say. Pauline Vu, a reporter for the online service Stateline.org, investigated and came up with a story that begins this way:

Reporting Is Central

"Reporting is the essential ingredient in good journalism. Everything else is dressing. Whether covering the White House or the school board, the reporter is the engine that drives the newspaper, the contributor who makes the newscast worthwhile. Forget the fancy packaging. The news organizations that are the most successful—the ones audiences consider essential—are those that care most about good reporting."

—Sid Bedingfield,
president, Fault Line
Productions

The lunch lines in West Virginia's Wood County schools move much faster than they used to. After students fill their trays with food, they approach a small machine, push their thumbs against a touch pad—and with that small movement, they've paid for their meal.

For half the state's school districts, as well as hundreds more across the country, the days of dealing with lost lunch cards or forgotten identification numbers are over.

"A student cannot forget their finger," said Beverly Blough, the director of food service in Wood County School District, which in 2003 became the first district in West Virginia to use finger scanners.

But the emergence of finger scanning has also sparked a backlash from parents and civil libertarians worried about identity theft and violation of children's privacy rights. In several cases when parents have objected, school districts have backed down, and some states have outlawed or limited the technology. . . .

"It just opens a huge database out there that's just easy for identity theft," said Joy Robinson-Van Gilder, an Illinois mother who rallied legislators last year to place limits on the technology in her state. "I think it's against their civil rights, without a doubt, and it is an invasion of their privacy." . . .

As we see, reporter Vu had to do a lot of digging for her story. Some reporters specialize in a distinct form of digging journalism called investigative reporting. These reporters say they dig to uncover situations that need to be exposed and remedied. I call this eighth and final news determinant *necessity*. We will go abroad and across the country to watch several reporters engage in this public service journalism.

Necessity

Deadly Imports First, we join Loretta Tofani in Salt Lake City. Tofani was a reporter with *The Washington Post* where she was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for her investigation of rape and sexual assault in the Prince George's County, Maryland, Detention Center. She then went to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, which sent her to Beijing as its bureau chief for four years, an experience she was to put to good use later for a series, "American Imports, Chinese Deaths," which was underwritten by the Center for Investigative Reporting and the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

Tofani had put journalism behind her when she accompanied her husband to Salt Lake City. She decided. . . .

But let her tell her story:

When my husband and I moved to Utah, I decided to try something different. I opened a store in Salt Lake City that sold Chinese ethnic furniture. There were Chinese medicine chests with tiny drawers, and Emperors' chairs with rounded arms that ended in carved dragon heads.

The store made me an importer, so I often traveled to China, where I had been a foreign correspondent for four years during the 90s for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. As a businessperson, I saw a different side of Chinese factories than those I had been allowed to see as a foreign correspondent. Back then, I received the usual “foreign journalist as spy” treatment: I was escorted by half a dozen Chinese officials who had pre-screened the factories and pre-interviewed the workers and managers. But as a businessperson, on a new passport, I had relative freedom to choose the factories I wanted to see, unencumbered by government escorts.

What I saw—and my inability to stop thinking about what it meant and what the stories would say—caused me to close my store and return to journalism. My series, “American Imports, Chinese Deaths,” showed that millions of Chinese factory workers were touching and/or inhaling carcinogens—nickel, cadmium, lead, benzene, toluene, n-hexane, mercury—as they made products destined for the U.S. While Americans worried about lead on toys imported from China, Chinese workers were dying from lead and other toxins. They were paying the real price of cheap American imports. Using shipping documents, I linked specific American imports to specific Chinese workers dying of fatal occupational diseases. I interviewed the workers and obtained their medical records. The series raised questions: if we protect American workers from fatal occupational diseases, shouldn’t Chinese workers making American products also be protected?

Tofani’s four-part series appeared in her hometown newspaper, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, and is available online at the Center for Investigative Reporting, www.centerforinvestigativereporting.org/blogs/category/58. This was shoe-leather reporting that took her to factories where paint spray “seemed to be part of the air.” At one, she wrote, “I stepped ahead of my escort, the sales manager, and approached a worker holding a hose in his hand. He was waiting for the next bureau. ‘Does that paint have oil?’ I asked in Mandarin. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it has it,’ and pressed on his hose to begin spraying again.



Land of the Lethal

Loretta Tofani’s return to China was heartbreaking for her. She had been a bureau chief in Beijing for four years and had learned Chinese. This time she was shopping for goods for her import business. But she quickly found out that conditions in the factories she visited were primitive . . . and lethal. Workers were handling and breathing carcinogens. Tofani visited the hospitals to interview the dying, and she spoke to young workers who worried about the hazardous conditions but needed the work.

“I had only been inside the factory for about 15 minutes. But it was enough. I thanked the sales manager. Once outside, I had trouble swallowing. My throat felt tight. I knew that Chinese oil-based paint contained lead. I began wondering about the workers. Didn’t they get lung cancer?”

The first article of her series answered the question:

GUANGZHOU, China—The patients arrive every day in Chinese hospitals with disabling and fatal diseases, acquired while making products for America.

On the sixth floor of the Guangzhou Occupational Disease and Prevention Hospital, Wei Caihua, 44, sits on his iron-rail bed, tethered to an oxygen tank. He is dying of the lung disease silicosis, a result of making Char-Broil gas stoves sold in Utah and throughout the U.S.

Down the hall, He Yuyun, 36, who for years brushed America’s furniture with paint containing benzene and other solvents, receives treatment for myelodysplastic anemia, a precursor to leukemia.

In another room rests Xiang Zhiqing, 39, her hair falling out and her kidneys

beginning to fail from prolonged exposure to cadmium that she placed in batteries sent to the U.S.

“Do people in your country handle cadmium while they make batteries?” Xiang asks. “Do they also die from this?”

With each new report of lead detected on a made-in-China toy, Americans express outrage: These toys could poison children. But Chinese workers making the toys—and countless other products for America—touch and inhale carcinogenic materials every day, all day long: Benzene. Lead. Cadmium. Toluene. Nickel. Mercury.

Many are dying. They have fatal occupational diseases.

Number One

At *USA Today* an editor set as the First Commandment for his staff: “Break stories. Investigate. Spot the trends.”



Tofani’s series won the national Society of Professional Journalists award for investigative reporting as well as a national Investigative Reporters and Editors award.

For Tofani’s complete story, see **Deadly Imports** in *NRW Plus*.

Before you do that, you might want to know about Tofani’s Pulitzer Prize. Her concern for fairness, her indignation at unchecked injustice that led to her series about victimized Chinese workers, appeared early in her career as a journalist.

Gang Rape While covering the county courts for *The Washington Post*, Tofani heard a lawyer tell a judge, “Your honor, my client was gang raped in the county jail.” The assertion shook Tofani. “I asked the judge how often he heard about the rapes. ‘Oh, it happens all the time,’ he said.”

Tofani decided to check. She continued to cover her beat, but on her days off and when she finished work, she went to see jail guards at their homes, and she interviewed rape victims. After six weeks, she went to her editor. About a dozen men a week were being raped, most of them held in jail because they lacked bail money.

“They were gang raped because the jail failed to enforce its rules and permitted prisoners to block the view of guards with black trash bags,” she told her editor. “Jail policies actually promoted the gang rapes because the jail failed to separate the weak from the strong, to separate those charged with drunk driving, shoplifting and trespassing, who became rape victims, from convicted murderers and armed robbers, the typical rapists.”

Her editor replied: “Let’s put it on the back burner.” She went over his head to another editor. He turned her down. “Spend your time on daily stories,” he told her. Her third try was successful, and the metropolitan editor ordered her immediate editor to give Tofani time to do the story.

The Pulitzer Prize judges found Tofani’s series notable for its documentation. She obtained the victims’ medical records and interviewed the victims as well as the rapists.

With the Disabled and the Exploited Our next stop is Minneapolis where Cammy Wilson has been assigned to write a feature: Spend a day with a woman in a wheelchair to see how people get around in the city.

Wilson accompanied the woman as she went about her chores, shopped and had lunch. At the end of the day, the woman remarked to Wilson, “Isn’t it awful how much we have to pay to be taken to the doctor?” “How much?” Wilson asked. “Forty to fifty dollars,” she replied.

Wilson sensed a story of greater impact than the feature she was assigned to write. Wilson asked the woman if she had a receipt for a trip to the doctor. The woman did.

By the time she finished her reporting, Wilson had a major scandal laid out: The transportation of the disabled was a multi-million-dollar operation in which people were being billed \$40 to \$120 for a round-trip to a medical facility. Companies were billing at an individual rate even when they took groups from a nursing home or a senior citizen center to a clinic.

Her stories interested the Health, Education and Welfare Department in Washington, D.C., and, because Medicaid money was involved, HEW investigated. The Minnesota legislature held hearings and enacted several laws to regulate the transportation firms.

A couple of weeks later, Wilson was house hunting. In one house, she noticed that every item was for sale. From worn-out washcloths to underwear, everything had a price tag. “Has the owner died?” she asked the realtor. “No,” he said, “the owner is in a nursing home.” “Why is he selling?” “He’s not selling. The conservator is,” the realtor replied.

Once again, Wilson had a story. She learned that the owner, Ludvig Hagen, 86, suffered a fall and was taken to a nursing home to recover. While there, the church that he had named in his will marked the house and all of Hagen’s possessions for sale. Wilson began her story this way:

“4415 17th Ave. S.”
 “4415 17th Ave. S.”
 The old man in his wheelchair repeated the address, tears beginning to well.
 “I don’t have to sell my house. It’s paid for.”
 But his house is for sale. It and all his possessions are part of an estate valued at \$140,000. . . .

“Path to the World”

“Try to read a newspaper every day—at bedtime or at breakfast or when you take a break in the afternoon. . . . The newspaper will be your path to the world at large. . . . In addition, a great newspaper will teach you how to write; most articles are models of clarity and substance—with no academic jargon!

“Pay attention to the writer’s vocabulary, see how many active verbs are used, file away striking new words for future use. Study how articles are structured—how the first paragraph tells the reader simply and clearly the subject and main points.”

—James MacGregor Burns,
 Williams College and
 presidential biographer

As a result of the story, the county attorney launched an investigation.

Wilson then looked at probate, the handling of wills and estates by the courts. She learned that the county probate court had appointed a management firm to handle the estates of various people and that the firm had sold their homes for well under the market price to the same buyer, who within six months resold the houses for 50 to 100 percent more than the purchase price.

Next, to a newsroom in New York City where Heidi Evans turns on her answering machine.

A Tip and an Exposé “The message on my answering machine was straightforward: ‘I have a story that may be of interest to you.’

“Although reporters often get calls like this, many of which lead nowhere, I was intrigued, given the source, someone I had interviewed from time to time during the three years I covered the health, hospital and AIDS beat for the New York *Daily News* . . . someone who had never called me before . . . someone who sounded troubled.”

Evans returned the call. The caller told her that the city health department had quietly stopped giving Pap smear tests to thousands of low-income women who depended on its clinics for free gynecological care.

“Since many of the clients of these clinics fit the profile of women most at risk of developing cervical cancer—sexually active women who have had several partners and little access to medical care—I knew I had the start of an important story,” she said.

She dug into the records, interviewed people and found an even bigger story—the health department had endangered the lives of many women by failing to follow up on medical tests.

Here is how Evans began her story:

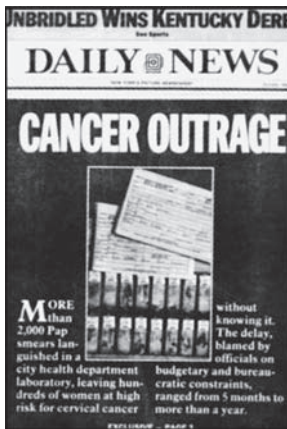
More than 2,000 Pap smears languished in a city health department laboratory for as long as a year, leaving hundreds of women at high risk of developing cervical cancer without knowing it.

She continued to dig and learned that 93 of the test smears indicated health problems, women who needed to be told to seek immediate medical attention. Evans found that instead of being informed quickly, the women received notices nine and ten months after their tests. When these women were finally notified and took further tests, some were fortunate. Some were not:

When Mary Pollack got the Mailgram it was Friday evening, too late to call the Health Department to have someone explain the message that read, “Urgent!! Concerning Your Health! Medical Emergency!”

On Monday morning, as Pollack held the Mailgram in her shaking hands, the doctor at the city’s Jamaica, Queens, clinic gave her the scare of her life.

“You have cancer,” he told her.



Heidi Evans

Hospital Conditions Our next journey to watch digging reporters at work takes us to Georgia where a hospitalized soldier has been visited by her husband. What he saw shocked him.

The husband of the hospitalized soldier called Mark Benjamin of United Press International because he had read Benjamin’s stories about strange illnesses afflicting some of those returning from service in Iraq. He told Benjamin that the treatment and the conditions at the Georgia service hospital were deplorable. He said his wife had to wait six weeks before a doctor saw her.

Benjamin knew at once that the situation was *important*, that if he could verify the caller’s assertions the story would have *impact*. Shabby treatment of those who serve their country is clearly newsworthy. He immediately flew to the base in Georgia to see for himself. Here is the beginning of the story Benjamin felt he had to tell:

FORT STEWART, Ga. Oct. 17 (UPI)—Hundreds of sick and wounded U.S. soldiers including many who served in the Iraq war are languishing in hot cement barracks here while they wait—sometimes for months—to see doctors.

Children at Risk Next, we go to Vancouver, Wash., to visit two young reporters in the newsroom of *The Columbian* where Erin Middlewood and Stephanie Rice have been informed that they have won a Sigma Delta Chi Award for their three-part series about child care facilities that violated health and safety regulations. The state, they found, did nothing to remedy an unsafe and dangerous situation for children.

It took two years and action by the state’s attorney general for the reporters to obtain the necessary documents, thousands of pages in three boxes. It was worth the wait. The documents and their reporting resulted in the state’s revoking the child care licenses of four providers the reporters investigated. Also, the governor pledged to devote more state resources to enforcement and regulation of child care facilities.

Here’s how the first article in their series begins:

Greg Knudtson received a frantic call from his wife, Tomoko: “Emergency, emergency. Jenna quit breathing.”

The Vancouver couple had just entrusted their 11-week-old daughter to the family’s child care provider, Jennifer Florentin, when Tomoko returned to work. Florentin had discovered Jenna wasn’t breathing when she went to wake her after an hourslong nap.

Knudtson, who was doing business in Seattle, rushed to the intensive care unit

in a Portland hospital to see his daughter. Tomoko looked at her husband with teary eyes and said, “She’s not coming back.”

The Knudtsons started asking questions after Jenna’s death in 2004. They wanted to know how their infant daughter could have been left alone for hours on the second floor, in a crib with a pillow and a blanket, violating licensed child-care regulations and basic health guidelines. The Clarke County medical examiner determined that Jenna suffocated.



Front Page Play

Prizewinners

Erin Middlewood, left, and Stephanie Rice, right, revealed the lax regulation of child-care providers by the State of Washington in a three-part series that revealed unsafe and dangerous situations for the children entrusted to the providers. They had to force the state to provide the files, a procedure that took two years.

The Columbian



Notice how the reporters take us directly to the heart of the story—the consequences of lax supervision. The Sigma Delta Chi judges said that “Child Care Nightmare” made them “spit fire, rattle our throats and simply say ‘thank you’ out loud for the three-day series about Washington State’s lapses in child care oversight.”

The Characteristics of the Reporter

Different as these journalists may appear at first glance, they share certain traits, and there are many similarities in the way they handle their assignments.

One characteristic we notice is the reporter’s attitude. He or she is curious. The reporter wants to know what is happening—firsthand. Journalists learn early that seeing and hearing for themselves is better than secondhand accounts. The firsthand account rings with authenticity.

Tenacious

“Let me tell you the secret that has led me to my goal,” said Louis Pasteur, the French chemist whose studies of bacteria led to the pasteurization process. “My only strength lies in tenacity.”

Persistent

The journalist knows how important persistence is in getting to the truth. Lisa Newman heard that a Chicago police officer was transferred as punishment for giving the daughter of the police superintendent a traffic ticket. But when she talked to the officer who issued the ticket, he refused to confirm her tip.

Newman, a reporter for *The Daily Calumet and Pointer*, gradually lessened the officer’s resistance, and he finally gave her the details. She also learned that the ticket was dismissed in traffic court.

GOYA/KOD

When *The Washington Post* was digging up exclusives in its Watergate coverage, the national editor of the *Los Angeles Times* was disturbed by the failure of the *Times'* Washington bureau to match the coverage. The *Times'* reporters were trying to cover the scandal by telephone, the editor learned.

“Tell them to get off their asses and knock on doors,” the editor shouted to the Washington news editor. The demand went out with increasing frequency and ferocity, until the Washington editor decided to post a sign in the office:

GOYA/KOD
Get Off Your Asses
and
Knock On Doors

With the information, Newman wrote several stories that led to an investigation.

Asking Questions Persistence means asking question after question until the issue is clarified, the situation made understandable for the reader or viewer. The columnist Dave Barry says, “I was a pretty good writer and I thought that was all that mattered. But journalism isn’t about writing. You learned that what it’s really about is asking hard questions, being persistent.”

Dangerous Drug David Willman of the *Los Angeles Times* Washington bureau learned that a drug to treat diabetes had been removed from the market in Great Britain but was still being sold in the United States. A year’s investigation led to his two-part series on the deaths the drug Rezulin had caused. But the Food and Drug Administration took no action. For the next 14 months he wrote about the mounting death toll and the growing concern of physicians in 25 follow-up stories. The FDA finally removed the drug from the market. An editor described Willman as “the most tenacious guy I ever met as far as grabbing something and never letting it go.” Willman won a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting for his stories.

Fair

In journalism’s younger days there was a newsroom saying, “Never check out a good story.” Today’s journalist always looks for the rejoinder, the defense, the reply, the other side of the story. A survey of working journalists found near unanimous agreement on two reporting necessities—getting the facts right and getting both sides of the story.

Knowledgeable

Stanley Walker, one of the great city editors, was once asked, “What makes a good reporter?”

“The answer is easy,” he replied, with a show of a smile around his eyes. “He knows everything. He is aware not only of what goes on in the world today, but his brain is a repository of the accumulated wisdom of the ages.” Walker, who helped make *The New York Herald Tribune* admired for its fine writing, continued: “He hates lies and meanness and sham, but keeps his temper. He is loyal to his paper and to what he looks upon as his profession; whether it is a profession, or merely a craft, he resents attempts to debase it.”

The wider the reporter’s knowledge base, the quicker the reporter can bring the story into focus. As soon as the reporter heard the speaker say that the country’s politics had gone wrong with Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal, he knew his story was about a conservative’s approach to politics. Reporters always try to get a jump on their stories, given the short time they have to do their reporting and writing. The more they know, the faster they can do their work.

Multiskilled

In addition to this knowledge base, journalists are equipped with an array of skills to meet the needs of media users. These skills, says Thomas Curley, president of the Associated Press, allow reporters to pace themselves to what Curley calls “consumption-on-demand.” Today’s journalist is multiskilled to meet multimedia demands.

Along with the written story, journalists may shoot still photos and full-color video as well as provide audio material for their stories that go online.

Feeding the Web Tom Priddy, online content producer at the *Herald-Journal* in Spartanburg, S.C., went to an open house to celebrate the new ballpark for the local Class A baseball team. “I covered the story, took photos, interviewed the principals and gathered some natural sound with my digital recorder,” he says. “I wrote the story for print, passed along one photo to the sports editor, then edited the audio and photos and created an audio slideshow for our Web site, GoUpstate.com.”

News 24/7 Reporters are asked “to get the news online almost instantly,” reports *Editor&Publisher*. This means filing stories on breaking news events “several times a day—in addition to the eventual print version. Add to that requests for audio and video components, podcasts, blogs and chats. . . .”

Beneath the technology, underlying the new skills, journalism is unchanged. Quality reporting remains the basis of all journalism. “Content,” says Curley, “is more important than container.”

Enterprising

News conferences, interviews and ball games present few problems. But for every easily accessible situation there is a tougher assignment, a less accessible source. The lore of journalism includes tales of enterprising reporters such as the one about the Chicago reporter who was blocked from a crime scene. He noticed doctors being waved into the building. He sprinted down the street to a pawn shop, pointed to a small suitcase, handed over a few dollars and raced back. Holding the case in his most professional manner, the reporter was allowed to pass.

Finding the Casualties When Chinese troops shot down hundreds of students demonstrating in Tiananmen Square for democratic reforms, reporters were prevented from entering the area. Officials denied that any of the young men and women were killed. Jan Wong realized she could learn about casualties by going to local hospitals. She found the front doors were barred to outsiders.

“But no one guards the back door,” and she went in. “Dozens of corpses, mostly unrefrigerated, decompose on the fifth day after Chinese troops slaughtered unarmed demonstrators near Tiananmen Square,” she wrote for her newspaper, *The Globe and Mail* of Toronto.

A week later, the authorities decided Wong was finding out too much. As she was walking down a street, a car with no license plate cut her off, secret servicemen grabbed her and tried to shove her in the car. She kicked and screamed, attracting passersby who protested. The police released her.

Naming the Coach In the days of intense competition between the United Press International and the Associated Press, reporters knew that a beat would result in a major play in newspapers and on stations. Sources did not want to show preference, so they would hold news conferences that allowed all the media an even shot. The trick was to break down the wall of silence before the scheduled conference, and the UPI did just that when a new football coach was to be announced at Rice University.

The Houston UPI bureau called around the country to the coaches who had been mentioned as candidates. No luck. The only one left was the assistant coach at Rice, and a call went out to his home. The maid answered. No, the coach wasn’t in. Nor his wife.

“Is she going to go to the news conference this afternoon?” the UPI reporter asked.

“Yes, sir. She wouldn’t miss that for the world,” the maid answered.

In seconds, the bureau put out a story about the assistant coach’s new job.

You might say that was risky. But would the assistant coach’s wife be going to a news conference to hear someone else named coach?

Courageous

For Ian Stewart of the Associated Press, the question was simple: Rely on people to tell him what was happening, or see for himself? Should he and an AP cameraman and an AP television cameraman venture to Freetown in Sierra Leone, which was being threatened by rebel gunmen? For 10 months, the rebels had rampaged across the countryside, earning a fearsome reputation by hacking off the hands and feet of villagers in a campaign of intimidation.

“The choice was simple,” Stewart said. “We had to go to give the people of Sierra Leone a voice and to tell their story.”

They went and they met with disaster. Myles Tierney, the TV cameraman, was killed, and Stewart suffered a bullet to his brain that left an arm and hand useless.

Given the disastrous outcome, was his choice wise? “I could not in clear conscience ignore the plight of an innocent people,” Stewart said. Not go? “That is not why I entered journalism, nor is that what I was trained to do.”

Call the Doctor

When the American Medical Association tried to block a public health bill proposed by President Obama, Nicholas D. Kristof of *The New York Times* called Obama’s doctor of more than two decades before Obama moved into the White House.

“They’ve always been on the wrong side of things,” Kristof quoted Dr. David Scheiner about the AMA. “They may be protecting their interests, but they’re not protecting the interests of the American public.”

An Ethic

“Making a living is nothing; the great difficulty is making a point, making a difference—with words.”

—Elizabeth Hardwick

The same ethic motivated Ellen Whitford of *The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot* to go into an abortion clinic and allow herself to be examined and prepared for an abortion. Whitford wanted to prove what she had learned secondhand, that abortions were being performed on women who were not pregnant.

“Murderous Resistance” In the journalism quarterly, *Nieman Reports*, Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff write about the “small group of liberal and moderate Southern editors, probably no more than 20 at any one time, who risked the anger of their readers as well as circulation and advertiser boycotts to urge compliance with the Supreme Court’s school desegregation decisions of 1954 and 1955.” This was a period of “murderous Southern resistance to the civil rights movement,” the historian Sean Wilentz says.

Roberts and Klibanoff write:

There may never have been a time in our nation’s history when more journalistic courage was shown than in the civil rights era in the 1950’s, 60’s and 70’s. The presence of Southern editors willing to display dissent against rising mob madness emboldened national leaders—presidents, congresses, religious figures, corporate executives and, especially, black civil rights leaders—to press for change. The bravery of reporters and photographers drove them to penetrate the South to see firsthand—and, more importantly, to show—the raw grip of white supremacy on an entire region of the country.

This is the journalistic legacy you inherit.

Martyred Journalists

In 1837, Elijah Lovejoy, an anti-slavery editor, was slain by a mob in Alton, Ill., as he tried to defend his press. Lovejoy is considered the first martyr to freedom of the press in the United States.

Died on the Job Reporters and photographers have died covering wars and disasters. Mark Kellogg, a correspondent for the *Bismarck (Dakota Territory) Tribune*, fell while riding with Custer and the 7th Cavalry at Little Big Horn in 1876. Ernie Pyle, the legendary war correspondent, was shot by a sniper in the closing days of World War II.

Since its founding in 1992, the Committee to Protect Journalists has kept records of the deaths of journalists “killed on duty worldwide.” The list includes the names of 750, 70 percent of them murdered and 20 percent who died during combat operations. A third of the murders were committed by political groups and government officials. Ninety percent of them have gone unpunished.

Compassionate

James Fallows, national correspondent for *The Atlantic Monthly*, describes as “the highest achievement” of journalism making “people care about and understand events or subjects they had not previously been interested in.”

Increasingly, journalists have turned their attention to the defenseless, the poor, those without a voice.

More Stories

If you would like to read more about how reporters covered a variety of stories ranging from school shootings at Virginia Tech University (college journalists)

and Jonesboro, Ark., (AP reporters) to racial disparities in health care (newspaper reporter), go to *NRW Plus* online at www.mhhe.com/mencher12e. Under Learning Center, access Student Edition and then *NRW Plus*. You will find the following stories and the comments of the reporters who wrote them:

- The 9/11 terrorist bombing of the Twin Towers.
- A tornado hits Spencer, Iowa.
- A newspaper covers a small fire; TV covers a fatal fire.
- The Christmas Fund annual story.
- Using the Internet to uncover disparities in health care.
- A drive-by shooting kills a little girl.
- A local group wants a classic book banned.
- Student newspaper tracks campus mass murder.



Summing Up

Journalists live in a world of confusion and complexity. Nevertheless, they manage through enterprise, wit, energy and intelligence to move close to the truth of the event and to shape their understanding into language and a form that can be understood by all. Our task is to help you develop the journalist's craft and to find a personal credo to guide you. A reporter who worked her way from small newspapers in New Mexico, Pennsylvania and New Jersey to the AP and then to *The New York Times* says her motto is "Keep cool but care." This philosophy seems to describe the reporters whose work we followed in this chapter and those we will be following in the rest of this book.

Journalists make mistakes. It is important to learn from mistakes and not to be discouraged. Although mistakes can be embarrassing and humiliating, they are unavoidable. Look at the Corrections box on page 2 of any issue of *The New York Times*, which is staffed by some of the best journalists in the business. Day after day, two to five admissions of error are published—wrong names, wrong addresses, wrong figures. Don't live in fear of making a mistake; that will cut down your range. Do the best you can. That's all anyone can ask of you.

Further Reading

At the end of each chapter, suggested supplementary reading is listed. The listed books have been recommended by journalists and by authorities in the fields discussed in the chapter.

This list includes, for example, the autobiography of a major figure in American journalism, Lincoln Steffens. It also includes Vincent Sheean's recollections of his life as a foreign correspondent, a book that persuaded many young men and women that journalism is for them. Also listed is a biography

of Edward R. Murrow, the eminent broadcast journalist. One book describes the women journalists who broke through barriers at *The New York Times*. Finally, no journalism bibliography would be complete without the book that describes how two young reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, toppled a president.

Filkins, Dexter. *The Forever War*. New York: Knopf, 2008.

Filkins, a war correspondent for *The New York Times*, has been described as “more committed to getting the story than to his own safety or comfort.” In his book, he describes the effects of the Iraq War on soldiers, doctors, teachers and the torturers and tortured. More than 140 journalists have died covering the Iraq War.

Frankel, Max. *The Times of My Life and My Life with The Times*. New York: Random House, 1999.

Kendrick, Alexander. *Prime Time: The Life of Edward Murrow*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1969.

Kroeger, Brooke. *Nellie Bly: Daredevil, Reporter, Feminist*. New York: Times Books, 1994.

Robertson, Nan. *The Girls in the Balcony: Women, Men, and The New York Times*. New York: Random House, 1992.

Serrin, Judith and William. *Muckraking: The Journalism That Changed America*. New York: The New Press, 2003.

The 121 articles from colonial days to the present display the work of crusading and investigative reporters. The great names are all here—Steffens, Tarbell, Riis, Wells, Woodward and Bernstein—along with the worthy work of lesser-known journalists of conscience.

Sheean, Vincent. *Personal History*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969.

Steffens, Lincoln. *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1931.

Waldron, Ann. *Hodding Carter: The Reconstruction of a Racist*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 1993.

Woodward, Bob, and Carl Bernstein. *All the President's Men*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974.

Part 2: The Basics



2 Components of the Story



Details from the crime scene.

R.L. Chambers

Preview

News stories are:

- **Accurate.** All information is verified before it is used. Direct observation is the surest way to obtain accurate information.
- **Properly attributed.** The reporter identifies all sources of information.
- **Complete.** The story contains the specifics that illustrate, prove and document the main point of the story.
- **Balanced and fair.** All sides in a controversy are presented.
- **Objective.** The writer does not inject his or her feelings or opinions.
- **Brief and focused.** The news story gets to the point quickly and keeps to the point.
- **Well-written.** Stories are clear, timely, interesting.



Accuracy. Brevity. Clarity.
The path to well-written stories.

If we were to generalize from the work of the reporters we have been watching, we might conclude that the reporter:

1. Attempts to report accurately the truth or reality of the event through:
 - A. Direct observation.
 - B. The use of (a) authoritative, knowledgeable and reliable human sources and (b) relevant and reliable physical sources.
2. Tries to write an interesting, timely and clear story. Quotations, anecdotes, examples and human interest enliven the story.

If journalism needs rules, these would be the starting points.

Accuracy

The highest praise A.J. Liebling, a master reporter for newspapers and *The New Yorker* magazine, could pay a colleague was “He is a careful reporter,” by which Liebling meant that the reporter took great care to be accurate. Although reporters often work under severe space and time limitations, they make every effort to check the accuracy of information through verification and documentation.

Joseph Pulitzer, a towering figure in U.S. journalism, had a cardinal rule for his staff: “Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy.” There may be arguments in newsrooms about writing style, about the best way to interview a reluctant source, but there is no debate about errors. A journalist may be tolerated if his or her writing does not sparkle, but reporters won’t last if they are error-prone.

Check and Check Again

Mistakes occur when the reporter fails to check an assumption or a source’s assertion.

When she was the public editor at *The Oregonian*, Michele McLellan recalls, “The newspaper featured a local high-school band member in a photo on the local news cover. The picture was tailor-made to brighten the family scrapbook. And it might have been the only time Julia Carr would see herself in her local newspaper.

“But we misspelled her name in the caption. I cringed that we had failed a young person in such a basic way. The bandleader provided the wrong spelling, but our photographer accepted responsibility. I was proud we didn’t just shrug, blame the source and move on.”

When the news editor of *The New York Times* spotted a line in a story that described the Canadian city of Sudbury as a “suburb of Toronto,” he checked an atlas. Sudbury, he found, is 250 miles north of Toronto. The reporter blamed the source, an FBI agent, but the editor said that was no excuse. “It should have been second nature to check,” he said.

More Blunders

The headline writer put the famous mountain peak El Capitan in Yellowstone National Park.

In one story, *The New York Times* writer wrote of “the University of Wisconsin at Ann Arbor” and Los Alamos in “the desert sands of New Mexico.”

A *Times* story refers to the “Ida P. Wells housing project in Chicago.”

In another *Times* story, a westward train makes several stops “before arriving in Santa Fe.” The writer also describes Santa Fe as being “in New Mexico’s desert.”

The caption in a midwestern newspaper refers to 22 women in the Washington State Senate. The picture shows 23 women.

***Newsweek* recommends parents let their 5-month-olds feed themselves raw carrot sticks and zweiback.**

No, El Capitan isn’t where the headline put it, but west in Yosemite National Park. And we all know where the University of Wisconsin is located. It’s Ida B. Wells. No trains stop in Santa Fe, which is hardly in the desert being some 7,000 feet high. As for *Newsweek*’s recommendation for feeding children carrots and zweiback, the magazine had to call back several hundred thousand copies of the issue. Its recommendation of carrots and zweiback could cause 5-month-olds to choke.

Costly Difference

The recipe in *Gourmet* magazine called for a dash of wintergreen oil. While the magazine was on the press, someone discovered that wintergreen *extract* was called for. Wintergreen oil is poisonous. Oops. The magazine printed the proper ingredients on a sticker and put it on the 750,000 copies of the magazine.

Fear

“The best newsrooms are places where people live in fear of being wrong. Good journalists can’t stand errors.”

—Caesar Andrews, editor,
Gannett News Service

Unanimous

A poll of 550 journalists on journalistic values ranked highest (1) getting the facts right and (2) getting both sides on record.

Corrections

When mistakes are made, corrections follow so that the record is accurate.

Correction

In last week's edition of the Michigan Chronicle, the story "Fauntroy stirs breakfast crowd," Congressman Walter Fauntroy's grandmother was misidentified. The matriarch was known to Fauntroy family members as "Big Ma," not "Big Mouth" as reported.

Language, Too

Accuracy also applies to the use of language. Words are chosen carefully to match the situation, event or individual. The writer who settles for the imprecise rather than the exact word lives dangerously, teetering on the brink of being misunderstood or misleading readers and listeners.

Precision We don't say she was "unusually tall." We write she was "an inch over six feet tall." No matter how concise our broadcast news item is, we don't write that "the ship damaged the pier." We write, "the tanker (freighter, battleship, ferry) caused \$500,000 in damage to the pier."

Firsthand Observation

The reporter knows that a story based on direct observation is superior in accuracy and reader interest to one based on secondhand information.

As Bertrand Russell, the British philosopher, advised his students:

Make the observation yourself. Aristotle could have avoided the mistake of thinking that women have fewer teeth than men by the simple device of asking Mrs. Aristotle to keep her mouth open while he counted. Thinking you know, when in fact you don't, is a fatal mistake to which we are all prone.

Despite the air of certainty in the tone of news stories, many are not based on the reporter's direct observation. The reporter rarely sees the burglar breaking in, the policy being drafted, the automobile hitting the telephone pole. The reporter obtains information about these events from authoritative sources such as documents and records (police files for the burglary and the accident) and from reliable individuals (policy makers and participants and witnesses).

News Filters

When the reporter bases his or her story on direct observation, the story is a *firsthand* account. But when the reporter is not on the scene and information is obtained from those who were present, the reporter's story is a *secondhand* account. It has been filtered through the source.

Some stories are based on accounts that have been filtered twice before reaching the reporter, a *thirdhand* account. For example, an official agency holds a

Past Due

In 1961, *The Columbia Journalism Review* criticized the *Daily News* for suggesting that medication taken by John F. Kennedy might affect his judgment. More than 40 years later, the *Review* published a correction and apology. A book that investigated Kennedy's illnesses stated that medication Kennedy took for Addison's disease did affect his judgment.

meeting at which the participants are sworn to secrecy. The reporter learns that one of those attending the meeting described it to a member of his staff, who happens to be a good source of news for the reporter. The reporter manages to obtain the staff member's account of the executive's account of what occurred.

Here are examples of stories based on direct observation and on secondary sources:

SHREWSBURY—About 250 anti-abortion demonstrators were arrested yesterday and charged with trespassing and violating a court order after they blocked the doors to the Planned Parenthood clinic for several hours.

The protesters, who prayed and sang as they were dragged and carried to

BURTON—A teacher has been charged with assault after a fifth-grade boy complained that she poked him in the chest with a pointer.

Pearl Gorton, 60, of 15 Newport Rd., North Kingsway, was charged with one count of simple assault. The incident took

FBI agents have established that the Watergate bugging incident stemmed from a massive campaign of political spying and sabotage conducted on behalf of President Nixon's re-election and directed by officials of the White House and the Committee for the re-election of the President.

The activities, according to information in FBI and Department of Justice files, were aimed at all the major Democratic presidential contenders and—since 1971—

police vans and a rented bus, were part of a new national group, called Operation Rescue, which has targeted abortion clinics. The group takes its name from a Bible passage in the Book of Proverbs: "Rescue those who are being drawn away to death."

place Jan. 9 at Sherbrook Elementary School, according to the police. The 10-year-old boy said Gorton poked him in the chest three times with the pointer because he was being loud in class, according to Lt. Karl Shapiro. The boy's father filed a complaint with the police on Jan. 15, Shapiro said.

represented a basic strategy of the Nixon re-election effort.

During their Watergate investigation federal agents established that hundreds of thousands of dollars in Nixon campaign contributions had been set aside to pay for an extensive undercover campaign aimed at discrediting individual and Democratic presidential candidates and disrupting their campaigns. . . .

—*The Washington Post*

Website Writing In their haste to go online, reporters open themselves to inaccuracies. "Working fast increases the chance for error," says Jonathan Landman, the deputy managing editor in charge of *The New York Times* Web operations. But that is a price all journalism has to pay. "Speed is a value. Speed gets information to people when they want it and need it," says Landman. The trick in writing for the Web, say its practitioners, is to balance speed, accuracy, fairness and the other journalistic values. And when an error is discovered, the Web allows quick recovery. "We've revised a running story as often as 50 times in the course of a day to add and revise information," says the editor of an Arizona newspaper Web site.

Firsthand Account

The reporters saw the protest and watched protesters being dragged into the waiting police vans.

Secondhand Account

The reporter learned about the incident from three sources, the police, the school superintendent and the teacher's lawyer.

Thirdhand Account

Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward said that they based their story "on strains of evidence, statements from numerous sources, deduction, a partial understanding of what the White House was doing, the reporters' familiarity with the 'switchblade mentality' of the President's men and disparate pieces of information the reporters had been accumulating for months."

Attribution

The farther the reporter is from direct observation, the more concerned he or she is about the accuracy of the information. Accurate and comprehensive direct observation is difficult enough. After the information has been filtered once or twice, only the most foolhardy journalist would stake his or her reputation on the accuracy of the material. To make clear that secondhand and thirdhand accounts are not based on the reporter's direct observation of the event, the reporter attributes the information about the event to a source.

Here are the first two paragraphs from a story in *The Detroit News*:

For six minutes, a Detroit police operator listened on the telephone as 24 bullets were fired into the bodies of an East Side couple.

But, according to the police, the operator mistook the shots for “someone hammering or building something” and dispatched the call as a routine burglary.

The lead may give the reader the impression the reporter was at the phone operator's elbow. But the second paragraph attributes the information to the police.

Attribution refers to two concepts:

1. **Statements** are attributed to the person making them.
2. **Information** about the events not witnessed by the reporter is attributed to the source of the information.

Here is a story that contains both types of attribution:

(1) Mayor Stanley Kretchmer said yesterday the city probably could balance its budget this year and next without laying off any workers.

(1) The decision, he said, “depends on a number of factors—the passage of a new tax package, the cooperation of municipal labor unions, general prosperity that keeps revenues high.”

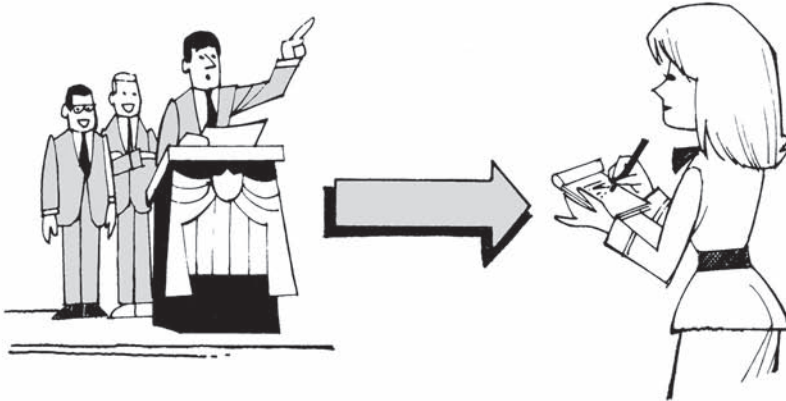
(2) At a meeting last week, the mayor told department heads they should consider the possibility of layoffs of about 10 percent of their workforce, according to city officials who attended the meeting.

(2) Police and fire department personnel would be exempt from the cuts, sources reported.

Generally, we attribute what we do not observe or know to be factual. Although the reporter may take the information from a police record, the document does not necessarily attest to the truth of the information, only that some source—the police, a victim, the suspect, a witness—said that such-and-such occurred. The reporter attributes the information to this source.

Some news organizations such as the AP demand rigid adherence to the following policy: Always attribute what you do not see unless it is common knowledge.

How the News Is Filtered



Firsthand Account

The story is based on direct observation of the event by the reporter.



Secondhand Account

The story is based on the account passed on by a participant or witness.



Thirdhand Account

The story is based on information supplied by a source who was informed by a participant.

Let us examine three stories to see how this policy is carried out. Under each story are the comments of an experienced reporter about the reasons attribution was or was not used. (Her direct quotes follow each story.)

YMCA

(1) NEW YORK AP—Dr. Jesse L. Steinfeld, former Surgeon General of the U.S. Public Health Service, has been appointed chairman of the National YMCA Health and Physical Education Advisory Council.

(2) Steinfeld is professor of medicine at the University of California at Irvine,

Calif., and chief of medical services for the Veterans Hospital in Long Beach, Calif.

(3) The advisory council will play an important role in the setting of future directions of the Y's nationwide programs, national board chairman Stanley Enlund said today in announcing Steinfeld's appointment to the nonsalaried post.

(1) There is no need for attribution of the appointment because the action is obviously on the record.

(2) Steinfeld's background is taken from records and needs no attribution.

(3) The role of the council is an opinion offered by the chairman of the board and must be attributed to him.

Hotel Fire

(1) BRANFORD, Conn. AP—The Waverly Hotel, popular earlier in the century, was destroyed by a two-alarm fire today.

(2) The roof collapsed into the heart of the building. At daylight the burned-out hotel was still smoldering.

(3) Myrtle Braxton, 73, who lived alone in the massive three-story building, was reported in fair condition at Yale-New Haven Hospital suffering from smoke inhalation.

(4) Officials said the fire was reported by Mrs. Braxton at 3:41 a.m. They said it

apparently started in the kitchen area where Mrs. Braxton was living after having closed off most of the rest of the building. She was living there without central heating or electricity, officials said.

(5) A neighbor said that a large number of antiques on the third floor were destroyed. Also lost was a huge ship's wheel from a sailing ship, a centerpiece in the dining room.

(6) The bank that holds the mortgage said the land and hotel were worth \$40,000 to \$50,000.

(1)(2) The condition of the hotel is a physical fact about which the reporter has no doubt.

(3) The attribution is implied as coming from the hospital.

(4) "Officials," presumably fire department officials, are cited as the authority because only they could have known this. In the second sentence, the location of the fire's origin is attributed.

(5)(6) Attribution gives the information credibility.



Attribute?

Not necessary. No reporter from *The Norman Transcript* was on hand when this tractor plowed into this house at lunchtime, but the evidence speaks for itself.

Bill Carter, *The Norman Transcript*



Attribute?

Of course. We attribute statements to those who make them.

CBC

(1) The Citizen’s Budget Commission, a private taxpayer’s organization, said today that the proposed city budget of \$185 million is more than the city can afford.

(2) The budget was submitted two weeks ago.

(3) Mayor Sam Parnass described it as an austerity budget.

(4) The Commission said it concluded after studying the budget that “significant cuts can be made.”

(5) The \$185 million spending plan is up 12 percent from the current year.

(6) When he submitted the budget, Mayor Parnass said anticipated revenues would cover the increase. The Commission is supported by the city’s business community.

- (1) A charge, allegation or opinion is always attributed, usually at the beginning of the lead. Here, the Commission is immediately identified as the source of the allegation.
- (2) Background need not be attributed because it is part of the record.
- (3) Attribute the mayor’s opinion to him.
- (4) Attribution to the source of the material.
- (5) Background needing no attribution.
- (6) Attribute the mayor’s statement. (The last sentence is the reporter’s attempt to give the reader the why of the Commission’s opposition—it’s a taxpayer’s group that likes austerity budgets because it means lower taxes. Nice touch.)

“Remember,” the reporter cautioned, “attribution does not guarantee the accuracy or truth of the material. All it does is place responsibility for the material with a source.

“If it turns out the information is inaccurate, the publication or station isn’t responsible for the misinformation. The source is.

“If you don’t identify the source, the reader or listener is going to assume that you stand behind the statements because you know they are true.”

Types of Attribution

Generally, reporters presume that those who speak to them can be named as the source of the information. Occasionally, a source will request he or she not be named. The reporter then has to determine whether the source can be referred to in a general way, as a “city hall official” or a “state legislator” or a “bank executive,” for example.

The source may say the information is for *background* only or *off the record*. These terms have specific meanings to reporters but may not have the same meanings to sources. The reporter must clarify with the source whether the material can be used without direct attribution or not used at all but is being provided solely for the reporter’s information, or somewhere in between.

Some reporters refuse to accept material if there is a condition that it may not be used in any form. They may bargain with the source, asking if they can go to

another source to obtain confirmation. Or they may ask if the material can be used without using the source's name.

Caution: Many editors refuse to accept copy that contains charges or accusations with no named source. They will not accept attribution to “an official in city hall,” “a company spokesperson.”

Background and off-the-record information pose problems for conscientious reporters because they know that backgrounders can be used to float *trial balloons*. These stories are designed by the source to test public reaction without subjecting the source to responsibility for the material. Reporters, eager to obtain news of importance and sometimes motivated by the desire for exclusives, may become the conduits for misleading or self-serving information.

When a reporter attributes assertions to a source, the reader can assess the accuracy and truth of the information on the basis of the general reliability of the source and his or her stake in the information.

The lesson for reporters is clear: Avoid commitments not to use names of sources.

Anonymous Sources

The reporter's job is to put sources on record, by name. Readers and listeners trust such a report. “When we write ‘sources say,’ they're convinced we're making it up,” writes David Shaw, media critic of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Some publications and stations insist that all material be attributed to a named source, but others will use nonattributed information when the reporter is sure the material is reliable. In these cases, the editor usually wants to know the name of the source.

Special care must be exercised when an anonymous source makes a charge of wrongdoing. *The New York Times* tells its staff:

We do not want to let unidentified sources (like “law enforcement officials”) use us to circulate charges against identifiable people when they provide no named complainants or other verifiable evidence.

Here is the policy of the Associated Press:

We do not routinely accede to requests for anonymity. We want information on the record. When a news source insists that he or she not be identified by name, we say so. If we accept the condition of anonymity, we keep our word. But within the rule set by the newsmaker, we do everything possible to tell readers the source's connections, motivations and viewpoints.

The Reporter as Source

When reporters dig out the information for their stories, the material can be attributed to the publication or station:

Austin police used force against African-Americans and Hispanics at significantly

Four Types

On the Record:

All statements are directly quotable and attributable, by name and title, to the person who is making the statement.

On Background:

All statements are directly quotable, but they cannot be attributed by name or specific title to the person commenting. The type of attribution to be used should be spelled out in advance: “A White House official,” “an Administration spokesman.”

On Deep Background:

Anything that is said in the interview is usable but not in direct quotation and not for attribution. The reporter writes it on his or her own.

Off the Record:

Information is for the reporter's knowledge only and is not to be printed or made public in any way. The information also is not to be taken to another source in hopes of getting confirmation.

higher rates than they did against whites during the past six months, according to an Austin American-Statesman analysis of police statistics.

Some editors are more conservative than those at the Austin newspaper. Jason Riley and R. G. Dunlop of *The Courier-Journal* in Louisville developed a series on dysfunctional county courts that lost and buried hundreds of felony cases. Riley wrote a lead that said the court system was flawed. His editor sent back Riley's draft with the comment, "Says who?"

Riley's response: "I didn't think it needed attribution because it was the conclusion I had drawn after six months of investigation." Riley held out and won out. Here is his lead:

FRANKFORT, Ky.—Justice in Kentucky is dispensed unequally because of differences among judges and prosecutors and a lack of state oversight that has allowed thousands of felony cases to stall, to disappear or to be dismissed for lack of prosecution.

The third paragraph begins with this attribution:

An eight-month investigation of the state's criminal justice system by *The Courier-Journal* found that some criminal cases took up to two decades to complete. . . .

Warnings

Attributing information to sources does not absolve reporters of responsibility for libelous statements in their stories. A reporter for a Florida newspaper reported that a county employee smoked marijuana, and the worker brought suit. "The reporter's own testimony indicated she had relied on second- and thirdhand accounts when writing the story," *Editor&Publisher* reported. A jury awarded the employee \$70,000. (See Chapter 25 for further discussion of libel.)

See for Yourself Journalists sometimes go astray when they neglect to ask for proof of assertions their sources make. Records, documents, reports are more reliable than a source's version of them. But these must be examined by the reporter.

A cornerstone of a journalist's questioning Hillary Clinton's honesty was that she had vastly overstated the value of the Clintons' real estate holdings in a loan application.

The allegation was given widespread attention. Then a reporter who checked the original document found that at the bottom of the front page was the notation: "Both sides of this document must be complete." On reading the other side, the reporter found that Mrs. Clinton had accurately stated the value.

Verify, Don't Assert

"The discipline of verification is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art. . . . Journalism alone is focused first on getting what happened down right. . . . (the) discipline of verification is the best antidote to the old journalism of verification being overrun by a new journalism of assertion. . . ."

—Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*

Historic Bet: Pastrami vs. Crab

When the Giants and the 49ers met in a National Football League playoff, Mayor Edward Koch of New York wagered a New York deli feast—pastrami, corned beef, dill pickles with corny bread—against Mayor Dianne Feinstein's cracked crab and California wine. The Giants and Koch lost. *The New York Times* reported the food was shipped by the Second Avenue Deli. *The Washington Post* said the Carnegie Deli supplied the sandwiches.

Big deal. Who cares what delicatessen shipped the corned beef and pastrami? Whoa, hold the mayo. The delis care. And we care, as journalists. It's trifles such as this that make the reader shake his or her head knowingly—journalists just can't get the simplest things right.

Note: Koch says he used the Second Avenue Deli.

The journalist who had attacked Mrs. Clinton defended his story by stating that his source had not provided the back of the page.

Verification

Attributing material to a source does not prove its truth. All a reporter does when attributing information is to place responsibility for it with the source named in the story. Attribution says only: It is true that the source said this.

The reporter who cares about truth is reluctant to settle for this half step but often is prevented from moving on by deadline pressures and the difficulty of verifying material. If a reporter tried to check every bit of information, many stories would never be written. There are, of course, certain routine verifications a reporter must make:

- Names, addresses and telephone numbers are checked in the telephone directory and the city directory.
- Background information is taken from the files.
- Dubious information is checked against records, with other sources.

Check the Farm Harlyn Riekena was worried, he told *New York Times* reporter David Cay Johnston. He had heard all this talk about how the federal estate tax would hurt farmers like him. His 950 acres planted in soybeans and corn in central Iowa was valuable, worth about \$2.5 million. Riekena "fretted that estate taxes would take a big chunk of his three grown daughters' inheritance," Johnston wrote.

President George W. Bush had made the point repeatedly: "To keep farms in the family, we are going to get rid of the death tax," the president said. (Opponents of the estate tax had taken to calling it the death tax, a more ominous title.) Bush had rounded up enough votes in the House to reduce the tax and then abolish it. But how true was the administration's dire prediction of the death of the family farm unless the tax was repealed?

Johnston went to farm country to check, and he did find fear of loss. But was the fear justified? Johnston asked Neil Harl, an Iowa State University economist whose tax advice "has made him a household name among Midwest farmers," Johnston wrote.

Harl told Johnston: "It's a myth." Harl said "he had searched far and wide but had never found a case in which a farm was lost because of estate taxes," Johnston wrote.

Johnston checked with the American Farm Bureau Federation, a supporter of the repeal. But, Johnston wrote, "It could not cite a single example of a farm lost because of estate taxes."

Johnston's guiding journalism philosophy is to "examine not what politicians say, but what they have done." This kind of reporting, he says, is "what readers want. . . . they want facts that are rounded and even-handed so they can apply their own lens of perception and draw their own conclusions."

Nonverifiable Information

The reporter can verify this statement: “The mayor submitted a \$150 million budget to the city council today.” All the reporter needs to do is examine the minutes of the meeting or the budget. But he or she cannot verify the truth of this statement: “The budget is too large (or too small).” A city councilman might have indeed stated that he would oppose the budget because it was too large, whereas the head of the Municipal League might have declared her organization’s distress at the “paltry budget that endangers health and welfare projects.” We can determine that the statements were made, but we cannot determine the truth of opinions and judgments. All we can do is to quote the source accurately, seek countering opinions and let the reader or viewer decide.

The Techniques of Verification

Verification is not the use of another opinion to counter the view of a source. Journalists should offer several views on controversial matters, and they should seek out the targets of charges. But that is balance, not verification, which is a check on the truthfulness of an assertion.

Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., introduced a bill that would require states to recognize gun carrying permits issued by other states. During the debate, Thune said that if people from South Dakota were visiting New York carrying their concealed weapons, “Central Park would be a much safer place.

Gail Collins of *The New York Times* quoted Thune and added:

There were no murders and three assaults in Central Park in 2008 compared with five murders and 341 assaults in Sioux Falls alone.

Not all charges and accusation can be verified, of course, and when this happens and the source has not offered proof, the newswriter says so.

During wartime, journalists depend on official sources because so much happens out of their sight and hearing. Sometimes, however, a reporter will try to verify material released by an official source. The result can be illuminating.

In Vietnam When the United States announced its planes had accidentally bombed the Cambodian village of Neak Luong, the U.S. Embassy told correspondents that the damage was minimal. Sydney H. Schanberg, a *New York Times* correspondent, decided to see for himself and sought air transportation to the village. The Embassy intervened to keep him from flying there, but Schanberg managed to find a boat.

Schanberg stayed in Neak Luong long enough to interview villagers and to see for himself whether the damage was minimal. It wasn’t.

To see more about Schanberg’s coverage, see **In Neak Luong** in *NRW Plus*.

In Iraq Early in the Iraq war, the military—sensitive to charges it had kept reporters from the front lines in previous engagements—allowed reporters to travel with the troops. Reporters were “embedded” with units and were able to file firsthand, graphic accounts of the action. But some reporters complained that their

Why Everyone Should Read the News

A major art gallery in London presented an exhibit by Damien Hirst, the artist who gained major media attention with his dead shark floating in embalming fluid.

Hirst’s unusual works caught the attention of collectors and have sold for hundreds of thousands of dollars, many of the works becoming the subject of news stories.

The work that was exhibited in the London gallery consisted of empty beer bottles, crumpled candy wrappers, stained coffee cups and other discarded material. The gallery put a six-figure price tag on the assemblage.

Sometime during the evening, a cleaning man gathered up the works, put them in his trash basket and tossed them out.



activities were still limited to the troops to which they were assigned and that they were not free to see and hear as they pleased and had to rely on service briefings.

Complete

Here is a brief story that ran in the business section of a major newspaper:

The United States' highest-paid chief executive officer resigned his post as Computer Associates International Inc., the world's largest independent software company, reshuffled its senior ranks and announced plans to spin off key divisions in an attempt to bolster its lackluster stock.

Company founder Charles Wang handed the CEO's reins to chief operating officer Sanjay Kumar, but will stay on as chairman and play an active role in the company with the responsibility of developing news initiatives.

Complete? Does the story leave unanswered any questions the reader might have? If you noticed that the story does not follow up the generality "highest-paid chief executive officer" with the amount Wang is paid, go to the head of the class.

There isn't a reader of this piece who isn't wondering how high in the stratosphere of executive salaries Wang's ascends.

Here's the second sentence in a long story about the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's visit to China that ran in *The New York Times*:

Among the top orchestras in the United States, it has the most musicians born in China, according to Li-Kuo Chang, the orchestra's assistant principal violist and a Shanghai native.

What do we expect to be told in this story? Yes, the number of China-born musicians in the orchestra. No, the reporter never told us.

Missing Prices The radio reporter began her 60-second piece about summer rentals in an exclusive area this way:

Once, renters fought for space at the Hamptons. Now, there are dozens of listings and few takers. The prices have gone way down. Still, there are long lists of available rentals.

After this beginning, what do you expect to hear? You want to know just how high those rentals were and how low they descended. But our reporter forgot to follow her generality with a specific. Her piece was not complete because she never gave us a single specific price.

Try These How would you follow these lines taken from some stories?

1. The temperature reached an all-time high yesterday at noon.
2. While in college, she set records in 100- and 200-meter races.

3. He said that today’s rap stars will join yesterday’s “in the dustbin of forgotten groups.”

You would expect:

1. The temperature hit 102 degrees, breaking the record of 98 degrees set on April 10, 1999.
2. Her times of 11.2 in the 100-meter dash and 22.03 in the 200-meter race remain standing at the college to this day.
3. “Who remembers ‘Four Hot Dogs’ today? Or ‘The Malignants’?”

Guidelines

1. Complete stories are written by reporters who anticipate and answer the questions their readers, viewers and listeners will ask.
2. Every generality in your story should be followed by a specific: Highest: How high. Most: How many. Way down: How low.

The complete story is also fair and balanced.

Fairness

When Walter Anderson, the editor in chief of *Parade*, was a young reporter he interviewed a woman whom he described as the “unmarried mother of five.” After the story appeared, the woman’s son called to ask Anderson, “Why did you write that? Why is that anyone’s business?”

On reflection two decades later, Anderson said, “The article I wrote was accurate, but I don’t think it was fair. I had gotten the facts right, but I was not right.”

Bias

The media are caught in the crosshairs of those aiming charges of bias. Conservatives find a liberal bias, and liberals find a conservative bias. “Our paper is under constant criticism by people alleging various forms of bias,” says Eric Black of the *Star Tribune* in Minneapolis. “And there is a daily effort to perform in ways that will make it harder to criticize. Some are reasonable, but there is a line you can cross after which you’re avoiding your duties to truth-telling.”

The Essentials

The *Washington Post* “Deskbook of Style” makes these points:

- No story is fair if it omits facts of major importance or significance. So fairness includes completeness.
- No story is fair if it includes essentially irrelevant information at the expense of significant facts. So fairness includes relevance.
- No story is fair if it consciously or unconsciously misleads or deceives the reader. So fairness includes honesty—leveling with the reader.

- No story is fair if reporters hide their biases or emotions behind such subtly pejorative words as “refused,” “despite,” “admit.” So fairness requires straightforwardness ahead of flashiness.
- No story is fair if innocent people are hurt.

Balance

CNN Anchor On Balance

“So when you have Candidate A saying the sky is blue and Candidate B saying it’s a cloudy day, I should be able to tell my viewers, ‘Candidate A is wrong. Candidate B is right.’ And not have to say, ‘Well, you decide.’

“That would be like I’m an idiot. And I’d be treating the audience like idiots.”

—Campbell Brown



Self-Discipline?

Whatever the reporter feels about a candidate for office, the account of his campaign is written objectively. The reporter quotes the candidate on his positions, on issues, asks him questions and describes his appearances at street rallies. The reporter allows the reader to make judgments.

Edward Reed

During political campaigns, editors try to balance—in some cases down to the second of air time or the inch of copy—candidate A and candidate B.

Balance is important. But balance does not require journalists to station themselves precisely at the midpoint of an issue. If candidate A makes an important speech today, the speech may be worth page 1 play. If, on the same day, opponent B repeats what he said yesterday or utters nonsense, the newspaper or station is under no obligation to balance something with nothing. A journalism of absolute balance can add up to zero. Balance is a moral commitment and cannot be measured by the stopwatch or the ruler.

The same common sense is applied to matters that require fair play. Should candidate A make a serious accusation against opponent B, the reporter seeks out B for a reply. The targets of charges and accusations are always given their say, and the reply is placed as closely to the allegation as possible.

Here is the AP’s policy on balance:

We make every reasonable effort to get comment from someone who has a stake in a story we’re reporting—especially if the person is the target of an attack or allegations. . . . If someone declines comment, we say so. If we can’t get comment from someone whose side of a story should be told, we spell out in our copy the steps we took to try to get that comment. . . . Whenever possible we also check our files to see what, if anything, the person has said in the past relating to the allegations. Including past comment may provide needed balance and context.

Objectivity

Lack of balance and the absence of fairness are often inadvertent. Because writing is as much an act of the unconscious as it is the conscious use of controlled and disciplined intelligence, the feelings of reporters can crop up now and then.

In describing an official the reporter dislikes, a reporter might write, “C. Harrison Gold, an ambitious young politician, said today. . . .”

Or, writing about an official the reporter admires, that reporter might write, “Gerald Silver, the dynamic young state controller, said today. . . .”

It is acceptable for a young man or woman to be “ambitious,” but when the word is used to describe a politician, it has a negative connotation. On the other hand, the “dynamic” politician conjures up an image of a young man or woman hard at work serving the public. Maybe the reporter is accurate in these perceptions. Maybe not. The reporter’s job is to let the reader draw conclusions by describing what the politician says and does.

In other words, the reporter straddles the middle line. We say the careful reporter is objective. If the reporter feels that Gold is overly ambitious to the point of sacrificing principles, then it is the reporter's job to prove it through meticulous reporting. The reporter must verify his or her suspicions, feelings or hunches.

Unfair and unbalanced journalism might be described as a failure in objectivity. When journalists talk about objectivity, they mean that the news story is free of the reporter's opinion or feelings, that it contains facts and that the account is written by an impartial and independent observer. Stories are objective when they can be checked against some kind of record—the text of a speech, the minutes of a meeting, a police report, a purchase voucher, a payroll, or vital statistics.

If readers want to weep or laugh, write angry letters to their senators or send money to the Red Cross for tornado victims, that is their business. The reporter is content to lay out the facts. Objective journalism is the reporting of the visible and the verifiable.

Objectivity's Limitations

In the 1950s, social and political problems that had been proliferating since the end of World War II began to cause cleavages in society, and reporters found their methodology of objective reporting inadequate in finding causes and fixing responsibility.

Journalists were concerned about the attention they had given Joseph McCarthy, the Wisconsin senator whose charges of Communist conspiracies had been given front-page play over the country. Their tortured self-analysis led them to assume collective responsibility for the senator's rise to power. They realized it was not enough to report what McCarthy had said—which was objective reporting. McCarthy had indeed made the charges, but many of the charges were later found to be false.

Frustrated Journalists Elmer Davis, a radio journalist, pointed to the limitations of objective journalism during the McCarthy period. He described the frustrations of reporters who knew officials were lying but were unable to say so in their stories.

Davis said that the principle of objectivity holds that a newspaper or station will run “everything that is said on both sides of a controversial issue and let the reader make up his mind. A noble theory; but suppose that the men who talk on one side (or on both) are known to be lying to serve their own personal interest, or suppose they don't know what they are talking about. To call attention to these facts, except on the editorial page, would not, according to most newspaper practice, be objective.”

Davis wondered whether readers have enough background on many subjects and he asked, “Can they distinguish fact from fiction, ignorance from knowledge, interest from impartiality?”

The newspaper is unworthy of the reader's trust, Davis continued in his book *But We Were Born Free*, “if it tells him only what somebody says is the truth, which is known to be false.” The reporter has no choice, he wrote, but to put into “the one-dimensional story the other dimensions that will make it

Objectivity Promotes Passive Journalism

“When the official view is portrayed as an objective view, it gives voice mainly to the powerful. . . . In domestic reporting, the poor and minorities often become invisible, unless they break the law. And then their depiction contributes to a divisive stereotype. Objectivity has encouraged passivity and invited official manipulation. Reporters who pursue the public's tough questions as opposed to merely covering what government and corporate leaders say or do are sometimes accused of ‘having their own agenda,’ ‘making news’ rather than ‘covering’ it. Objectivity, at least as some construe it, can result in journalists falling back on a ‘he said, she said’ approach to reporting. Likewise, it can push them towards a false balance—equal time or space—when two or more sides do not have equal evidence for their positions.”

—John H. McManus, “Objectivity: It's Time to Say Goodbye,” *Nieman Reports*

approximate the truth.” The reporter’s obligation is to the person who goes to the news “expecting it to give him so far as humanly possible not only the truth and nothing but the truth, but the whole truth.” Then, in a paragraph that influenced many journalists, Davis wrote:

The good newspaper, the good news broadcaster, must walk a tightrope between two great gulfs—on one side the false objectivity that takes everything at face value and lets the public be imposed on by the charlatan with the most brazen front; on the other, the “interpretive” reporting which fails to draw the line between objective and subjective, between a reasonably well-established fact and what the reporter or editor wishes were the fact. To say that is easy; to do it is hard. No wonder that too many fall back on the incontrovertible objective fact that the Honorable John P. Hoozis said, colon quote—and never mind whether he was lying or not.

Adjustments

Another broadcast journalist, Edward R. Murrow, who had moved from radio to television, pioneered in-depth reporting. He sought to make television journalism more than a bulletin board with news for the middle class. In his work in the 1950s, Murrow demonstrated a passion to get at underlying truths along with curiosity and journalistic discipline.

Davis, Murrow and a few other journalists gave a broader scope to objective reporting. Journalists—with their unique nonpartisan perspective and their commitment to democratic values, accurate observation and truth—began to see how they could provide insights for the public and for policy makers. To do so more effectively, they knew they had to change some of their traditional practices. Underlying their conviction that changes in the practice of journalism were needed was their assumption that journalists are publicly useful men and women.

Providing Context Some of these journalists found support and justification for their attempt to widen journalism’s scope in their discovery of a report that had been issued in 1947 by a group of academicians, *A Free and Responsible Press. A General Report on Mass Communications: Newspapers, Radio, Motion Pictures, Magazines, and Books*. The report told journalists that they are most useful when they give “a truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the day’s events in a context which gives them meaning. . . . It is no longer enough to report *fact* truthfully. It is now necessary to report the *truth about the fact*.”

Journalists began to find ways to go beyond just reporting assertions and claims. They sought to give an added dimension to their stenographic function by checking statements and by looking for causes and consequences of actions. They found that this kind of journalism takes the public closer to the truth.

Such reporting is now commonplace. It is expected of all reporters that they will report the *truth about the fact*. In Elizabeth Rosenthal’s report from China about Chinese officials wooing the International Olympic Committee for the 2008 games, she quotes a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, “Most Chinese believe that the human rights situation in China is the best ever.”

That satisfied the stenographic function. Then she placed the statement in context, “But that was not true for all Chinese this week,” she wrote. She described the detention of members of a human-rights group and the imprisonment of a woman for signing a petition urging the Olympic Committee to call on China to release jailed human-rights advocates. Rosenthal also reported the stepped-up surveillance of demonstrators at Tiananmen Square where human-rights advocates try to speak out.

Personal Involvement

How close can a reporter move to the event before he or she loses objectivity and risks becoming part of the story? The easy answer is that the reporter must maintain a distance, keep an objective detachment. Sometimes? Always?

When Ron Martz, a reporter for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, was embedded with the Army in Iraq, he had to decide whether to help out in a medical emergency. An Iraqi civilian had been wounded and medics who were treating him needed help. Martz dropped his reporter’s notebook and held an intravenous drip bag as the medics worked.

Was that right? Martz wondered when he filed his war diary entry on National Public Radio. Ethicists, Martz said, consider this kind of situation cloudy territory. Martz’s decision, he reported on NPR, was that he is a human being first, a reporter second.

Brevity

In our generalization about the reporter’s job at the outset of this chapter, we pointed out that the news story is succinct. Here is a two-paragraph story that says a great deal although it contains only four sentences:

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa, Nov. 8—The bodies of 60 victims of an accidental dynamite explosion a mile and a half down a gold mine 100 miles southwest of Johannesburg were brought to the surface today.

Of the dead, 58 were Basuto tribesmen from Lesotho, chosen for the dangerous job of shaft-sinking, or blasting a way down to the gold-bearing reef. The two others were white supervisors. The black Africans will be buried in a communal grave tomorrow.

—*The New York Times*

Creative work is based on the art of omission. When Beethoven was struggling with the music to his opera “Fidelio,” he realized that the leisurely pace of the music did not meet the demands of the theater, and for years he pared down his work. David Hamilton, the music critic, describes Beethoven’s effort as a “ruthless piece of self criticism. . . . Beethoven expunged balancing phrases, trimmed decorative expansions, excised anything that did not move forward, eventually achieving the terse urgency that now marks the opera’s crucial scenes.”

In eliminating large sections of his music, Beethoven rejected three overtures he had written. One, “Leonore No. 3,” became one of the most popular pieces in

The Ultimate Art

“. . . there is but one art: to omit! O if I knew how to omit, I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knew how to omit would make an *Iliad* of a daily newspaper.”

—Robert Louis Stevenson

Too Brief

Headline writers are the brevity experts. But sometimes their tightening misdirects meaning:

Kids Make Nutritious Snacks

Squad Helps Dog Bite Victim

Eye Drops off Shelf

Stud Tires Out

Still True

From the 1931 movie, *Dance, Fools, Dance*: City Editor to reporter Bonnie Jordan, played by Joan Bennett, “Is this all of it?” Jordan answers, “Yes, but I could write some more.” City Editor, “There’s your story in the first three paragraphs. You can have the rest of it.”

Duty

“The news of the day as it reaches the newspaper office is an incredible medley of fact, propaganda, rumor, suspicion, clues, hopes and fears, and the task of selecting and ordering that news is one of the truly sacred and priestly offices in a democracy.”

—Walter Lippmann

the orchestral repertory. Despite its obvious beauty and power, Beethoven found it unsuited to his opera.

Joseph G. Herzberg, an editor on several New York City newspapers, said, “Newspapering is knowing what to leave out and condensing the rest.” But stories can be so condensed they are misleading, as is this obituary from *The Hartford Courant*:

Robert “Bob” E. Welch, 56, of Enfield, passed away, Saturday (January 29, 2005) at the West Haven Veterans Hospital after a long battle with his family at his bedside.

Selectivity

The way out of the dilemma of being brief but not writing telegrams is through Herzberg’s advice, which can be summed up in one word—selectivity. Brevity is the result of selectivity—knowing what to leave out.

Edna Buchanan, the police reporter for *The Miami Herald*, began her account of a record-breaking week of violence in Dade County this way:

Dade’s murder rate hit new heights this week as a wave of violence left 14 people dead and five critically hurt within five days.

A couple of paragraphs compared these figures with murder figures of previous years, and then Buchanan summarized most of the deaths:

In the latest wave of violence, a teenager’s throat was cut and her body dumped into a canal. A former airline stewardess was garroted and left with a pair of scissors stuck between her shoulder blades. Four innocent bystanders were shot in a barroom gun battle. An 80-year-old man surprised

a burglar who battered him fatally with a hammer. An angry young woman who “felt used” beat her date to death with the dumbbells he used to keep fit. And an apparent robbery victim was shot dead as he ran away from the robbers.

Clarity

The executives of 40 daily newspapers in Iowa and journalism instructors at the state’s three journalism schools were asked to rank characteristics considered most important for beginning reporters. Both groups put the ability to write clearly and interestingly first. The novelist Henri Stendhal wrote to fellow author Honoré de Balzac: “I see but one rule: to be clear. If I am not clear, all my world crumbles to nothing.” Or, as Harold Ross would frequently ask his *New Yorker* writers after reading their copy, “What the hell do you mean?”

Guideline To avoid enchantment with the sound or look of your writing, be brutal. No one has been maimed by copious use of the delete key. Cut out all

material that does not buttress your main point, usually expressed in the lead. Delete adjectives and adverbs, irrelevant quotations. The guide: Make it brief but clear and complete.

Clear prose follows comprehension. That is, the reporter must be able to understand the event before he or she can explain it clearly and succinctly. You cannot clarify what you do not understand.

Clarity is enhanced by simplicity of expression, which generally means short sentences, everyday language, coherence and logical story structure. We shall look at these in detail in Chapter 7.

Human Interest

To make certain the story interests people, the journalist recounts events in ways that substitute for the drama of the personal encounter. One of the ways the journalist does this is to tell the story in human terms.

A change in city zoning regulations is dramatized by pointing out that now low-income families can move into an area that had been effectively sealed off to them by the previous two-acre zoning rule. A factory shutdown is personalized by talking to workers who must line up at the unemployment office instead of at a workbench.

Polluting In a story about chemicals polluting the Hudson River and ruining the fishing industry, Barry Newman of *The Wall Street Journal* begins:

Grassy Point, N.Y.—In the gray-shingled shack at water’s edge, four fishermen sit playing cards around an old kitchen table, ignoring the ebb tide laden with the spring run of shad. The wall is hung with foul-weather gear; rubber boots are piled in the corner. On the refrigerator door somebody has taped up a newspaper clipping about the awful chemicals in the fish of the Hudson River.

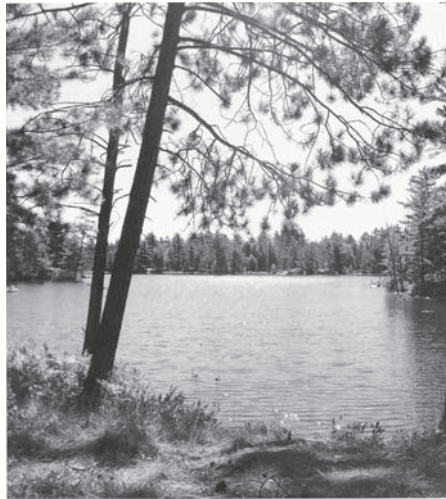
“I do my fishing from the window here,” an old man says, looking off to the quiet hills on the east bank, three miles across the river from this small valley town.

“No nets for me this year,” another man says. “No pay,” says the third. And the fourth: “A lot of trouble, this.”

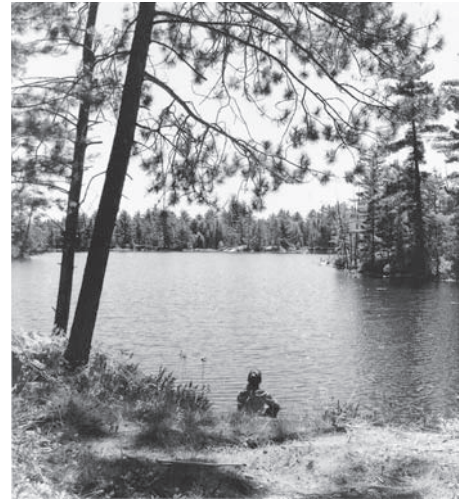
Localizing In Washington, the talk was of budget cutting. Members of Congress used the podium as a pulpit to expound on the morality of frugality.

Back home in Minneapolis, the *Star Tribune* decided to see just what role federal spending played in Anoka County. “This was an attempt to bring down to a personal level the debate in Washington over extremely intricate financial and policy issues,” said Mike Kaszuba, suburban affairs reporter. He teamed with the newspaper’s Washington bureau chief Sharon Schmickle to do the reporting and writing.

The reporters found that billions of dollars had flowed into the county since the New Deal built the Anoka high school stadium. Federal money “built the



Lifeless



Lively

R.L. Chambers

“Irresponsible Journalists”

“I wish I could remember how many times when I was Ambassador to Yugoslavia I was officially requested to persuade, convince, or direct *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* to behave ‘responsibly.’ I doubt whether there is, in truth, any objective standard of responsible journalism. We tend to think papers are responsible when we agree with them and irresponsible when we object to their content.”

—Laurence Silberman,
Judge of the District of
Columbia Circuit of the U.S.
Court of Appeals

bridge that carries traffic over the Rum River into downtown. Now it pays Mary Wellman, hired last year as Anoka’s only female police officer.”

The series gave faces and names to those helped by federal funds—children eating school lunches, students attending the local technical college, the injured using the Anoka ambulance, people who need help with their heating bills, salaries for teachers who help special education students.

Responsibility

Ted Williams was one of baseball’s greatest players. The Boston Red Sox outfielder won six batting titles over a span of 17 years and was one of the few to win the Triple Crown twice, leading the league in 1942 and in 1947 in batting, runs batted in and home runs. To many baseball fans, he was heroic. To some sports writers, he was, as Roger Kahn put it, “a pill.”

It was possible for readers to know the real Williams because, Kahn says, when nine writers covered Red Sox games “it was impossible to conceal” the truth about Williams. “If one writer courted The Thumper by refusing to report a tantrum as news, another inevitably seized the tantrum as news. Regardless of each reporter’s skill, an essential, imperfect system of checks and balances worked. If you cared enough about Williams, and I did, you could find a portrait that was honest by consensus.”

But most of the Boston newspapers that covered Williams are gone, as are others in many cities. There are fewer than a dozen cities with competing daily newspapers. This means that the responsibility for truth-telling falls on fewer shoulders. It falls, in most U.S. cities, in fact, on a single reporter, for most local news beats are covered by only one journalist.

Responsibility is not a visible part of a news story. It is an attitude that the reporter carries to the job. It encompasses all the components we have discussed in this chapter.

Responsibility is the reporter's commitment to the story, to journalism and to the public. Responsibility demands of the reporter that the story be accurate, complete, fair, balanced and clear.

Summing Up

Journalism begins with the ABC's—accuracy, brevity and clarity:

Accuracy of fact and language.

Brevity in making the point succinctly.

Clarity so there is no doubt about what happened.

These are moral requirements as well as necessities for the practice of journalism. Journalists take on the responsibility of informing people about the world around them so that people can act on what they read, see and hear. But these actions depend on clear, understandable and accurate information. Without reliable information, action may be misdirected or, equally unfortunate, never taken.

Further Reading

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Liebling was a master reporter and a classy writer who covered the terrain—from prizefighting and gourmet dining to politics, with many stops between. He was a World War II correspondent who was in the middle of the action. He describes being strafed by a German plane at an Allied airfield:

As soon as there was a lull in the noises overhead, I got up and ran toward the edge of the runway to get away from the transports, but more noises came before I made it, so I flopped again. After they had passed, I got up and ran off the runway. I saw a soldier in a fine, large hole nearly six feet deep. He shouted, "Come right in, sir!" You can have Oscar of the Waldorf any time; I will always remember that soldier as my favorite host.

Liebling said of his journalism: "I can write better than anybody who can write faster, and I can write faster than anybody who can write better."



Misspelled Name

Part 3: Writing the Story



What Is News? 3

Preview

We look closely at the news values that guide journalists in determining the newsworthiness of events. The news values are:

- **Timeliness.** Today's events are more newsworthy than yesterday's.
- **Impact.** The more people affected, the bigger the story.
- **Prominence.** The better known, the bigger the story.
- **Proximity.** The closer the event, the bigger the story.
- **Conflict.** Battle or debate, struggles make news.
- **Unusual.** The unexpected and the different = news.
- **Currency.** Suddenly, the silent is given voice.
- **Necessity.** A situation the journalist feels compelled to reveal.



Pennsylvania state troopers surround a disarmed man who surrenders.

Robert Esquivel, *Herald-Standard*

Some Answers Past and Present

We know that some subjects draw people to the media. The weather is one of these. Parents want to know how to dress their children for school and themselves for work and for the trip to the shopping mall. The result: Radio gives us the forecast every 10 minutes and newspapers devote considerable space to the weather report.

We know something about the people who look at TV, listen to the radio, read newspapers and magazines and use the Internet for the news. Women over the age of 50, for example, are avid followers of news about health. The result: daytime TV, day and nighttime radio and cable feature news about illness and remedies. Men under 40 make up, almost exclusively, the sports followers. The morning newspaper has a large sports section, and morning radio and TV are heavy on sports before men leave for work and in the evening when they are at home.

We know something about the news habits of those 18 to 34. More than half of them use the Internet to read the news online. We know they want their news presented in tightly written sections.



Journalism isn't stenography. Dig.

Definition

“Journalism is in fact history on the run. It is history written in time to be acted upon; thereby not only recording events but at times influencing them. Journalism is also the recording of history while the facts are not all in.”

—Thomas Griffith, *Time*

Wars, Dragons and Business

The first printed newsbook, published in 1513 and titled *The trewe encounter*, described the Battle of Flodden Field in which James IV of Scotland was killed during his invasion of England. The Anglo-Scottish wars that followed provided printers with material for more newsbooks. The elements of our modern-day journalism were featured in these accounts—names of officers in the wars and their deeds. Adventure, travel and crime were reported, along with accounts of disasters.

As one printer-pamphleteer put it, people are interested in “and most earnestly moved with strange novelties and marvelous things.” These early-day journalists favored stories of monsters and dragons, not unlike our own day’s tales of the Abominable Snowman and the Loch Ness monster.

During the 17th century, news sheets spread to the business centers of Europe, reporting news of commerce. In this country, as historian Bernard Weisberger has pointed out, the newspaper “served as a handmaiden of commerce by emphasizing news of trade and business.”

Day and Bennett

The newspaper editors of the 19th century understood that to stay in business they had to appeal to a large audience, and this realization led to definitions of news that hold to this day. The papers in the large cities were printing news for the newly literate working class. One of the first penny papers—inexpensive enough for working people—contained the ingredients of popular journalism. In 1833, the first issue of Benjamin H. Day’s *New York Sun* included a summary of police court cases and stories about fires, burglaries and a suicide. Other stories contained humor and human interest.

Several years later, James Gordon Bennett—described by historians as the originator of the art, science and industry of news gathering—used the recently developed telegraph to give the readers of his *Herald* commercial and political news to go along with his reports of the everyday life of New York City, its sins and scandals. His formula of news for “the merchant and man of learning, as well as the mechanic and man of labor” guides many editors today.



Joseph Pulitzer

The Library of Congress

Pulitzer

Day and Bennett followed the tastes and appetites of their readers, but they also directed and taught their readers by publishing stories they deemed important.

This blend of entertainment, information and public service was stressed by Joseph Pulitzer, who owned newspapers in St. Louis and New York. He, too, gave his readers what he thought they wanted—sensational news and features. But Pulitzer also used his news staff for his campaigns to curb business monopolies and to seek heavy taxes on income and inheritance. In 1883, Pulitzer charged the staff of his New York *World* with this command:

Always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption, always fight demagogues of all parties, never belong to any party, always

oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always remain devoted to the public welfare, never be satisfied with merely printing news, always be drastically independent, never be afraid to attack wrong, whether by predatory plutocracy or predatory poverty.

Hearst

Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst were locked in a circulation war for New York readers when Cuba rebelled against its Spanish rulers. Spain was severe in repressing the insurrection and the New York newspapers seized on the story of helpless Cubans trying to free themselves from ruthless oppressors.

Hearst's *Journal* was particularly imaginative. After the United States declared war in 1898 and the troops were slow in making it to Cuba, Hearst urged them on with inventive news stories.

"Over the next week," writes Arthur Lubow in *The Reporter Who Would Be King*, "the *Journal* reported an exciting sequence of landings, bombardments and fleet battles, all admirably detailed, all entirely fictitious. The *Journal* was selling so well thanks to its apocryphal scoops that its rivals began to play the same game, often rewriting the accounts of the creative *Journal* writers."

Today's Editors

Modern mass media editors overseeing newsrooms humming with the latest electronic wonders apply many 19th-century concepts of news. They would define their news menu as did Pulitzer—a mixture of information, entertainment and public service. They would also agree with the definition of news offered by Charles A. Dana, who ran the *New York Sun* from 1869 to 1897. Dana said news is "anything that interests a large part of the community and has never been brought to its attention before."

One of Dana's editors, John B. Bogart, contributed the classic definition, "When a dog bites a man, that is not news, because it happens so often. But if a man bites a dog, it's news."

Another enduring definition of news was offered by Stanley Walker, a Texan gone East to succeed as city editor of *The New York Herald Tribune* in the early 1930s. He said news was based on the three W's, "women, wampum, and wrongdoing." By this he meant that news was concerned with sex, money and crime—the topics people desired to know about. Actually, Walker's formula is as old as the contents of Caesar's *Acta Diurna* 2,000 years ago, which, along with information about public affairs, offered news of sports, crime and sensational events.

Definition Changes By the mid-1970s, the United States had been through three crises: a war in Vietnam that wound down with guilt and defeat for many Americans; the Watergate scandals; and the failure of some political, social and economic experiments of the 1950s and 1960s that had been hailed as solutions to international conflict, racial tension and poverty.

It was not surprising, then, to see a shift in the criteria used to determine the news. Av Westin, the executive producer of the American Broadcasting

Pioneer

In response to criticism of the *Journal's* fabrications, Hearst ran a front-page editorial about its so-called news from Cuba: "The *Journal* realized what is frequently forgotten in journalism, that if news is wanted, it often has to be sent for . . . the public is even more fond of entertainment than it is of information."

Three Views of News

"A news sense is really a sense of what is important, what is vital, what has color and life—what people are interested in. That's journalism."

—Burton Rascoe, *Chicago Tribune*, 1920s

"Marketing should be the king of all editors. They should forget what university professors stuffed into their heads, find out what readers really want and give it to them."

—Stuart Garner, *Thomson Newspapers*, 1980s

"News is truth that matters."

—Gerry Goldstein, *The Providence Journal*, 1990s

This Is News?

A Riverside Road woman reported to police September 25 at 10:37 a.m. that a dog was lying on the ground near Underhill Road.

The woman didn't know if the dog was dead, and she was afraid to approach it.

The dog later got up, and moved to a shadier spot, police said.

—*Newton (Conn.) Bee*

Company's "Evening News" program, said Americans wanted their news to answer the following questions: Is the world safe? Are my home and family safe? If they are safe, then what has happened in the last 24 hours to make them better off? Is my pocketbook safe?

People wanted not only more pocketbook stories but escape stories as well. Editors asked for more entertainment in the form of copy about lifestyles, leisure subjects and personalities.

In the 1990s, editors devised the "reader-friendly" story. Readers, they argued, want to learn how to diet, how to raise their children, where to invest their money. The news agenda was being shaped to conform to the interests of middle-class readers and viewers who bought the products of media advertisers.

News in the 21st Century The 21st century opened with proof of Walker's wampum and Westin's pocketbook theories of news. Stories abounded of the high-flying economy and its new dot-com millionaires. In short order, the news focus shifted to an economy in retreat, dot-coms collapsing, jobs lost, corporate crime, pensions disappearing, talk of a 1929–39 style depression. Pessimism replaced optimism. Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq sent amputees and body bags home. People lost confidence in their leaders.

Subjects once given major play no longer held the public's attention, and topics that had been ignored made it to the top of the news. A study by the Project for Excellence in Journalism found a significant decline in crime news. Religion-related issues became big news: the disclosure that in many dioceses of the Catholic Church pedophiles were protected, and the controversy over gay marriage. The political muscle exercised by the religious right became a persistent news subject.

Definitions of news may change, but two general guidelines remain constant:

- News is information about a break from the normal flow of events, an interruption in the expected, a deviation from the norm.
- News is information people can use to help them make sound decisions about their lives.

How does a reporter or editor determine what events are so unusual and what information is so necessary that the public should be informed of them? Journalists have established some guides, called news values, for answering these questions.

News Values

In Chapter 1, we watched several reporters covering and writing news stories. Now we examine more closely the eight factors that determine the newsworthiness of events, people and ideas:

1. Timeliness

Events that are immediate, recent. The daily newspaper, cable TV, the online news services and the hourly newscast seek to keep readers and listeners abreast of events. Thomas Griffith, a former editor of *Time*, said that “the essence of journalism is timeliness; it must be served hot.” Thus, broadcast news is written in the present tense, and most leads on newspaper stories contain the word *today*. No matter how significant the event, how important the people involved, news value diminishes with time. André Gide, the French novelist, defined journalism as “everything that will be less interesting tomorrow than today.”

The media are commercial enterprises that sell space and time on the basis of their ability to reach people quickly with a perishable commodity. The marketplace rewards a fast news carrier. Most newspapers created Web sites to meet the demand for news NOW. They ask their reporters to file running stories online and then write for the printed newspaper. Radio, which was being prepared for its funeral when television captured a large segment of the listening audience, staged a comeback with the all-news station.

Timely Information Essential There is another side to our need to know quickly. Timeliness is important in a democracy. People need to know about the activities of their officials as soon as possible so they can assess the directions in which their leaders are moving. Told where they are being led, citizens can react before actions become irreversible. In extreme cases, the public can rid itself of an inefficient or corrupt official. Officials also want quick distribution of information so that they can have feedback from the public. This interaction is one of the reasons the Constitution protects the press. Without the give-and-take of ideas, democracy could not work.

Timeliness is also the consequence of advertising necessities. Because most businesses are based on the quick turnover of goods, advertisements must appear soon after goods are shipped to stores. The news that attracts readers to the advertisements must be constantly renewed.

Caution The need to supply Web sites with breaking news can cause problems. Initial reports are sometimes unclear, even contradictory. “Reporters working for the Web need to disclose to readers the limits of what they know,” says John Leach, a veteran editor of online news services. “It’s not difficult. We use phrases like this, ‘Smith could not immediately be reached for comment,’ and we say that we’re pursuing comment from those involved.

“We also say, ‘Details of the accident were not immediately available’ when we post an initial story about a fatal auto accident. If we don’t know the name



Alert

“Never, never neglect an extraordinary appearance or happening. It may be a false alarm and lead to nothing. But it may, on the other hand, be the clue provided by fate to lead you to some important advance.”

—Alexander Fleming,
discoverer of penicillin

of the victim, we'll write, 'Police are withholding the name of the victim until they notify the next of kin,' or we'll write, 'The name of the victim has not been released by the police.'"

Leach says that reporters should understand that "facts change from initial reports, often in significant ways. We all know how eyewitnesses will give different and even contradictory reports of what happened. Police have to sort those out. We've had descriptions that changed in height, weight and even gender." He recalls an initial story quoting a spokesman for the state public safety department that a dozen vehicles were involved in an accident in which seven people died. "A couple of hours later, the department revised the account to two fatalities.

"One of the beauties of the Web is that you can revise the story as soon as you get new information, and we have revised a story as often as 50 times in the course of a day . . . to add new information, to change figures, to add identifications. Reporters have to be comfortable doing that."

2. Impact

Events that are likely to affect many people. Journalists talk about events that are significant, important. They talk about giving high priority in their coverage to situations that people need to know about to be well informed. The more people who are affected by the event, the bigger the story. An increase in the postal rates will be given major attention because so many are affected. An increase in a town's property tax will receive considerable play in that town and nowhere else, but a change in the federal income tax rate will receive national attention.

Journalists may take the initiative in digging up situations that have considerable impact. David Willman, a reporter in the Washington bureau of the *Los Angeles Times*, suspected that the federal Food and Drug Administration had lost its effectiveness as the guardian of public health. He spent two years examining the FDA's work and discovered it had approved seven prescription drugs that were believed to have caused the deaths of more than 1,000 people. Despite warnings from its own specialists about the drugs—among them a painkiller, a diet pill and a heartburn medicine—approval had been granted.



Flooded Out

Sudden changes in weather affect large numbers of people and are given major play by journalists.

Juan Carlos,
Ventura County Star

Flawed Tests In Houston, a lawyer who was disturbed by reports of incompetent forensic testing in the local police department laboratory called KHOU. An alert sounded in the station's newsroom. Lab work, the reporters knew, is key evidence in criminal trials. The tests can send a woman to prison for 20 years, a man to death row. If the lab work is tainted, innocents suffer.

Harris County, in which Houston is located, sends more men and women to death row than any county in the nation. David Raziq and Anna Werner decided to investigate. They sent some of the lab's DNA tests to forensic experts and when the findings came back they confirmed the reporters' suspicions. The experts reported "egregious errors . . . repeated gross incompetence . . . errors that seem to favor the prosecution." One report said that the work in a rape case was "the equivalent of a scientific train wreck."

The result of the reporters' digging was that a thousand cases were reopened and new tests ordered. Among the victims of the flawed tests was a prison inmate convicted of rape when he was 16 years old. He had served four years when he was freed.

3. Prominence

Events involving well-known people or institutions. When the president trips disembarking from an airplane, it is front-page news; when a city council member missteps, it is not worth a line of print or a moment of air time. A local banker's embezzlement is more newsworthy than a clerk's thievery, even when the clerk has stolen more. The more prominent the person, the bigger the story. Names make news, goes the old adage, even when the event is of little consequence.

Two events that probably received the most massive media coverage of the 1990s were the result of prominence—the pursuit, arrest and trials of O.J. Simpson and the sexual affair of President Clinton with a young White House intern. Never mind that the economies of several large countries were crumbling, that the Middle East and Northern Ireland saw carnage amidst peace efforts, that nuclear proliferation arose and that ethnic warfare killed hundreds of thousands and made refugees of many more. Names made news, big and bigger news.

Prominence applies to organizations as well, and even to some physical objects. The repair of a major bridge in Akron is given coverage in that city and not elsewhere. But when the Golden Gate Bridge shuts down, that action merits national coverage.

The American poet and journalist Eugene Field was moved by the journalism of personalities to write:

*Now the Ahkoond of Swat is a vague sort of man
Who lives in a country far over the sea;
Pray tell me, good reader, if tell me you can,
What's the Ahkoond of Swat to you folks or me?*

Despite Field's gentle poke, journalists continue to cater to what they perceive as the public's appetite for newsworthy names.

4. Proximity

Events that are geographically or emotionally close to people. If 42 people die in an airplane crash in the Andes and one of the passengers is a resident of Little Rock, the news story in Little Rock will emphasize the death of the local person. This is known as *localizing* the news. When two tour buses collided in Wales, injuring 75 people, *USA Today* began its account this way:

Teen-agers from Lancaster, Pa., Houston and St. Louis were among 75 people hurt when two tour buses returning from Ireland collided in Wales.



Page One Story
The standoff and then the surrender of a man armed with a high-powered rifle was big news in Uniontown, Pa., but was a one-paragraph item in Philadelphia.



Political Conflict

The opponents of abortion do battle with placards, parades and politics. This long-running conflict sometimes becomes violent.

Mike Roemer

Emotional Closeness People are interested in events and individuals close to them. Also, ties may be religious, ethnic, racial. Newspapers and stations with large Catholic or Jewish populations give considerable space and time to news from the Vatican or the Middle East. After the space shuttle Challenger exploded and sent seven crew members to their deaths, the *Amsterdam News*, a weekly in New York with a predominantly black readership, headlined on page 1 the death of the black astronaut who was aboard.

5. Conflict

Strife, antagonism, warfare have provided the basis of stories since early peoples drew pictures on their cave walls of their confrontations with the beasts that surrounded them. People and their tribes and their countries have been at war with each other, and with themselves, since history has been kept, and the tales that resulted have been the basis of saga, drama, story and news.

To journalists today, conflict has a more nuanced meaning. “The most effective stories I’ve read,” says Peter St. Onge, a staff writer for *The Charlotte Observer*, “involved ordinary people confronting the challenges of daily life.”

Although critics of the press condemn what they consider to be an overemphasis on conflict, the advance of civilization can be seen as an adventure in conflict and turmoil. Indeed, one way to define, and to defend, journalism is that it provides a forum for discussion of the conflicts that divide people and groups, and that this peaceful debate makes conflict resolution possible.

6. The Unusual

Events that deviate sharply from the expected, that depart considerably from the experiences of everyday life make news. We know that. But here we are talking about the truly different, the bizarre, strange and wondrous.

When a dog bites a man, it isn’t news. But when a police dog, a tried and true member of the K-9 Corps, sinks his teeth into the arm of his police handler, that’s unusual, and it’s news. We’ve all seen big watermelons in the supermarket, but the 165-pound monster makes page 1 of the B section of *The Freeport News* when the farmer offers it to the First Baptist Church for its annual picnic.

Domestic Violence Domestic spats are not news, unless they are so violent murder is committed. But when Lorena Bobbitt tired of her husband’s mental and physical attacks and cut off his penis. . . . Yes, that was news for a week or two.

The wide coverage of the Bobbitt family surgery led Peter Kann, publisher of *The Wall Street Journal*, to condemn “media fascination with the bizarre, the perverse and pathological—Lorena Bobbitt journalism.”

Today, few people can identify Lorena Bobbitt or recall the reason for her fleeting media attention. The bizarre has the life span of a firefly’s momentary flash.

To some, though, the attention was important and worthwhile, for the incident made people think about domestic violence and its victims, and in its wake some governors pardoned women imprisoned for killing husbands who had for years tormented and beaten them. Cause and effect? Possibly.



AP Photo by Jeff Widener

A Lone Man's Plea

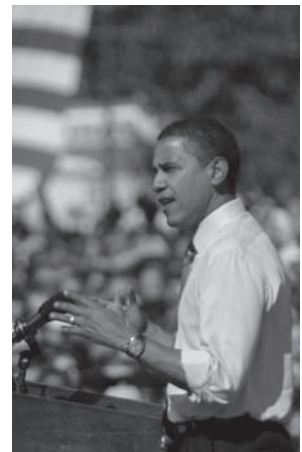
As the tanks headed down Cangan Boulevard in the government's show of strength in Beijing, a young man darted in front of the column. The tanks stopped. The man looked up and called out to the soldiers to stop the killing. The tanks tried to weave around him, easing him aside. He cried out again, pleading for no more violence. Bystanders finally pulled him away, fearing he would be crushed under the treads.

A Symbol The young man who stood alone before a column of tanks on their way to bloody Tiananmen Square struck everyone who saw the photograph and read the accompanying story as so amazing, so wondrous that the act quickly became a symbol. To some, the act showed defiance of tyranny. To others, it was, as the writer and critic Ian Buruma wrote, a symbol “of the futility of empty-handed opposition to brute force.”

A President Elected The leads to the stories of the election of Barack Obama all included the fact that he had overcome traditional political wisdom—that no black person could achieve the nation's highest office. Here is the beginning of the Associated Press story as it appeared in the online site of *The Daily Independent* of Ashland, Ky.:

WASHINGTON—Barack Obama swept to victory as the nation's first black president Tuesday night in an electoral college landslide that overcame racial barriers as old as America itself. “Change has come,” he declared to a huge throng of cheering supporters.

The son of a black father from Kenya and a white mother from Kansas, the Democratic senator from Illinois sealed his historic triumph by defeating Sen. John McCain in a string of wins in hard-fought battleground states, Ohio, Florida, Virginia, Iowa and more.



Barack Obama

A Religious Nation

For decades, news about religion consisted of stories about forthcoming services and summaries of the sermons of prominent preachers. Suddenly, journalists realized that Americans are deeply religious, and religion became an important beat for many newspapers. Asked, “How important is religion in your life?” 59 percent of Americans answered “Very important.” In other countries, the percentages were United Kingdom, 33; Canada, 30; Italy, 27; Germany, 21; Japan, 12; France, 11.

7. Currency

Occasionally, a situation long simmering will suddenly emerge as the subject of discussion and attention. Historians might describe the situation as an idea whose time has come. When it does, the media catch up.

In the early 1960s, President Kennedy called attention to the conditions of the poor. Then President Johnson declared a “war on poverty.” Newspapers responded by covering health and welfare agencies and by going into poor areas of their cities in search of news. Television produced documentaries on the blighted lives of the poor. More than 40 years later, poverty, although as pervasive, receives less attention.

The plight of women and members of minority groups in achieving recognition for their talents was long ignored. Victims of the glass ceiling and discrimination in the executive suites, they finally broke through to the media and became the subject of coverage.

Generally, journalists have not been in the vanguard of these discoveries. Sometimes though, journalists will decide that a situation needs attention and will make it newsworthy. We saw a few pages back how a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, David Willman, revealed that a federal agency had approved the sale of prescription drugs that were killing people. He stayed with the story for two years before the agency pulled the drugs from the market.

The work of Willman also falls in an eighth category, a category that stems from the reporter’s feelings that he or she must act.

8. Necessity

The seven previous categories of newsworthiness involve people, events and situations that call out for coverage—meetings, speeches, accidents, deaths, games and the like. This final category is of the journalist’s making. That is, *the journalist has discovered something he or she feels it is necessary to disclose.* The situation or event, the person or idea may or may not come under any of the previous seven categories of newsworthiness. The essential element is that the journalist considers the situation to be something everyone should know about, and usually it is a situation that needs to be exposed and remedied.

This is journalism of conscience. The journalists who report and write these stories are on the staffs of small and large publications, network and local stations, specialized publications and magazines, and some convey their work online.

Here are some examples of their work:

Pensacola News Journal—Exposure of a culture of corruption that led to the indictment of four of the five county commissioners.

The Atlanta Business Chronicle—Sarah Rubenstein and Walter Woods found questionable connections between state officials and landowners whose property was needed for right-of-way acquisitions for a \$2.2 billion highway project. After publication, the project was put on hold.

The Charlotte Observer—A year before the subprime mortgage crisis caused an economic meltdown, the newspaper recognized that housing foreclosures had become epidemic in its area because of “easy credit for mortgage loans that many buyers clearly couldn’t afford.” The four-part series was titled *Sold a Nightmare*.

WEWS, Cleveland—Many of the calls to the station’s Troubleshooter team were from homeowners who complained of contractor fraud: After receiving payment, the contractor would leave the job half finished and could not be reached. Ohio had no law protecting people from such contractors, but after the team reported the problem, legislation was enacted.

The Boston Globe—Despite a veil of secrecy, the newspaper uncovered sexual abuse by Roman Catholic priests in many parishes. Priests were transferred rather than dismissed. The *Globe* disclosures led other media around the country to investigate their parishes.

WMAQ, Chicago—The TV station revealed that U.S. Customs officers at O’Hare International Airport were using racial and gender profiling to target black women for invasive strip searches. The story led to a class-action suit and an investigation by the Customs Service of procedures at all international airports.

60 Minutes—American soldiers in Iraq had to scavenge Iraqi dumps for scrap metal to protect their lightly armored Humvees that had become death traps, reporters Steve Kroft and Leslie Cochrane reported.

Westwind—To check on military recruiting practices, 17-year-old J. David McSwane, a reporter on the Arvada, Colo., high school newspaper, told an army recruiter he was a high school dropout addicted to marijuana. Was he army material? he asked. Not to worry, the recruiter told McSwane: He would be given a fake general education diploma and instructed to take a fluid that would help him pass the urinalysis. McSwane’s story was headlined: ARMY DESPERATION LEADS TO RECRUITING FRAUD.

Portland Press-Herald—Barbara Walsh examined Maine’s care for mentally ill children and found the system was chaotic. After hundreds of interviews, and an examination of thousands of documents, Walsh wrote that children had to wait months and years for help, that some children were placed in juvenile lockup for lack of an adequate placement program. The governor and legislators vowed reform.

WTVF-TV—Despite a budget crisis and the largest tax increase in the state’s history, Tennessee was awarding contracts to firms without competitive bidding—and the companies had close ties to the governor. Bryan Staples and Phil Williams of the Nashville station also learned that companies had overcharged the state. The governor retaliated, impeding the reporters from checking records and pulling \$160,000 in highway safety advertising from the station. Despite attacks on the reporters’ credibility, the FBI and IRS decided to investigate.

Las Vegas Sun—The Pulitzer Prize jury awarded the newspaper the Public Service gold medal with this citation: “. . . courageous reporting by Alexandra Berzon for the exposure of the high death rate among construction workers on the Las Vegas Strip amid lax enforcement of regulations, leading to changes in policy and improved safety conditions.”

Labor of Love

Investigative reporting isn’t glamorous, says Phil Williams. “There are long hours of tedium—whether it’s dissecting computer databases, combing through records and hiding in the back of a van for hours on surveillance without a bathroom break. If that sounds like a great job to you, then it can be.”

The Overlooked For many of these stories, reporters dug into situations that one reporter described as affecting “the least of them,” the men, women and children that journalism usually overlooks. Noreen Turyn, an anchor at WSET in Lynchburg, Va., heard about an old state law still on the books that allowed the forced sterilization of men and women. The law had been adopted during the heyday of eugenics, a social movement that used pseudo-science to bring about what it called the “improvement of the race.” Under the law, youngsters who had

minor offenses and those whose parents said they could not control them were shipped off to Lynchburg Colony where they were forced into sterilization “without any understanding of what was happening to them,” Turyn reported. Turyn interviewed the victims, among them a World War II Bronze Medal winner. The state acted to repeal the law after Turyn’s series was aired.

Katherine Boo of *The Washington Post* describes this reporting as traveling through “the shadowlands of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised.” In two separate series, Boo disclosed the horrible conditions in which the city’s retarded lived—and died. She documented beatings, robberies, rapes and the use of the retarded for slave labor in so-called training programs.

Abortions for All When Heidi Evans of the *New York Daily News* was told by a caller that every woman who went to a cash-only abortion clinic was informed that she was pregnant, Evans raced over to the clinic the next day with a urine sample of her own.

“The owner, who did the tests himself, told me I was pregnant and tugged at my arm to have the procedure right then,” Evans said.

“The following day, I sent another reporter with a sample from one of our male colleagues. The urine also tested positive.” After two more weeks of reporting, in which she showed how poor, mostly immigrant women were herded by the clinic owner to a back room where a fly-by-night doctor operated, the state shut down the clinic.



Hazard

When Hurricane Floyd hit North Carolina, thousands of hogs were drowned. Officials estimated 28,000 hogs were killed. The decaying carcasses became a health hazard and had to be incinerated.

Chris Seward,
The News & Observer

Hog Heaven In Raleigh, *The News & Observer* examined an unlikely source of environmental degradation—hog lagoons.

Raising hogs is big business, and the bigger the hog farm the better the business because the slaughterhouse can be next door, eliminating the expense of hauling the hogs to the meat cutters. But the big hog farms—some have a million animals—do the following, the newspaper revealed:

Contaminated Ground Water

Through the emission of ammonia gas into the atmosphere that is returned with rain, streams are being choked with algae.

Waste from the hogs—which produce as much as four times as much waste per hog as do humans—is piling up in open fields.

The series on the hog farms, contamination won a Pulitzer Prize.

Questionable Deaths In North Carolina, disability advocates had complained about the state’s mental health system. The governor didn’t listen. Parents complained about the lack of services for their children. Legislators weren’t interested. Debbie Cenziper of *The Charlotte Observer* listened and became interested. The result: More than 30 stories beginning with a five-part series that revealed that 34 people with mental disabilities—many of them young—died under questionable

circumstances while in the care of the state's mental health facilities. "They died from suicide, murder, scalding, falls," Cenziper says. "They suffocated, starved, choked, drowned." Most of the deaths were never investigated because the state had not been told of them.

The stories led to increased mental health funding, money for hiring 27 inspectors for mental health facilities and two laws to correct the dangerous flaws Cenziper had described.

See **Broken Trust** in *NRW Plus*.

Dying Lakes The *Times Union* in Albany, N.Y., felt it necessary to track the progress, if any, being made to cope with the effects of acid rain in the nearby Adirondacks Park, the largest wilderness area east of the Rockies. What it found did not make for optimism.

Reporter Dina Capiello found that 500 of the 6-million-acre park's 2,800 lakes are dead. Unless something is done, she wrote, within 40 years a thousand more lakes will be lost to acid rain, lakes empty of plant and animal life.

See **Dying Lakes** in *NRW Plus*.

Does It Work? In all these stories the common element is that something was not functioning properly, that something was wrong with the system. David Burnham, a former *New York Times* reporter, says the increased bureaucratization of public life calls for a new approach to news. The media need to spend more time asking: How are the bureaucracies that affect our lives working? Are they deviating from our expectation that they are there to serve us?

Is the police department engaged in crime prevention; is the power company delivering sufficient energy at a reasonable price; are the high schools graduating college-entry seniors?

News Is Relative

These eight news values do not exist in a vacuum. Their application depends on those who are deciding what is news, where the event and the news medium are located, the tradition of the news medium, its audience and a host of other factors.

Economic Pressures

The media are a business, a profit-seeking enterprise. Most stations and newspapers are no different from Microsoft and Home Depot. Their operations are designed to maximize profits.

Advertising is the engine that drives the media. This can be seen quickly enough when the newspaper has 48 pages because the department stores are advertising white sales. The result is a large news hole, with plenty of space for stories. On days when the advertising is slim, the newspaper may run to 32 pages and stories are cut to the bone, or not run at all.

Massive declines in advertising revenue have led to the shuttering of newspapers and the cutbacks in staff of many others. Men and women 25 to 50—the



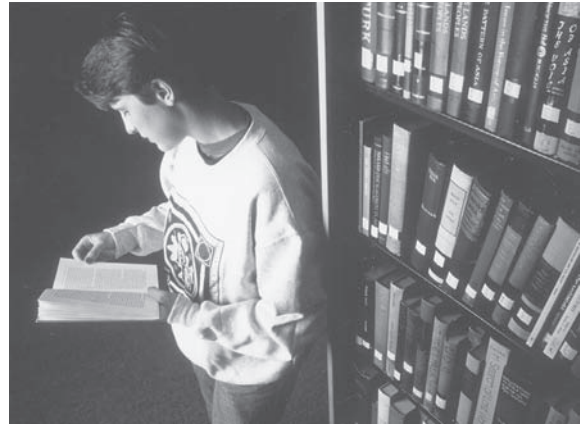
All-Out Coverage

When terrorists struck New York City and Washington, newspapers turned away from the bottom line and ordered robust coverage. Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr., publisher of *The New York Times*, said that although cancellations of advertising during September, when the hijacked planes struck, would cost the *Times* "millions of dollars," coverage would be all out.

More Than Money

"A newspaper is a business that must produce a decent profit or eventually fail. But a newspaper is more than just a business—it is a public trust with responsibilities to its readers and its community that extend well beyond producing profits."

—James P. Gannon,
former editor,
The Des Moines Register



Changing Times . . . Changing Beats

A century ago, 50 percent of the workforce in the United States made a living from agriculture. Farm news was big news. Today, with 2.5 percent so employed, farm news is important outside agricultural areas only when the cost of food goes up. At the beginning of the 20th century, fewer than 115,000 students attended college and journalists paid little attention to them. Today, more than 50 times as many are enrolled and higher education is a major beat.

Mike Roemer

demographic group that advertisers want to reach—have largely deserted newspapers and magazines for online material, and advertisers have followed.

The Influence of Owners

In addition to putting their imprint on their products by deciding how much money to take out of the enterprise, media owners can exert a powerful tonal influence. Some are cautious, unwilling to dig into news that might stir controversy. Their papers and stations cover the surface of the news, what we describe in Chapter 11 as Layer 1 news, the stenographic report of what people say and do. Some go further, imposing a particular political point of view and slant on the news. And some combine avarice and political slant.

Cave In When the Chinese government was upset by the British Broadcasting Corporation's news coverage of human-rights abuses in China, it made its displeasure known to Rupert Murdoch, the owner of a massive global media

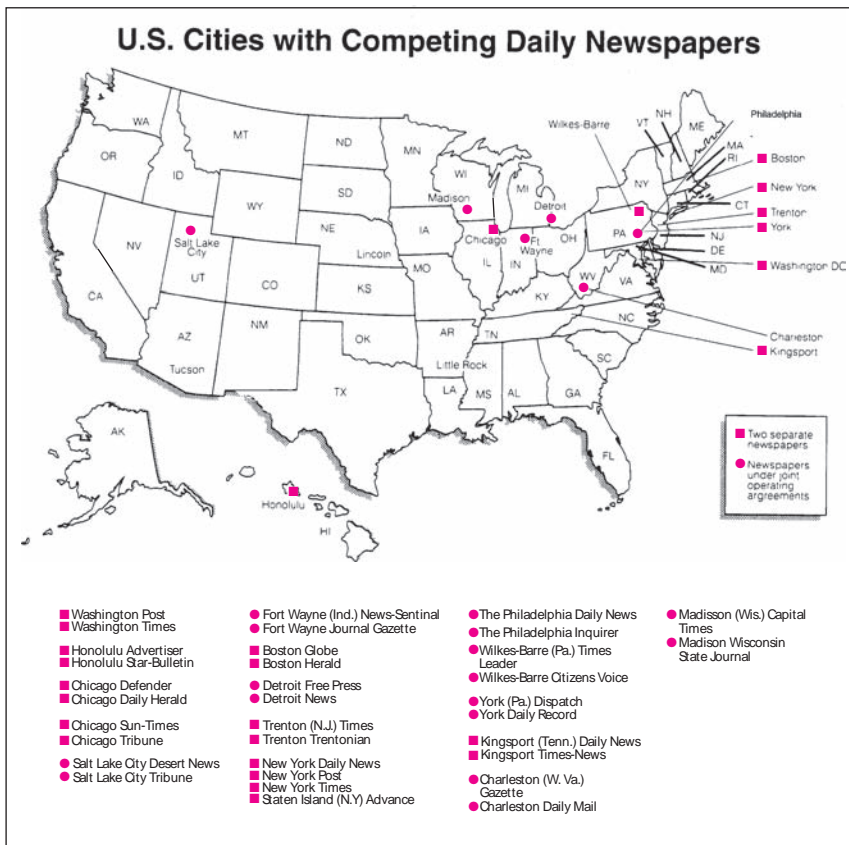
Conflicting Goals: Sales vs. Truth

Advertising is the principal source of revenues that supports our media system. That dependence creates an incongruity between the public's preferences and the criteria employed by the people in charge. As consumers of communication, we judge it by its value and meaning for us; advertisers judge it by its efficiency in disseminating what they call "exposure opportunities."

Media content has been driven primarily by the need to maximize audiences for sale rather than by the desire to communicate the truth about our world or express deep thoughts and feelings. To this end, broadcasting and film

have vied with each other in pursuit of violence and vulgarity. The largest of our mass media, the daily press, traditionally the forum for contention and irreverence, has undergone a steady attrition of competition and a general retreat to the safety of the middle ground. Left to its own devices, the public persistently drifts toward amusement rather than enlightenment, avoiding confrontation with the pressing, perhaps overwhelming, problems that confront the nation and the world.

—Leo Bogart



Fading Newspapers

The number of cities with competing newspapers has declined along with decreases in the total number of newspapers and their circulation. Circulation has declined 17 percent as readers went to the Internet for news.

Murdoch's Empire

"Murdoch uses his diverse holdings, which include newspapers, magazines, sports teams, a movie studio and a book publisher, to promote his own financial interests at the expense of real news-gathering, legal and regulatory rules and journalistic ethics. He wields his media as instruments of influence with politicians who can aid him, and savages his competitors in his news columns. If ever someone demonstrated the dangers of mass power being concentrated in few hands, it would be Murdoch."

—Russ Baker, "Murdoch's Mean Machine," *Columbia Journalism Review*

conglomerate that includes large holdings in China. Murdoch's Hong Kong broadcast operation had been airing the BBC newscasts that irritated Chinese Communist Party leaders.

Murdoch acted quickly. He eliminated BBC news. He said that using the BBC, considered the provider of the finest broadcast journalism in the world, would jeopardize his business in China.

Murdoch again made the news with a move motivated by his business interests in China. HarperCollins, a book publisher owned by Murdoch, planned to publish a book by Chris Patten, the last British governor of Hong Kong. Patten was an outspoken critic of China's authoritarianism and miserable human-rights record. When Murdoch learned of the publication plans, he ordered HarperCollins to drop the book.

Owners' Politics Murdoch is politically conservative, and his politics impose a deep imprint on his media properties. When Sen. James Jeffords of Vermont changed his party membership from Republican to Independent, thus giving control of the U.S. Senate to the Democrats, the front page of Murdoch's *New York Post* put a photo of Jeffords on page 1 that was doctored to portray him as a traitorous Benedict Arnold. Commentary on Murdoch's Fox TV news channel is predominantly conservative.

Courageous In contrast to the bottom-line journalism of many publishers, some put the public welfare before the dollar sign. In the darkest days of *The Washington Post's* coverage of Watergate, when President Nixon threatened economic reprisals to *Post* properties, publisher Katherine Graham stood steadfast. In a tribute to Graham on her death, Hendrik Hertzberg wrote in *The New Yorker*:

The courage she summoned in the face of serious, and at that time frightening, abuses of power put democracy in her debt in a way that few other American publishers, perhaps none, have ever equaled.

Fearful Some newspapers duck controversy in an attempt to be all things to all their readers. After the governor of South Dakota signed the most stringent anti-abortion bill any state had adopted, a national controversy erupted. Even many right-to-life supporters opposed the law. But the state's major newspaper, the *Argus Leader*, was mute. Taking a position, wrote the editor of the Gannett paper, "could well jeopardize the credibility we have worked long and hard to establish."

Contrast the mute South Dakota newspaper with the work of Ira B. Harkey, the editor and publisher of the newspaper in Pascagoula, Miss., during the South's furious resistance to court-ordered school desegregation. When Harkey editorialized in support of the 1954 Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, a cross was burned in front of his home. Worse was yet to come.

During the desegregation crisis at the University of Mississippi, Harkey urged the peaceful admission of James Meredith, who would become the first



Maxim

"Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one."

—Joe Liebling

black student at Ole Miss. Federal troops had to be called out to quell the rioting protesters.

Harkey's life was threatened, a cross was burned in front of his newspaper office and rifle and shotgun blasts rattled his home. Yet Harkey was steadfast in his support of desegregated schools.

Chains

The media are spiraling toward a concentration of ownership in fewer and fewer large corporations. Fifty years ago, families owned almost all the daily newspapers. Today, four of five newspapers are owned by groups, known as chains. "The family-owned newspaper is an endangered species," says H. Brandt Ayers, whose family has owned *The Anniston Star* in Alabama for parts of three centuries.

The *Star's* ownership is happy if it can make 10 percent profit, Ayers says. Chain owners want twice as much and more to placate dividend-hungry stockholders.

Most media commentators find the concentration worrisome. "The pressure on them is to produce dollars," says Ben Bagdikian. Profits come before good journalism, he says.

Group ownership has its defenders. Their large resources enable local editors to take on the community power structure without fear of economic retaliation, the defenders say.

The reality is mixed. Some group-owned media provide minimal coverage. A radio chain with hundreds of stations has no news staff in most of its stations. Some chain-owned newspapers and stations continue to dig and provide their readers and viewers with illuminating journalism. The difference often lies with the tradition of the newspaper or station and its ownership.

The Charleston (W.Va.) Gazette has long spoken for protection of its environment. This Scripps Howard paper has encouraged reporter Ken Ward Jr. to take a strong point of view to his work. "The area is economically depressed and controlled by a few large companies that rape and pillage and don't leave much for the people," he says. "If there is any place in the United States that needs good investigative reporting that comes at things with a good set of values, it's here."

Tradition

Some publications and broadcast stations have a history of public service journalism that guides them in their selection of what is worthy of their reporters' time and the owners' funds.

The Charlotte Observer has challenged the tobacco industry. More recently it took on the home builders. Reporters Ames Alexander and Rick Rothacker accompanied building inspectors on their rounds, watched houses being built, pored through public records and interviewed more than 400 homeowners, builders, inspectors and others. The paper's database editor, Ted Mellnick, helped them examine "4 million computer records on all building inspections conducted in Mecklenburg County since the 1970s," says Alexander.

Threat

"It is daily becoming more obvious that the biggest threat to a free press and the circulation of ideas is the steady absorption of newspapers, television and radio stations, networks and other vehicles of information into corporations that know how to turn knowledge into profit—but are not equally committed to inquiry or debate or to the First Amendment."

—Reuven Frank, former head of NBC News

Five Packs a Day

Although *The Charlotte Observer* circulates among farmers who grow two-thirds of the tobacco used to make cigarettes, the newspaper published a 20-page special report “Our Tobacco Dilemma” that called attention to the health hazards of smoking. On the front page of the section was this photograph of James McManus, 62, who has, the newspaper reported, “smoking-caused emphysema” and requires an “oxygen tank to survive.” The tobacco industry spends more than \$13 billion a year to market its products.



Mark Sluder, *The Charlotte Observer*

The project took eight months. The reporters concluded that “North Carolina’s laws favor builders over buyers.”

The Audience

When the TV actress Ellen DeGeneres announced that she is a lesbian, the *San Francisco Chronicle* put the story on page 1 alongside a four-column photo of a crowd in town watching the show on a big screen. *The New York Times* national edition put the story on page 17A. The reason for the difference in play: San Francisco has a large percentage of gay men and women in its population.

Everything media writers do is aimed at an audience, and the nature of that audience may well be the most important influence in media performance.

Network TV Once king of the media hill, network television is now struggling for footing on a downward slope. Viewership has eroded, and the networks have been engaged in a search to match the news to its different audience. Their advisers have suggested that the morning audience wants less news of government and domestic and foreign affairs and more of crime, celebrities and lifestyle. Nothing too heavy. That’s for the evening newscasts and for the “PBS NewsHour.” Why the difference? Demographics. The morning viewers are younger.

The Affluent

USA Today devotes plenty of space to its “Money” section. A third of the newspaper’s readers have incomes of more than \$100,000, the readers that advertisers are anxious to reach.

Demographics Age, race, gender, geography, income, ethnicity—these are factored in when news managers make their decisions on what is printed and put online and on the screen.

If we look at the audience for National Public Radio, the content of its news becomes understandable. The audience, reports the Project for Excellence in Journalism, “falls between 25 and 54 years of age, has college degrees, and votes, and half have household incomes of over \$75,000. This has created a situation in which NPR is a media resource used by a young, culturally elite group.”

Online Journalism As we have seen, newspapers and magazines have gone online. In addition, many online-only news services have found widening audiences. To name a few, Huffingtonpost.com offers a variety of news and opinion, much of it from a liberal point of view; Stateline.org distributes news of state governments; and propublica.org offers investigative reporting.

Trends The Project for Excellence in Journalism reports, “Audiences are moving toward information on demand, to media platforms and outlets that can tell them what they want to know when they want to know it.” The result is continued and steady decline, about 25 percent, of newspaper circulation from its high of around 62 million in 1973, and similar declines in radio and television news listening and viewing. Newspapers are succeeding in attracting readers to their online news sites. They are less successful in luring people to the printed newspaper.

“Younger audiences,” reports the Project for Excellence, “are interested in news. But they want it from new platforms that can deliver it in new ways and on the consumers’ new terms.” If you add the number of those who read only online news to those who read it in print form, the result is that the newspaper organization’s audience is growing. However, advertisers seem reluctant to support online news, which adds to the economic problems of newspapers.

The Reporter

Despite the many media changes, it remains true today what has been operative through the years: For the most part reporters, the men and women on the beat, make the news. The court reporter who looks through a dozen court filings chooses the one or two that she will write about. The police reporter, whose daily rounds begin with the examination of the dozen arrests made overnight, decides which two or three he will report. The feature writers with a dozen ideas swirling through their heads have time for a couple.

Yes, the guidelines do help, the news values that we have discussed—timeliness, prominence, impact and the others. But there is wide latitude within these categories. For example: Just who is sufficiently prominent to be newsworthy? To Karen Garloch, a medical writer for *The Charlotte Observer*, a local building contractor named Vernon Nantz may not have been prominent, but his situation qualified him for her attention. Nantz was dying of cancer and had decided to forgo chemotherapy. He wanted to die at home, close to his family.

“The idea for this story was born out of my interest, as a medical writer, in the end of life care,” Garloch says. “I had written many stories about living wills and advance directives, the forms people sign to declare their expectations about extraordinary medical care. I had also written about the growth of the hospice movement and discussions among ethicists and doctors when to stop treatment that appears to be futile.

Dying with Dignity “With millions of Americans facing these choices, I wanted to tell the story of the end of life through a real person who made the choice to reject extraordinary medical care and die with dignity at home.”

Garloch’s series about Vernon Nantz began this way:

When Vernon Nantz was diagnosed with a recurrence of cancer, his doctor told him: “We can treat it, but we’re not gonna beat it.” Vernon had just months. He decided to use Hospice at Charlotte, stay at home with his wife and be around his family and friends.

More and more we want a choice about how and where we die.

This is the story of one man’s choice.

Garloch was with Nantz when he decided not to get out of bed to dress for the visit of the hospice nurse. She was there when the family gathered around his bed, sure he was dying, and she was there when he rallied and ate an entire fried fish dinner with french fries and hush puppies. And she arrived at the Nantz home shortly after he died at 2 a.m.

Reader response was overwhelming, said Garloch’s editor, Frank Barrows.

Like many of the reporters we have seen at work, Garloch could be said to have made the news with this story of Vernon Nantz. She and the others could be described as activist journalists.

For Garloch’s story, see **Vernon’s Goodbye** and **Readers Respond** in *NRW Plus*.

Activist Journalists To some journalists, news consists of overt events—an automobile accident, a city council meeting, a court document, the State of the Union Address. Their journalism is denotative, pointing to what has happened. Necessary as this reporting is, some journalists would complement denotative journalism with a more active, seeking-out journalism.

Activist journalists seek to place on the public agenda matters that they believe require consideration, civic discussion that could lead to some kind of action. The action could be an awareness of another way to end one’s days, as the Garloch feature demonstrated. Or it could lead to remedial action, as Willman’s stories about deadly prescription drugs accomplished. The sociologist Herbert Blumer says that issues come to public attention, not because of the “intrinsic gravity of the social problem,” but because they have been given status by some respected



The Journalist’s Basic Tasks

- To hold a mirror to society, showing how people go about their work and play.
- To provide information that keeps people informed of the activities of elected and appointed officials.
- To give voice to the voiceless.
- To supply information about controversial and unusual issues.
- To entertain.

group that has called attention to the problem. These groups can legitimize an issue as a matter of concern requiring action, Blumer says.

Among those that can legitimize situations, Blumer lists educational organizations, religious leaders, legislators, civic groups and the press. Once legitimized, the issue can be acted upon quickly, Blumer says.

What Motivates Reporters?

The public editor or ombudsman of *The New York Times*, Byron Calame, sought to answer this question. “Based on the hundreds of reporters with whom I’ve worked and competed,” he said he came up with seven motivations. They are:

Being First with New Facts or Fresh Insights

The drive to be first with the basic facts of a newsworthy development remains embedded in the culture of newsrooms and in the minds of reporters. . . . The obvious signal to reporters: Old-fashioned scoops still count.

Pursuing Stories That Can Have Impact

All reporters want to write articles that people talk about—but some are driven to journalism that produces corrective action or beneficial changes. Two major goals of these reporters are to hold the powerful accountable and to right wrongs.

Winning Prizes

Reporters are most reluctant to acknowledge that their journalism is driven by the desire to win a prize. The criteria for many journalism contests, however, favor stories that cause change or make waves.

Impressing Sources

The better reporters assigned to cover a beat or specialized area of coverage are likely to cultivate the better sources, including experts on the subject. Such reporters will write certain articles that will be viewed as unfavorable by some sources. Yet many of the journalists remain highly motivated to impress their sources with the accuracy, fairness and depth of their work.

Finding Out What’s Really Happening

A fundamental motivation of reporters is the curiosity that drives them to get to the bottom of a confusing or complicated situation and find patterns that help explain it to readers. Making sense out of chaos—especially when you can do it first—is something many reporters find very rewarding.

Telling Stories in a Compelling Way

There are two motivations (and often fairly strong egos) at work here. One is the desire of almost all reporters to tell an important story so that it will be read to the

end. The other is the satisfaction, or even the delight, that many reporters derive from good writing of the kind that can move readers to laugh or cry.

Getting on the Front Page

While it's no longer a dominant motivation, the hope of turning up a really big story that will make the front page never seems that far from the minds of many reporters.

Summing Up

Impersonal and objective as journalists would like to make the determinants of news, journalism is based on selection, and choice is a highly personal affair. It derives from the journalist's professional background, his or her education and the intangible influences of family, friends and colleagues.

The professional decisions are framed by other considerations as well: the need to entertain to keep readers and viewers who are constantly being seduced by entertainment media; the pressures of the business of journalism such as budgeting restrictions, meeting the competition, considering the needs of advertisers.

Further Reading

Bagdikian, Ben H. *The New Media Monopoly*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

In the first edition of his book, in 1983, Bagdikian warned that media concentration in the hands of some 50 corporations endangered democracy and threatened to control the marketplace of ideas. Since then, ownership has become even more concentrated, and the dangers even greater.

Gelb, Arthur. *City Room*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2004.

Gelb tells his story of his rise from copyboy to managing editor of *The New York Times* with anecdotes that enliven the estimable *Times*.

Roberts, Gene, and Hank Kilbanoff. *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle and the Awakening of a Nation*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

"At no other time in U.S. history were the news media more influential than they were in the 1950s and 1960s," the authors say in this examination of how reporters covered the civil rights movement. They find that most of the white journalists who covered the story "simply didn't recognize racism in America as a story" until the trial of the two killers in the 1955 murder of the black teen-ager Emmett Till in Mississippi. The book was awarded the 2007 Pulitzer Prize in History.

Sloan, Bill. "I Watched a Wild Hog Eat My Baby"—*A Colorful History of Tabloids and Their Cultural Impact*. Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2001.

Wolff, Michael. *The Man Who Owns the News, Inside the Secret World of Rupert Murdoch*. New York: Broadway Books, 2008.

Murdoch, says Wolff, “likes to be the cause of the conflict. He likes to set the house on fire and watch all the fire engines drive maniacally down the road.” Of Murdoch’s pursuit of *The Wall Street Journal*, Wolff writes that Murdoch tried to quell the owners’ hesitancy about selling to journalism’s buccaneer. Wolff says Murdoch told them they “should just ask around to see if he is a trustworthy person or not.” One reviewer said the book reveals Murdoch’s “reptilian momentum without wondering too much about where he’s headed. According to this book, not even the politics of Fox News are all that important to him.”