

Wollo University
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Department of Journalism and Communication

News Writing and Reporting for Print (JoCo2061) Students Work Material

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Wollo University Main Campus

Dessie, Ethiopia

June, 2020

Chapter One

1. The Concept and Nature of News

Understanding news is fundamental to writing for a news medium, be it a newspaper, magazine, yearbook, broadcast station or Internet site. It is important because it enables a reporter to sort and prioritize information and help readers distinguish between what is relevant-what they need to know-and what is less important, even though readers may be interested in the subject. This understanding of news is also useful to reporters so they can make all stories appealing to readers. Faced with busy readers who can get their news from print, broadcast and internet sources, a reporter who knows what news is will likely write better than one who doesn't. Delivering information fast and first are two goals of most news organizations today, but the consumer will rely upon and trust that source that delivers it with accuracy and relevance.

1.1.2 Definition of News

News has been defined by different people in different ways. The most important definitions of news that will help you to understand what news is are the following:

1. News is new
2. News is information about a break from the normal flow of events, an interruption in the expected.
3. It is helpful to remember the news isn't news until someone decides that it is: News is the report of an event, not the event itself.
4. News is information people need in order to make rational decisions about their lives
5. News must be factual, yet not all facts are news.
6. News may be an opinion, especially that of a prominent person or an authority on a particular subject.
7. News is not necessarily a report of a recent event.
8. What is important news to one community or school may be unimportant or have little or no new value in another community or school.
9. In its totality, news is the daily chronicle of mankind people taking, arguing, fighting, trading, planning, building and destroying, winning and, losing, making love and making war.

Webster's Dictionary Define News as:

- New information about anything

- Recent happenings
- Reports of such events, collectively

In general, news is a timely report of any accurate facts or opinion that holds interest or importance or both for a considerable number of people.

1.2 Types of News story

There are various classifications of news stories. News stories can be classified geographically and thematically. And they are also classified according to their focuses, significance and timeliness.

1.2.1 Classification of news according to geographical distribution

- A. Local News
- B. Regional News
- C. National News
- D. World News

Local, regional and national news are under the category of domestic (Home) news; where as world news is foreign news.

1.2.2 Classification of news according to subject matter or theme.

- | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| - Political news | - Sport news | - Human right |
| - Economical news | - Crime news | - Health news |
| - Social news | - Development news | - Religion |
| - Electrical news | - Cultural news | - Urbanization |
| - War news | - Historical news | - Corruption |
| - Terrorism | | |

1.2.3 Classification of news based on their focus, significance and timeliness

Despite the above two geographical and thematically classifications, stories have been fallen into four basic categories: Spot or Hard or Straight news, Soft news, News Features and Editorials.

- A. Spot or Hard or straight news
- B. Soft News
- C. Feature Stories
- D. Editorials

A. Spot or Hard or Straight News

Oftentimes, writers use these three words-spot, straight and hard-interchangeably, you should not be confuse with these words, because they refer the nature of story **hard**, the ways the story present to the audience **straight**, and the time the story reported **immediate** or **on the spot**. But, now, we shall use the word hard to deal with this type of news.

Hard news is a chronicle of (or to write about or to show) timely events or incidents in order in which they happened or occurs. It is important and interesting factual information about current events. It consists of six hundred words on average.

Hard news story has greater importance or significant for relatively large number of audiences; because it focuses on timely events that the people need to know, and it tells the audiences (readers, listeners and viewers) vital information's quickly, clearly and concisely.

Hard news writer (reporter or other journalists) should follow a fairly standard writing style. By answering the five W's and H the writer should put the most important details in the beginning or lead of the story. The rest of the story (body) will be elaborate on it.

Examples of hard news stories include reports on **crime, court cases, government's announcements, house fires, award ceremonies, plane crashes, international events**, etc.

B. Soft News

This is a term for all the news that isn't time-sensitive (the primary importance in this types of news story is **entertainment**, but it should also **inform**. Soft news features or focuses on a particular angle, such as human interest reactions that may often relate to hard news. It appeals more to emotions than the intellect and desire to be informed.

For example, Canada's ex-Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau passed away, it was first reported as hard news, but the vast majority of stories in the papers for week after his death were soft news.

Soft news includes **profiles of people, programs or organizations**. It also includes different column's news story which primary important is entertainment as well as information.

C. News Feature

News feature is usually not breaking news but a story related to the news. Features are often interpretive, given background, play up human interest elements of story; and they are journalism's shop center they are full of interesting people, ideas, colors, comments, actions and energy. Unlike hard and soft news stories, feature stories consists one thousand-five hundred words on average.

News feature story provides readers with greater mix of stories, and writing style. And it can explain and interpret an ongoing current process affecting people's lives. It concerns itself with current events but gave a different treatment.

News features makes the paper more interesting while giving reporters the opportunity to impress editors with their writing and information-gathering skills. They featurize or play up an unusual angle or interesting point of a story rather than to rely on a bare recitation of the five W's, the usual straight news approach, which might not make the best use of odd unusual or interesting elements of a story. Story telling is in its height. This makes feature story effective to cover complex issues that can't be fully covered in hard news story. Many of these stories can be produced free of the deadline pressure that hangs over a straight news story.

A feature story usually focuses on a certain angle, explores it through background research and interview the people involved, and then draws conclusions from the information.

For an example, look at street kinds. A hard news story must clinically report the relevant statistics: **how** many they are, **where** they are, and **what** they are doing. It usually relies on time-sensitive hook-for example, the release of a new study, a demonstration by street youth or the untimely death of a young person on the streets.

A feature on street youth is not limited in such a manner. It might be written over a longer period of time, and allows the unique and detailed stories of street kinds' individual lives to be expressed.

2. News Values and Components

2.1 Values of News Story

Several factors make a story interesting enough to be reported in newspaper or in the radio or on television as news. Some of them are internal factors usually called news elements: - **timeliness, impact, proximity, controversy, prominence, oddity or unusual, currency, and emotions or instincts.**

2.1.1 Timeliness

News is always a timely matter. Timeliness is the first and most important element of news. The name of the profession-**journalism** expresses this characteristic of news. The word journalism comes from

the Latin word **diurnalis**, meaning **daily**, and journalism has come to mean the current and timely reporting of events.

Timelines is important in 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.

2.1.2 Impact

Impact is another element of news. It refers the importance or significance of the events to be news worthy. One way to judge impact is to figure out what the results or consequences of a news story might be. The more people affected the more important story. The following question will help the reporter to decide to report the events. “Are many people affected or just a few?” If many people affected by the event, the reporter will run it in the papers or on the broadcast. Contamination in the water system that serves your town’s 20,000 people has impact because it affects your audience directly.

2.1.3 Proximity

This element of news is always important, since people are more interested in news of local events than in events that happen far away. Audiences are more interested in what affects them personally, directly and locally than in events happening in some distant location.

Example; a plane crash in Chad will makes headlines in N. Djamena, but it’s unlikely to be front-page news in Chile unless the plane was carrying Chilean passengers.

Proximity refers not only to geographical nearness but also to interest nearness. For example, the orthodoxies want to read about the activity of the Patriarch.

2.1.4 Controversy

The fourth element of news is controversy refers stories that involve arguments, public debates, and charges, countercharges and fights.

Controversy is natural and it found in all sports stories; all news of the war, crime, violence and domestic disputes. Much news of government's bodies such as: city councils, state legislature and congress; and all stories involving different of opinion.

Some writers use the word **conflict** for this news element. They refer conflict between human and human, human and animal, human and nature, human and environment, human and space or animal and animal. The conflict can be both physical and mental.

2.1.5 Prominence

Prominence is another element, of news. It refers persons, places, things and situations that are well known to the public. Prominent persons involve public figures, holders of public offices, celebrities, people in authority and people who have negative publicity.

The more well-known a particular name, place, event or situation the more attention the story will have. In other words **names make news**. The story becomes more interested when a reporter includes as many know names as possible in the story. Ordinary activities can become news if they involve a prominent person. For example

The president of the United States played golf yesterday. An American played golf yesterday too. Today, the city newspaper has a picture of the president playing golf on an inside news page; there is no picture of the other person (an American) on the golf course, even though the person got a hole-in-one on the ninth, and the president, reportedly rarely breaks 100 on 10 holes. Why was not the other person achievement reported?

The president made news by golfing and an American didn't simply because he is the president and the person isn't that is called prominence.

2.1.6 Currency

Currency refers to happenings that are on peoples' minds at the present time. It includes current affairs which are political events and problems in society.

For example, the Ethiopian government declared to celebrate the Ethiopian new Millennium last year in all parts of the country. As a result, our media had begun reporting about millennium celebration activities since May 2007 (May 1999). In fact their news bulletin in the mass media was called **Millennium News**.

Drought, election campaign, war and etc can be current issues for news media.

2.1.7 Oddity

Oddity is often news. The bizarre, the unusual, the unexpected often makes news. An old journalistic cliché states that “it is not news that if a dog bits a man, but it is news if a man bits a dog”. That doesn’t happen every day. In a simpler way air plane crashes are reported on news casts, but the thousands of safe flights every day are not. The unusual event, the airplane crash, makes the news cast.

If something makes a reporter stop and store, wonder and exclaim, then the reporter knows that what he/she is looking at is news worthy.

2.1.8 Emotions and Instincts

These news elements involve the desire for food, clothing and shelter. The universal interest in children and animals and the elements of fear, jealousy, sympathy, love and generosity are the major elements.

From this discussion of news story elements, it becomes clear that you should have these guidelines in mind when you’re deciding if your message is news or an announcement; whether it’s a feature or an item of limited public interest. From this you decide which format to use for distributing the information and the medium. That is most likely to use your information.

2.2 Other Factors or External Factors

We have discussed about internal factors which are common for all media to judge the news worthiness of story or event. But all media didn’t report one story in the same way. Why news papers or broadcast station are reports a story differently than another? Because, still there are other factors which influence the news value. We can call them external factors.

- The policy of the news medium regarding news and its elements may increase or diminish the importance of a story or kill it entirely.
- The political and religious belief of the news medium’s owners or management may alter news value and the way a story is reported.
- The attitude of the news medium toward labor, agriculture, gun control or particular racial, ethnic or sexual orientation groups may change news value.
- A news source aligned with a particular political party or other special interest groups may also publish news and commentary in opposition to its own positions.
- The amount of space given to a story in a print or online medium or the amount of time on radio or TV determines whether a story is told briefly or in detail.

- Censorship can also change news value, especially during war or national crisis for non-student media-censorship can take other, less direct forms, including an absence of presidential press conferences in order to keep a president from answering questions about events or decisions.

Generally we can list additional factors as follow:

1. Economic aspects-expenses to cover the beat
2. Constitutional and legal aspects

This consideration has the following advantages

- a. Protection of individuals against libel
 - b. Protection of society against obscenity
 - c. Protection of State against internal disorder
 - d. Protection of State against external aggression
 - e. Protection of the youth against moral damage
3. Advertisers and advertising agents: for most newspaper they are source of income
 4. The status (capacity) of news media staff
 5. Audience nature

2.3 Components/Rudiments of story

Journalists, like other professional, abide by rules and customs of their profession. These essentials of journalist practice include **Accuracy, Attribution, Background, Balance, Fairness, Objectivity, Brevity, Clarity, News Point, Novelty, Identification, Human Interests and Verification.**

2.3.1 Accuracy

Accuracy means correctness in reporting facts, in spelling (punctuation) and adherence to the rules of grammar. In short, the newspaper had better to be right in every statement, every work, every figure, name and date, age and address, title and occupation and quotation. All these should be verified and correctly spelt. Keeping facts and quotation accurate will help news medium to be credible by its audience. Without accuracy it is impossible to be credible. Readers read things in the newspaper that they themselves are familiar with. If the newspaper misspells a reader's name; place a neighbor at the wrong address; places the wrong teacher in the kindergarten class room, the reader recognizes the error.

“If the daily news can't even get my name right, how in thunder can I trust it to get anything right?”
The puzzled /confused/ reader might ask.

Inaccuracy is caused by careless reporting or editing, laziness, missed facts, distortions, the use of speculation and rumor, and putting speed on accuracy. Many news media now want to be first to break a story, but does it do this at the expense of accuracy? It shouldn't be; they should have time to verify facts. Inaccuracy also caused by the myriad facts that go into a story and the many people who help to produce the finished story-the copy editor, the editors and the anchor persons in radio and TV whose vocal inflection may even distort the facts.

Sometimes an inaccurate story stems from incorrect information fed to a reporter either intentionally or inadvertently. So reporter should ask sources carefully.

There are some methods to ensure the materials are accurate:

- Check and double-check every fact with other sources or documents. Use your newspapers library and public records. Whenever possible call back sources to confirm **statistics, anecdotes** and **quotes**. Make sure you always ask sources to spell their names and tell you their correct titles, even when it seems obvious.
- Read your copy very closely before turning it in many mistakes can be caught by careful self-editing.
- Never guess: you may think something is obvious and be wrong.

Confessing Error

Some newspapers have **ombudsmen** to whom readers can take complaints about errors. Others simply make corrections a matter of routine even to the point of having a daily paragraph or two in a regular corrections column. This may, perhaps, lead readers to consider newspapers just a bit careless about facts but probably also gives readers a sense that the newspapers is less remote, less impersonal, more responsive to its public than critics have charged. You will find corrections in almost any newspaper.

2.3.2 Attribution

Attribution is the identification of the source of facts or of quotations or generally of statements in a story that are not directly observed or eye witnessed by the reporter. The information might be second and third hand. However, the source of the information should be the best possible one as much as possible to establish the person's (reporter's) professionalism and the medium's impartiality and credibility.

Example: 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 civilian mistook the shots for “someone hammering or building something” and dispatched the call as a routine burglary.

When a reporter attributes the sources of a story, the readers can identify that the reporter got his/her facts from that source and the opinions expressed and explanations given are not the reporter own opinions. As a result they can make their judgments on the story. A news story is not the place for a reporter to express his or her opinion, but he/she can express his/her opinion in an opinion column or editorial.

Example

“Homecoming was a success.” **Wrong**

“Homecoming was a success.” Lisa Washington, Senior Class President, said. **Correct**

Generally, when we speak to attribution, we refer to what is called sourcing quote or statement. That is, responsibility for the materials is given to the sources. When there is not attribution, the reporter, the newspaper or station is considered the source.

By attributing the **best possible sources to the story**, the reporter can achieve two goals:

- A. It identifies the source of all the information in the story as a reliable one,
- B. It gives credibility to the only matter of opinion in the story.

Stories which are general (common or obvious) knowledge; first hand knowledge-when the reporter witnessed the events; which can easily verified; and which are in disputable need not to be attributed. But, matters of opinion, judgment or view point, quotations, disputable facts and information, in the story should be attributed. Actions are attributed to the person or group commenting or performing them.

Attribution to the source does not guarantee that the statement is true. But it does place responsibility for the assertion with the source. When reporters doubt the reliability of a statement, they try to verify it, ensuring that who ever made the statement is held responsible.

Too much attribution will clutter up a story; and too little can get you in trouble. So using common sense you can eliminate or use more attribution.

In crime stories attribute any accusatory statements to police or other authorities, especially when you are using a suspect name. If the person has been charged with a crime, you may state without attribution. The word allegedly can be used when the charges have been proved, but direct attribution to the police is preferable.

All **quotes** or **partial quotes** must be attributed to a speaker. In addition, you need to attribute information you paraphrase.

Background information does not need to be attributed.

2.3.2.1 Wording of Attribution

Said: Is the preferred verb for all the attribution of all direct and indirect quotes. The word says, the present tense form of said is used when the quote is something a person repeatedly says. Use always the word said when you are attribute quotes. You should not be worried to use the verb ‘said’ frequently or repeatedly in a story. Because repeated use of said will not likely noticed by readers, and this is the desired effect in most cases.

Stated: the verb stated is very formal and should only be used if someone in authority issues a formal statement, either in person or on paper.

Remarkd: is also another possibility

According to: use according to when you are referring to inanimate objects “according to a study” even if it is acceptable to say ‘according to police”, it is not preferable.

Note: Normal speaking order is preferable. That is, you should place said after the name or pronoun. If the person has a long title, said can be placed before the name and title.

2.3.2.2 Placement of Attribution

Writer puts attributions at the **end** or **middle** of sentences instead of at the beginning. When the source is more important that what he/she is being said, the attribution put at the beginning of sentences.

2.3.2.3 Types of Attribution

There are four types of attribution.

- A. **On the Record:** all statements are directly quotable and attributable by name and title, to the person who is making the statement.
- B. **On Background:** all statements are directly quotable; but they can not 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 Spokesperson”

- C. **On Deep Background:** any thing that is said in the interview is usable, but not direct quotation and not for attribution. The reporter writes it on his or her own.
- D. **Off the Record:** information is for the reporter's knowledge only and is not to be taken to another source in hopes of getting official confirmation. A good journalist is willing to accept any information from any source, as long as it remains nothing more than a tip that will lead to someone willing to go on the record. "If u can't tell me on the record, who can?"

2.3.2.4 Anonymous sources

Sources sometimes seek anonymity. They will offer an information only if their names are not disclosed. Newspapers and other news media are reluctant to run such martial because anonymity absolves the source of responsibility for the material when anonymity is promised to a source, the reporter may not use the source name.

Some editors demand to be told the names of sources. When this is the case the sources must be informed that their names will be given to the editor. The **AP** says its basic rule is attribute and attribute by name. Anonymity is reserved (the last choice) for these cases in which the information is news worthy, factual and not available from any sources on the record. We use anonymous sources only on matters of fact, not on matters of opinion or judgment.

2.3.3 Verification

Verification is another component of news story following attribution. Verification is the activity checking, double-checking and verifying information to the accuracy of one's reporting. Not all information needs to be verified, however, there are some specific issues which are routinely verified.

Careful reporter check:

- ❖ Spellings, dates and figures with news sources
- ❖ Names, address and telephone numbers with other sources and compare their findings with written records-city directories, phone books, the newspaper's own library and legislative handbooks and state manuals.
- ❖ Their own notes

Verification should be done in all steps of reporting-gathering, synthesizing and writing stories. Reporters read their copies line by line to be sure it corresponds to their notes after they have written their copy.

"All names verified" should be put at the start of your copy.

A “(correct)” or “(CQ)” should be inserted after an unusual spelling or a questionable figure in a story. These would be additional evidence of care and accuracy on the part of the reporter and are reassuring to an editor.

The reporter can verify this statement “The mayor submitted a \$ 1.5 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/she cannot verify the truth of this statement “The budget is too large (or too small)”

2.3.4 Background

The additional material that a reporter digs up on his or her own that helps the reader for listener get closer to the truth often takes the form of background. Most often background material comes from the reporter's knowledge and from checking references and clips. Background materials give readers explanations, trace the development of the event and add facts that sources may not have provided. Reporters spend much time back grounding their stories.

2.3.5 Objectivity

Objectivity refers to the prevailing principle of news gathering and reporting that emphasizes eyewitness accounts of events, corroboration of facts with multiple, most concerned and knowledgeable sources and balance. A reporter should report news as impartially and honestly as possible. That is always a worthy goal. It also refers to an institutional role for journalist as a fourth estate, a body that exists apart from government and large interest groups.

This principle is controversial for its achievement or practice. Critics said that journalists are shaped by their backgrounds- upbringing, social and economic status, education, religion, ethnic makeup and personal biases, which are bound to affect their views of the news. “Objectivity is a myth”, is their familiar cry; and they don't come from Mars or other planets. So that, their opinions and emotions have great potential to interfere easily with factual presentation in stories about which strong bias are held. They are correct in saying that however, they overlooked two things: First they overlooked journalists are trained- in journalism schools and on the job- to submerge their personal feelings in the interests of giving the public straight, unadorned facts, which is what most readers want and expect. They can find opinions in the editorials, personal columns and op-ed (Opposite Editorial) pages. And they don't seem to realize that reporters have no personal stake or interest in the great majority of the stories they cover.

Objectivity has two meanings:

1. **The work itself:** - a story is objective when it is balanced and impartial, the reporter does not include (inject) his/her opinions, feelings, and biases.

2. **The tradition:** journalism is the so called free world represents an impartial third party the one that speaks for the general interest.

Total objectivity is impossible. Reporters are human beings; therefore, it may be difficult for them to be completely objective, but they can be fair. Good reporters try to put aside personal biases and beliefs when covering news. Example

- The city council last night gave city workers extravagant wage increase of 15%
- The city council last night gave city workers wage increase of only 15%
- The city council last night gave city workers a 15% wage increase

2.3.6 Balance

Both sides in a controversy are given their say. In a political campaign, all candidates should be given enough space and time to present their major points.

Both sides of an argument are presented in a news story. When a charge is made against a person, the accused is sought out and the response is placed in the story close to the charge. If the accused can't be found or refuses to comment, the news writer says so in the story.

2.3.7 Fairness

Fairness means all parties involved in the news are treated without favoritism.

- ◆ No story is fair if it omits facts of major importance or significance. So fairness includes completeness.
- ◆ No story is fair if it includes irrelevant information at the expense of significant facts. So fairness includes relevance.
- ◆ No story is fair if reporters hide their biases or emotions behind such subtly pejorative words as “refused”, “despite”, “admit” and “massive”. So fairness requires straight forwardness a head of flashiness.
- ◆ Reporters and editors should routinely ask themselves at the end of every story “Have I been as fair as I can be?”

2.3.8 Brevity

Brevity refers to making of your points succinct and economic, using of action verbs and concrete nouns, and word choice-using strong words, phrases and sentences.

By choosing a concrete nouns, that refers and actual person, place or thing good writers avoid adjectives. By using action verbs that shout, writers can avoid using adverbs. Good writers make their nouns and verbs work for them.

Look at these sentences. The weak ones are the wordy sentences. The strong sentences make their points succinctly by using action verbs.

Weak – He was hardly able to walk

Strong – he staggered. (He stumbled, He faltered)

Weak – He left the room as quickly as possible.

Strong – he ran out. (He rushed out, He dashed out)

Concrete nouns are words that stand for something we can point to as real: table, desk, chalk, crayon, and basket, Ted Kennedy, Prince Charles.

It is advisable to avoid using abstract noun except in direct quotes. Abstract nouns have no physical reference: patriotism, feminism, freedom, and hope. These words have different meanings to different people.

2.3.9 Clarity

The key to clear writing is clear thinking. Clear thinking extends to the writing as well as to the subject matter. That implies that the reporter must be able to understand the event before he/she is going to write it. This will help the reporter to explain the event clearly and succinctly. The reporter can't clarify what he/she doesn't understand. Badly written stories are the results of muddy thinking.

To make your story clear and understandable:

- Follow subject-verb-object(S-V-O) pattern for a sentence.
- Avoid excess punctuation.
- Divide long sentences
- Stay away from adverbs and adjectives.

2.3.10 Novelty

Up to date new story

2.3.11 News point

It refers to:

- The message of a story
- The focus of the information
- Usually found in the lead

In feature writing, the paragraph in which the theme or point is presented is called a nut graph

2.3.12 Identification

Identification is a quick portrait. News writer should identify people, organizations, buildings, places and events as early as possible in the news story. This will help readers to visualize and locate peoples and things clearly.

When the writer wants to identify people, he/she should follow the standard identification. The standard or formal identification has major elements: such as **name, title, age, address and occupation**.

Identifying people by their name is the basic form of identification. So the writer must be careful to spell peoples' names correctly. Readers don't want to see their names misspelled or to be given the wrong middle initial. You must check the spelling of their names by asking themselves. If they are not available, check city directories, court records, official printed programs or the telephone book.

Identify people in news stories by their **first name, middle initial and last name**.

Tome E. Rolnicki

George A. Hough

Susan F. Paterno

However, when people prefer and follow some other usage follow their preference.

M.L. Stein

C. Dow Tate

Sherri Taylor

Using of nicknames for sport and feature stories is possible, but it is impossible for other stories.

When the writer uses a list of names and titles, he/she place the name first and title second. However, the writer can placed short official titles of elected public officials, members of the armed forces, police officers and firefighters before the names.

Mayor Eng. Takele Umma

Prime Minster Abiy Ahmed

News papers often use age as a means of identification, especially in stories of injury of death (obituary) or in other circumstances where ages have officially documented.

Identifications that follow a name-age, address, job description or other information-is set off by paired commas for example: Police charged Walter Roxburgh, 25, of 10 Maple Lane, and Sean J. Kirby, 27, of 62 Satem St., with two counts of---

In some news stories we must be concerned about invasion of privacy and identification that may place a person at risk. Names of victims of crimes, victims of child abuse or sexual molestation, women who have been raped may not be as important as the circumstances. These victims usually don't want to be identified by their names and address in the newspaper or on the radio or TV.

2.3.13 Human Interest

Reporters personalize and dramatize the news by seeking out the people involved in the event. Human interest is an essential ingredient of news. A story that lacks people is as lifeless as a photograph without a human form. Most events affect people. That is why editors instruct reporters to tell their stories to the audience in human terms.

When readers see people in news stories they identify with them, sharing their problems, successes and defeats. The presence of people in stories also makes the stories clear. We want to know what people do under stress, what they think about when they have problems, what people do when their homes are flooded.

Since the human elements catch the readers' interest, it should be put high in the story. You should tell the story in human terms.

Part Two: Gathering the News Story

Chapter Three: The Reporter

3.1 The Reporter

In journalism, the most interesting and familiar person for the public is the reporter. For the public he/she is the press itself. Reporters represent the mysterious and invisible power of the press when he/she present at all important meetings, demonstrations, national and international gatherings and trouble spots. Reporters are the foot soldiers of the newspapers, news magazines, wire services, radio and television stations and the networks.

The reporter has a greater influence upon the life of the newspaper than other journalists. It is his/her duty to go out, to see, find, hear, and know about the latest events and happenings and then write about the same in the newspaper. The newspaper today is a reflex of the day to day life and this reflex is made possible through reporting the news stories of the reporter.

Reporters come to their work from various backgrounds. Many are graduates of schools of department of journalism. Others were liberal arts majors and arrive in the news room with degrees in history or political science or English. You will find a good many reporters and others in the news room that have changed careers and have moved from teaching, nursing, medicine, the sciences, business or the law into journalistic jobs. Many minority journalists have been recruited from other lines of work.

Nearly all news people today have at least a bachelor's degree, and you will find many with master's degrees and some with doctoral degrees. A sound education is the sine quo non of today's journalism.

Reporters and others in the newsroom are a diverse, heterogeneous lot, but they all have one thing in common-a strong belief on the importance of the press and its mission and, for the most part, a sense of satisfaction in their work.

3.2 Duties of the News Reporter

There are many duties of the news reporter. Some important duties during his/her reporting are given below.

1. A reporter should make his/her copy pulsate with life and full of interest for the reader.
2. Good reputation is very important for absolute reliability. So that, a reporter should be fair in his/her comments, punctual in his/her appointments and careful in his/her inquiring facts to gain such quality.

3. A reporter should the ability to write good English or the language of his/her paper. He/she should write stories in a condensed manner. He/she has to pay attention for his/her material clarity, correctly use of spelling, punctuation and capitalization etc.
4. The reporter should type and write his/her reports clearly only on one side of the paper in double space so to allow enough space for sub-editorial corrections.
5. Local newspaper reporter is more popular and closer to the local people than other journalists. As a result, some people may establish confidential relations with him/her; and tell their personal, private and business affairs. A reporter should never betray their confidence under any circumstances by divulging secretes which they have told him/her in good faith. This quality of trustworthiness increases the popularity of the reporter and he/she is welcomed wherever he/she goes. This will also enhance his/her reputation in all sections of the society.
6. Sometimes a reporter may assign to write short length paragraph about local events. For this he/she should keep his/her eyes and ears open; contact police office, fire station and hospital for collating information regarding accidents and deaths; and try to know and call up the secretaries of social, religious, political, legal, official and other organizations to get some interesting stories.
7. Every reporter should keep engagement diary and other notebooks. It is very necessary for the reporter to posses a good knowledge of shorthand and typing. This helps a reporter greatly in writing down verbatim reports of political meetings and speeches made at some political functions.
8. The reporter's copy need to be so neat and clean that it could be photograph and put in the paper as it is.
9. The reporter should not forget to give a catch-line to his/her copy. Every copy which goes to the printer to be set is given a catch-line. The catch-line is a key-word, because during the production it identifies all the sheets of the copy. The catch-line is given on each sheet so that the printer can collate the whole story. The catch-line should be chosen very carefully. It better to choose an uncommon word, which may not be resembled with another catch-line. If the reporter chooses a very common word as a catch-line like "accident," it might be confused because there may have been half a dozen accident stories in that edition of the newspaper.
10. The reporter should put the catch-line and the page number at the top. Before starting the story he/she should leave half page of the first sheet. At least two inches margin should be left on the

left side of sheet that can be used by the sub-editor for writing the headlines or any other instructions for the printer. On the left side margin, the editor might write corrections if any.

11. It is good rule to end the page at the end of a paragraph. Similarly, the reporter should not continue a sentence on the next page. At the end of each sheet the reporter should type the word 'more,' or the letters 'm.f' or 'more follows'. Whenever he/she finishes his/her story he/she should write at the end of the last page the word 'end'. All these things are very necessary, otherwise, sometimes a page or a paragraph of his/her copy might be lost on the printer's desk. The reporter should also try to follow the house style, which must adhere to.

3.3 General Rules for a News Reporter

Besides the above duties a reporter should also remember the following points:

1. As already discussed above, a reporter should never repeat a story which has been told to him/her confidentially or in good faith, unless he/she takes the prior permission of the person concerned to make it public.
2. Use names for local news reporting, but spell correctly.
3. Every reporter should try to develop the qualities of descriptive writer.
4. A reporter should always try to improve his/her method of reporting and his/her style. He/she must remember that practice makes human perfect.
5. Every reporter should use plain English. He/she should avoid difficult words. He/she should enable his/her readers to visualize the scene described by him/her as clearly as if he/she had seen it with his own eyes.
6. A good reporter should avoid the use of stereotyped phraseology.
7. A reporter should try to be accurate in his/her reporting. Whenever his/her accuracy is called in question, he/she should be able to produce his/her original notebook.
8. Be careful in your reporting, some person may deny having said during excitements.
9. Be careful in reporting of court proceedings. Use of wrong name might land you into legal problems.
10. While reporting ordinary public meetings, a reporter has to produce only a summary, which he/she should try to write up at the meeting progresses.
11. The reporter must master the art of condensing while reporting the speeches made in the public meetings. This will greatly help the reporter in writing his/her summaries.

12. A reporter must know what is newsworthy and what is not. A recognition news value implies the need of ‘**news nose**’. Without it a reporter cannot hope to achieve success in his/her career.

3.4 Desired Qualities of a Reporter

1. News Sense

It is the basic quality of news person. Every reporter has to have news sense or nose for news to distinguish news from non-news. He/ she should be able to compare various news values and decide where to begin his/her story and should not miss important details.

2. Clarity

A reporter should have clarity of mind and expression. Without clarity of expression clarity of mind has no meaning.

3. Objectivity

A reporter should aim at objectivity while dealing with a story. He/she should not allow his/her personal bias and ideas to creep into a story. He/she should not take sides but try to cover all the different viewpoints to achieve balance in the story.

4. Accuracy

A reporter should strive for accuracy. He/she should check and re-check his/her facts till he/she is satisfied that he/she has them accurate.

5. Alertness

A reporter should always be alert while dealing with his/her subjects. Scoops don’t walk into newspaper offices- alert reporters catch them in air and pursue.

6. Speed

In today’s world, speed matters everywhere. A person who can not work fast can not be a good reporter. While maintaining all other desirable qualities a reporter should strive to work faster. He/she think fast, decide fast and type fast for he/she has to meet deadlines or may have to go to another assignment.

7. Calmness

A reporter has to remain calm and composed in most exciting and tragic circumstances. He/she has to apply appropriate mental and physical effort to write the story. It is true that a reporter is human being. He/she has natural feelings or emotions to the exciting situations, but he/she has to prevent these

emotions in the face of disturbing influence-he/she has to develop resistance to excitability. Being in the field, reporter face many such occasions when he/she has to control his emotions.

8. Curiosity

Reporter should have curiosity. For reporters it is useful in developing a very strong desire for facts that may lead to better stories. And they should read as much as possible to constantly improve their awareness level.

9. Skepticism

This is another necessary quality which a reporter should cultivate. He/she should not take anything for granted. He/she does not believe any source until he/she faced with undeniable proof.

A reporter should be more vigilant for many forces constantly try to use them, and through them their paper. Many people try to plant on reporter wrong story for their own ends. Many a time a reporter falls into such traps in good faith. He/she should have enough skepticism to avoid such plots.

10. Punctuality

It is a good habit. For a reporter it is a must for if he/she is not punctual he/she may miss something for which he/she may have to depend on secondary sources. It always better to be punctual and wait than reach late and ask others- a rival may misinform you or hide some important information.

11. Patience

It is a quality which helps a reporter in a big way for many a time almost daily he/she has to test his/her patience, the voluntary self-control or restraint that helps one to endure waiting, provocation, injustice, suffering or any of the unpleasant change of time and life. Most of the time a reporter waits for someone or something and a time he/she has to tolerate other people's short coming and has to remain unperturbed by some one else's slowness or other quirks.

12. Imagination

It helps a reporter in writing better stories by using different angles or perspectives that retain the readers' interest. Imaginative writing is highly attractive and it improves the quality of a newspaper.

13. Farsightedness

An intelligent envisioning of the future helps news reporters in general. The quality helps them in identifying processes and people who will be important in future. Reporters can watch such processes and cultivate people who may become important news sources in the future. A reporter with forethought can think ahead and prepare for eventualities.

14. Self-Discipline

One can achieve a degree of proficiency in reporting by systematic effort and self-control. In this sense self discipline suggests dedication and firm commitment. It helps in journalism as in any other field.

15. Integrity

It is a virtue in itself and implies undeviating, honestly and strict adherence to a stern code of ethics. This human quality is important for journalists. It is more important for reporters for they are more exposed to temptations.

16. Fearlessness and Frankness

These qualities help reporters in asking unpleasant questions and taking risks to find out truth. No body gives a story in a platter. The reporter will have to probe, question, authenticate and exercise his/her power of deduction to get a good story.

17. Tactfulness

A reporter should be tactful. He/she should the ability to handle sensitive people and situations gracefully without causing hurt or angry. He/she should be considerate of others and should be careful not embarrass, upset or offend them. A reporter should have flexible and sociable personality and should have a nature that relishes variety of experiences. He/she should have an understanding of human behavior and emotions. This will help him/her in developing contacts that are so essential for news gathering.

18. Initiative

A reporter who works in the field should have an outgoing nature with initiative and drive. These qualities will help him/her get acquainted with news sources and get stories from them. A meek, retiring or shy person is not fit for reporting. He/she may be good at his/her desk. Reporters need a fair amount of assertiveness and aggressiveness to be successful in their career.

19. Mobility

A reporter should be mobile. He/she should enjoy moving around and should not hesitate traveling distances to get stories when required. He/she should go to his/her news sources as often as possible for such contact contacts help him/her get news. A mobile reporter is seldom caught napping when a major story breaks.

20. Diligence

Reporters should be diligent. His/her jobs require painstaking exertion of intense care and effort, alertness and dedication to the task and wary watchfulness. These qualities are basically qualities of good and efficient human beings. Good and efficient human beings make reporters. All other things being equal reporters need additional qualities to deal effectively with all sorts of people they meet in the field.

3.5 The reporter's skills

Editors defined reporters in terms the skills needed to gather information about a wide range of events and human activities: reporters are people who get what they are sent for, and who know how to dig out information, what ever the source and no matter how hidden or obscure. They suggested that reporters must be able to meet deadlines, must be able to write, must be able to gather information and must be able to generate ideas for stories.

The Reporting Skills Are:

- A nose for news: observation-listening and seeing
- Finding information
- Verifying information
- Asking questions
- Analyzing and interpreting information

- **A Nose for News**

A nose for news is an understanding of news and news values and the ability to recognize a story when it comes along. It is not something one is born with. It is acquired, it can be developed and it improves with experience.

- **Observation: Listening**

Great dill of what reporter comes from listening to people talk. Reporters learn to listen with a selective ear and to listen carefully. This is especially an important skill. Successful reporters get on well with others, are able to chat comfortably and purposefully with stranger, and are able to draw at news sources is meaningful conversation.

- **Observation: Seeing**

Much reporting is based on asking people what they saw or did and writing a story dependent on that observation. This is a workable approach that results in acceptable and accurate news stories of a

routine nature. This approach is also acceptable when, because of time, distance and some other barriers, the reporter can't do the observing firsthand.

Good observer can observe things for themselves, a more vivid, more accurate and more interesting story results. They know what kind of things make interesting reading. Careful observer can also see what people do, notes the weather, the size of the crowd, colors, sounds and background incidents.

- **Finding Information**

Reporters do not expect to know everything; it's obvious they can't, but they have to know how and where to find out. And this is basically true. They have to learn where do they get their information and from who they receive information. They are expected to know about their community's history, geography and governments; and about peoples in authority, names and titles of public officials. This will help them to identify where the information and the sources of news are found when reporting.

Reporters also expected to know how to use public records and published information available from government and other sources. They have to how to use libraries; how to locate and read annual reports, budgets, proposals, minutes of meetings, court records, computer files-data banks and statistical data of all kinds.

- **Verifying Information**

Checking, cross-checking and verifying are basic skills. Careful reporters check everything. They take nothing for granted. They have to check their information with sources as well as with their own notes and copy.

- **Asking Questions (Interviewing)**

Interviewing involves asking questions that elicit a response. The question asked by the reporter must be an intelligent question, and the reporter must know something about the subject being discussed. Reporter may assign as beat or special reporter or general assignment reporter. Whatever his/her area a reporter should know his/her subject matter well. There are different beat: such as court, business, health and labor. These areas need knowledge and expertise, so the reporters need to talk with experts in these areas. And they should know the subject matter too.

Journalists are self-educated people. They carry their education beyond the classroom. They read widely and they study the world around them. They read their own newspaper, other newspapers, magazines, books and government reports. They read novels, history, biography and scientific and technical studies.

Once the question has started, it is essential that the reporter understand what is being said and be able to take careful notes while still keeping one part of the mind free to think about what comes next. The skilled reporter, in a sense, hopscotches along ahead of the person being interviewed and develops new questions based on what has already been said.

Control of an interview is not always easy. Some people gush like fountains once they start talking and cannot be stopped easily. Others wander off course and have to be brought back to the subject. And the reporter has to have a sense of when the person being interviewed has been sucked dry and have a graceful way of drawing the interview to a close.

Reporting Techniques

Reporting requires a number of techniques that together make up the news-gathering process.

The first technique is the stenographic, which requires only listening and not taking.

The second technique is interviewing or questioning, which requires not only reporters listen to what people are saying but also that they ask questions to add to what they have heard.

The third technique is observing.

Finally, there is investigation.

Chapter Four: Reporting

4.1 Finding Stories

4.1.1 Finding Story Ideas

Reporting usually base on the universal themes that are fundamental conflicts of life: birth and death; triumph over human suffering; heroism and cowardice; selflessness and greed; crime and the quest for justice; honor and corruption; freedom and oppression; one person's fight against the tyranny of the majority; scarify for the greeter good; love against all odds; the action of fate, or chance, in the world.

The above context can be base to find story ideas. Based on that reporters should act as guardians of democracy and serving as watchdogs of the government. They expected to stories that go beyond routine coverage. How? By looking at people and events in terms of the above universal themes.

Reporters can get story ideas:

1. By Asking Him/herself: what are the major problems in my community?

Then report on how the people on charged with solving that problems are succeeding. If the problems are not being solved, write a story about why not.

2. By Looking For Watchdog Stories

Are the people who govern you and your readers successfully doing the job they to were elected or assigned to do? Are they spending the tax Birr or student fees they collect wisely and responsibly? If not, why not?

3. From News releases

News releases come from public relations people who want to publicize a cause or event. Generally biased and often factually incorrect, news releases should be reprinted verbatim, but they can serve as an excellent source for story ideas. Double-check all information in a news release before publishing.

4. From Editors

Editors are the gatekeepers who have the power to decide which stories are newsworthy and which are not.

Most newspapers, magazines, and radio and television stations have assigning editors who assign story ideas to reporters. They often determine what angle reporters should take, and even who they should interview.

Story Meetings

After you got your study ideas, there will be story meetings. At story meetings, reporters expected to present their story ideas and discuss with their assigning editors about them. Then the editors will offer suggestions on angles to pursue and sources to contact. In the field, sometimes, your research may tell you the story need an entirely different angle from that of the editor gave you at story meetings. In this condition you expected to take the new angle or direction for that information.

4.1.2 Finding Sources

Now that you have an idea, you'll begin the arduous task of reporting, gathering the information you'll need to write a balanced, fair and accurate account of the issue, problem or controversy. Reporting entails collecting evidences-facts, statistics, anecdotes and quotes from people with different viewpoints- that support your stories focus. To collect these evidences, first, you have to identify or find your best possible sources. The quality of the source is the primary criteria to separate a good story from the other.

Reporters use both **primary** and **secondary** sources when reporting news stories. A **primary source** could be an interview with a person who has direct experience of an event or topic, or an original document related to that topic. The journalist as eyewitness also is considered a primary source. A **secondary source** might be a written report based on the original document. In the case of a fire, for example, the person whose house burned down would be a primary source. So would a firefighter who had been involved in putting out the fire. But the press release issued by the fire department the next day would be a secondary source.

In general, try to interview:

1. The official most directly involved in the problem.
2. Someone who disagrees with the handling of the problem.
3. A victim hurt by the problem.
4. A person helped by the problem, if applicable.
5. An outside expert to lend perspective on the problem and the way it's being handled by officials.

Once you discover a helpful source of information for one story, it's a good idea to stay in touch with that person over the long term. Get as much contact information as possible for every source, not just an office address and telephone number, but mobile and home telephones and e-mail addresses as well. Good reporters "work" their sources regularly, contacting them to ask if anything interesting is happening. Make it easy for sources to get in touch with you, as well; by giving your business card to everyone you meet on a story.

Anyone with access to information, including secretaries and clerks, can be a useful source for a journalist. They can provide copies of documents, and they often know who the most knowledgeable person on a given topic is. A reporter who treats them with respect may find his or her request for an interview with the secretary's supervisor accepted more quickly.

4.2 Basic Reporting

No matter how well you write, you will never be able to compensate for a badly reported story. Explaining an issue or a problem well requires becoming an expert in it; becoming an expert means mastering far more detail than your readers need to know. To do so, you expected to know some basic reporting methods that enable reporters effective. There are three ways to gather information for your story—research, observation and interviewing. Of these, interviewing is clearly the most important. It can be done in person, over the phone, and now even by e-mail. It can be extensive or just a few questions

4.2.1 Interviews

American reporter Kristin Gilger says, "Skillful interviewing is the basis for all good reporting and writing." An interview is defined as information, opinion, or experience shared by a source in conversation with a reporter. What makes an interview a little different from an ordinary conversation is that the reporter determines the direction of the questioning.

Setting up an interview is not always easy. People may not want to talk with a journalist, especially if the story is controversial. When dealing with public officials, start from the premise that the public has a right to know what the officials are doing. Experienced reporters have found they can persuade even the most reluctant officials to agree to an interview by anticipating the excuses and roadblocks they may use.

- **They don't have time.**

The reporter can offer to meet at the most convenient time or place for the person they want to speak with. Limiting the amount of time requested also may help.

- **They are afraid because they think the story will make them look bad.**

Treating people with respect and telling them precisely why you want to talk with them will help sources be less anxious.

- **They don't know what to say.**

Reporters need to be clear about why the story needs a particular person's point of view.

- **They are hard to reach.**

Reporters often have to go through a secretary or public relations officer to contact the person they want

to interview. If they suspect that their request is not being forwarded, some reporters will write a letter to the source, or call during lunch or after business hours in an effort to get through.

Once you have secured the interview and researched the person and the topic, there is still more preparation to do. Most reporters develop a list of questions or topics, which they take with them but do not read from during the interview. Instead, they refer to the list only near the end to make sure they haven't forgotten something important. The list also includes other information, documents, or photographs they want to obtain from that source.

Questions are the backbone of an interview. They are the rudder, keeping the ship going in the right direction. Good questions can reward you with unexpected answers, rich information, and surprises. Poor questions can leave you wondering why you bothered to talk to that person anyway. Questions that are too specific can lead you down the wrong trail.

The first question in an interview is important because it sets the tone for what follows. A lot of journalists like to begin with an "ice-breaker" question that lets the source relax. It's something they're comfortable answering. It may, in fact, have nothing to do with the reason you are there. But often it helps to establish your credentials with the source, and that can establish a sense of trust and openness.

Most of the time, the best questions are **open-ended** questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. They are also non-judgmental, in that they do not establish the reporter's point of view. It's the difference between, "What do you think about that?" and "What could you have been thinking!" While it's important to ask good questions, it's also important to be quiet and let the interviewee talk. Good journalists are good listeners, and often learn the most significant information by being silent. What you hear also can lead to additional questions that may not have occurred to you.

Robert Siegel, who works for National Public Radio in Washington, D.C., tells the story of an interview he did with a Turkish diplomat after Pope John Paul II was shot and wounded by a Turk in Rome. His first question, "Do you know any details about this man, Mehmet Ali Agca; where he lived in Italy, what he did there, what kind of visa the Italians gave him?" The answers were all no. After several more tries, Siegel paused, about to give up. And the diplomat filled the silence with this, "? Except that he is the most famous convicted murderer in Turkey, who escaped from prison after assassinating the editor of one of our major newspapers." Siegel says he almost lost a good story by asking questions that were too narrow. He acknowledges that a better way to open the interview might have been, "Tell me about this man."

Forms of Interview

Reporters can do interviews **in person**, **by telephone**, or **online via e-mail or instant messaging**. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages. *Interviewing in person* gives the reporter a more complete sense of the individual. What kinds of photos are on the wall? Is the desk messy or neat? What books are in the bookcase? Meeting in person also gives the reporter the ability to judge the source's credibility based on his demeanor. Does he look nervous or comfortable? Is she willing to look the reporter in the eye?

Christopher (Chip) Scanlan, director of writing workshops for The Poynter Institute, a journalism school in the United States, tells the story of interviewing a woman who lost her husband to cancer. She gave him a tour of her home, and in the bedroom she said, "You know, every night I put just a little of [my husband's] cologne on the pillow, so I can believe he is still with me." It's a detail that the reader can smell and feel, which Scanlan never would have learned over the phone or online.

Telephone interviews take less time, and some reporters find it easier to take good notes when they don't have to worry about maintaining eye contact with the source. They can even type their notes into the computer. *E-mail interviews* are useful for reaching people in distant places, but the reporter can't listen to what's being said and follow up in "real time." Instant messaging via the Internet is more akin to a telephone interview. But both online methods raise the question of whether the person they appear to be from actually sent the answers.

Because of these concerns, *The Virginian-Pilot* newspaper in Norfolk, Virginia, has instituted this newsroom policy for online reporting: "In quoting from electronic communications, we will make certain the communication is genuine, as it is easy to fake Internet return addresses or log on as someone else. The Internet is not controlled like a wire service [such as Reuters or the Associated Press]; hoaxes can come from anywhere."

Reporters using e-mail or other online forms of communication should follow the same professional standards as they would in any other form. They must identify themselves as journalists and tell what information they are seeking and why. They need to apply the same fact-checking and thinking skills they would to any other source of information.

No matter which way they conduct an interview, reporters usually have some questions they save for the end. First, they may summarize the conversation to be sure they've heard accurately what was being said. Then they will ask if there is anything else the person being interviewed wants to add. They also ask for the best way to get back in touch with the person, especially after hours, and they thank the

person for his or her time. And many journalists have one last question they ask at all interviews, "Who else should I talk to about this?"

4.2.1.1 Ground Rules

Most interviews are conducted "**on the record**," which means the reporter can use anything that is said and attribute it directly to the person who is speaking. It is important to make sure the source knows this, especially when the reporter is dealing with ordinary people who are not accustomed to being quoted in the newspaper or on the air.

If the information is not to be on the record, both the reporter and the source must agree in advance to the conditions under which the information can be used. An interview "**on background**" or "**not for attribution**" generally means the information can be used in a story and the source's words can be quoted directly, although he or she cannot be named. However, the source can be identified in a general way, for example, as "a foreign ministry official" or "a company engineer" — as long as the source and the journalist both agree on the description to be used.

Many news organizations have written policies regarding the use of anonymous sources. *The New York Times* newspaper, for example, says: "The use of unidentified sources is reserved for situations in which the newspaper could not otherwise print information it considers reliable and newsworthy. When we use such sources, we accept an obligation not only to convince a reader of their reliability but also to convey what we can learn of their motivation." Reporters should not be too quick to agree to talk on background because sources sometimes try to use it as a cover for a personal or partisan attack, knowing it cannot be traced back to them. And using an unnamed source makes it more difficult for the audience to evaluate the credibility of the information.

But there are times when reporters have to get information on background because it's the only way a source will agree to talk. A source who fears for her safety if others learn that she has spoken to a reporter may agree to provide information only on background. Here are some guidelines for deciding whether to accept and use background information:

- The story is of overwhelming public concern.
- There is no other way to get the information on the record.
- The source is in a position to know the truth.
- You are willing to explain (in your story) why the source could not be named.

In some capitals, government officials will talk to reporters on background as well as "**deep background**," which means the information can be used but not in a direct quote, and the source

cannot be identified. A reporter could write only that officials are known to believe something or another. Information that is offered "**off the record**" cannot be used at all, so most reporters will fight this arrangement unless the source is so important to the story that they have no other choice. Off-the-record information cannot even be repeated to another source, but it can tip reporters off to a story that is worth pursuing.

Whatever the arrangement, it's up to the reporter to make sure both sides understand and agree to the ground rules before the interview. Sometimes sources try to change the rules in the middle, by telling the reporter something important and then adding, "But you can't use that, of course." That's why it's a good idea to spell things out at the beginning, and not to agree to withhold information unless a separate deal is reached before proceeding with the interview.

Journalists also should be clear about how far they will go to protect the identity of a source. In some jurisdictions, journalists may risk going to jail if they refuse to reveal information about a confidential source in a court of law. If a journalist is not willing to risk facing time in prison to protect a source, he or she should say so.

Some reporters are quite skilled at getting off-the-record information back on the record. Eric Nalder is one of them. When an off-the-record interview is over, he reads back a quote that is quite innocuous and asks, "Why can't you say that on the record?" When the source agrees, he goes on through his notes, reading back quotes and getting them approved for use. He says he once got an entire interview changed from off the record to on. In part, that's because the source now trusted him to be accurate because he had heard the quotes read back.

One other ground rule that is important for journalists to understand is the use of an "**embargo**" on information provided by a source. That means the information is provided on the condition that it is not to be used until a specific time. A government agency announcing a new policy may provide a written summary several hours in advance or even a day ahead. That gives reporters time to digest the information before the press conference making the policy official. Reporters who accept information under an embargo are bound to honor it unless the news becomes public before the specified time.

4.2.1.2 Getting it Right

Credibility is a journalist's most important asset, and accuracy is the best way to protect it. To ensure accuracy, reporters must check and double-check all of the information they collect for a news story. Reporters will make mistakes, but they should be rare. When an American newspaper, Portland's *Oregonian*, studied its own errors, editors concluded they happened mainly because of three causes:

- Working from memory;
- Making assumptions;
- Dealing with second-hand sources.

We'll talk more about getting it right in Chapter 4 ("Editing"). But reporters are the news organization's first line of defense against errors. Reporters who take excellent notes and consult them often, and who search for primary sources whenever possible, is better able to abide by the late American publisher Joseph Pulitzer's three rules of journalism: "Accuracy, accuracy, and accuracy."

4.2.1.3 Tape Recorder

A tape recorder is a useful tool that ensures your quotes will be accurate and in context. But taping interview poses particular problems, especially for beginner.

First off, beginners often use tape recorders as a crutch, an excuse to stop paying attention and stop taking notes during an interview. Ever tried to transcribe an hour-long interview? It takes about two-and-a-half hours. Multiply that by three sources, and you have missed your 5 p.m. deadline. Worse, the more students rely on tape recorders, the easier it is to put off learning the crucial skill of not taking, which is best mastered, like the rest of journalism, by practice.

Forget the tape recorder until you're a skilled interviewer and note taker. If you must use one, pretend it's not there and take notes as usual. If the machine malfunctions, written notes will help you determine what's essential to transcribe and what you can leave on tape, thus saving you time.

4.2.2 Observation

On-the-scene observation is one of the fundamentals of good reporting. Journalists want to witness events for themselves whenever possible so they can describe them accurately to the audience. Good reporters use all of their senses on the scene. They look, listen, smell, taste, and feel the story so the audience can, too.

To do this well, journalists need an accurate record of their observations. A print reporter can do his or her job with a notebook and a pencil or pen, but many also carry audio recorders and cameras, especially if they are expected to file stories for an online edition as well. For radio, journalists need to capture sound, and for television, both sound and video.

Using a recorder is one way of making sure that any quotations you might use are accurate. But electronics have been known to fail, so it's important for all journalists to be skilled note-takers. Here are some tips on note-taking from experienced reporters:

- Write down facts, details, thoughts, and ideas. Make clear which is which, and where they came from.
- Draw diagrams of rooms, scenes, or items in relationship to each other.
- Always get correctly spelled names, titles, and contact information. Ask for birth date and year, to make sure you have the person's age right.
- Spell out interview ground rules in the notebook.
- Don't crowd the notebook. Leave space for annotating notes.
- Leave the inside covers blank to write down questions to ask later.
- Annotate the notes as soon as possible.

Many reporters use their own shorthand for common words so they can take notes more quickly. Then they annotate their notes, spelling out abbreviations to avoid any confusion later. They also will mark the most important information they have learned, good quotes they may use in the story, anything they need to follow up on or check for accuracy, and questions that still need to be answered.

It sounds obvious, but reporters must be sure they have the tools they need before heading out to cover a story: notebook, pen, tape or digital recorder, and fresh batteries. There's nothing more embarrassing than arriving on the scene only to discover there is no film or tape in the camera, or that the only pen in your pocket is out of ink. Today's journalists often carry additional tools: a mobile telephone and a laptop computer. A few other simple items can be useful, as well. Putting a rubber band around your notebook to mark the next blank page makes it easy to find quickly. A plastic bag will protect your notebook when it rains, so the pages stay dry and the ink doesn't run. A small pair of binoculars will help you see what's going on even if you can't get very close. A calculator will help you convert information like the number of tons of fuel carried by an aircraft into terms more familiar to the audience, in this case, liters or gallons.

Your five senses can provide the details that help a make an otherwise dry story come to life for a reader. Even if you are "just" doing an interview, make note of the setting: What do you see? Hear? Smell? Feel? Drop those details into your story to help bring your reader into the place and the moment from where you are reporting.

Be careful, however, not to load your story with gratuitous detail that demeans or insults your subject. We don't need to know what color your interviewee's hair is, unless it is relevant to the story.

Try sitting someplace alone for 30 minutes, and then write a story about what you saw, as practice in developing your observational skills.

4.2.3 Research

Journalists tend to collect much more information than they can put into a story, but that information always helps them better understand the event or issue they are covering. Sometimes, background

information is essential to give a story deeper meaning. In Eric Nalder's story about life rafts, for example, he included the fact that the water the ferries cross is cold enough in January to kill someone within half an hour. That information puts the shortage of life rafts in context by explaining more clearly why it matters. It's exactly the kind of information reporters look for when they do research on a story, either before they leave the newsroom or along the way as questions come up.

Journalists have more research tools available today than ever before, thanks to computers and the Internet. Many of them are just high-tech versions of the basic tools of the trade: directories, almanacs, encyclopedias, and maps. Others are databases and reports that would have been much harder to find in the days before the Internet, requiring a personal visit to a library or government building. Still others are resources that few would have imagined two decades ago when the Internet was young: search engines, blogs, chat rooms, and e-mail lists. All of these resources are useful to journalists collecting background on a story. But one of the most basic research tools has not changed in a century: the news organization's own library of previously published or broadcast stories. Whether these "clips" are kept on paper in filing drawers or in computer files, they are a useful starting place for all kinds of stories. Many journalists also keep their own "clip files" of stories they have saved about specific topics.

Imagine that the former president of a neighboring country has died. A reporter assigned to write the story would want to know some basic facts: age, cause of death, and where and when he died. But the journalist would also want information about his time in office, and how the country has changed since he was president. A first step would be to consult previous news reports, either in the newsroom's archive or online. Those reports might mention someone who was close to the former president, whom the reporter could ask for an interview. The reporter would want to have some background on that person before conducting the interview, and might learn that the former president's friend kept all of his letters, which could reveal some surprising new information.

Doing an interview without having done any background research is like driving to an unfamiliar place without consulting a map. You might get where you intend to go, but it's just as likely that you will miss a turn along the way.

Further tips for news reporting

Finding story ideas

- Keep your eyes and ears open; listen to what your friends are talking about.
- Read everything you can get your hands on; get story ideas from other newspapers and magazines.

- Think of a youth angle to a current news story.
- Research a subject that interests you ask yourself what you would like to know more about.
- Talk to people in a specific field to find out what is important to them.

Newsgathering

- Begin collecting articles on your subject.
- Talk to friends and associates about the subject.
- Contact any agencies or associations with interest or professional knowledge in the area.
- Create a list of people you want to interview; cover both sides of the story by interviewing people on both sides of the issue.
- Collect government statistics and reports on the subject get old press releases or reports to use as background.

Interviewing do's and don'ts

- Be polite.
- Explain the ground rules of the interview to people unfamiliar with how the media works - this means that you tell them the information they give you can and will be published. If they do not want any part of what they say published, they need to tell you it is "off the record."
- Tape the interview (so if anyone comes back at you, you have the proof of what was said).
- Build a relationship with the person being interviewed.
- Start with easy questions; end with difficult questions.
- Read the body language of the person you're interviewing and if they get defensive, back away from the question you are asking and return later.
- Don't attack the source.
- Keep control of the interview; don't let the subject ramble or stray from the subject.
- On the other hand, don't let your "opinion" of what the story should be colour the interview. Always remember that the person you are talking with knows more about the subject than you do.

Part Three: Writing the Story

Chapter Five: Beginning the Story

5.1 Finding the Focus

All news stories are made up of facts, observations, quotations, and details. Reporters almost always have more than they can use, and because they've worked hard to collect all of that information, their natural impulse is to use as much of it as possible in their stories. But cramming in all the facts that will fit rarely results in a well-told story that will engage the audience. It is harder to understand stories that are overstuffed with information. A reporter who tries to explain everything may succeed only in confusing the audience. Besides, newspapers have only so much space; radio and television news programs only so much airtime; and readers, listeners, and viewers only so much spare time and attention to devote to catching up on the news.

Good journalism involves selection, not compression. Reporters must use their news judgment to decide what is most important to include in a story and in what order to put it. For many reporters, the most difficult part of telling a story is deciding what to leave out. One way to make those decisions is to choose a central point or a theme for the story, also called a focus.

Focus

The focus of a story is basically the answer to the question, "What is this story really about?" To determine the focus, Poynter Institute writing instructor Chip Scanlan suggests asking five additional questions:

- What's the news?
- What's the story?
- What's the image?
- How can I tell it in six words?
- So what?

Imagine that you're covering a fast-moving wildfire. You've been out talking to people and observing the damage all day. Now, you need to focus your story before you begin writing. Here's how you might use Scanlan's questions to find your focus:

- **What's the news?**

A fire destroyed two houses in the mountains east of the city, but no one was injured and the city business district was spared.

- **What's the story?**

Two families are homeless but grateful to be alive.

- **What's the image?**

Family members hug each other near the smoking ruins of their house.

- **How can I tell it in six words or less?**

Fire destroys homes but not spirits.

- **So what?**

Property damage from a dangerous fire was limited.

The reporter writing this story now knows that his lead will be about the families who lost their homes; that he'll use a quote high up in the story from a family member expressing gratitude that everyone survived; and that he'll also include general information about property damage. The reporter knows that he can leave out some of the information he collected about the number of fire companies that responded in the business district, but he still might include a quote from the fire chief.

The results of this focus exercise are not meant to suggest that every story has only one acceptable focus. On the contrary, reporters for different news organizations may take the same basic facts and write their stories quite differently because they have decided on a different focus. In the case of the wildfire story, a reporter could use the same five questions to come up with a different focus.

- **What's the news?**

Businesses in our city escaped damage from a wildfire that destroyed two houses in the mountains east of downtown.

- **What's the story?**

Business owners grateful the fire spared them this time.

- **What's the image?**

A business owner shakes hands with a firefighter outside his store.

- **How can I tell it in six words?**

Fire can't stop business.

- **So what?**

Economic impact of a dangerous fire was limited.

This version of the story would lead with the relief of business owners, and use a quote high up from one businessman whose store was spared. Both stories would include the same basic information — that two houses were destroyed while businesses were unaffected — but their emphasis would be different. Knowing what to emphasize before beginning to write helps the reporter decide what facts

and quotes to include and what to leave out. As William Zinsser notes in his book *On Writing Well*, "Clear thinking becomes clear writing; one can't exist without the other."

Experienced reporters don't wait until the end of the day, after they've done all their research, interviews, and observation, before seeking a focus for their story. They may actually start the reporting process with a focus in mind, which helps them decide where to go and whom to interview. Of course, the focus can change as they collect more information, and it often does. The most important thing is for the reporter to have decided on a focus for the story before sitting down to write.

Having a focus in mind is just the first step in planning to write a story. The second is to organize the story so you know what information goes where. Begin by listing the basic facts of the story and decide what should be at the top, at the end, and in the middle. Select the best quotes or sound bites from your interviews, and decide where they should go in the story. Make note of any details you want to be sure to include. Before they begin to write, some reporters find it useful to create an outline on paper that they use as a kind of road map for the story.

5.2 Writing the News

Good news writing is concise, clear, and accurate. That sounds simple enough, but it's actually quite challenging. As we've already mentioned, reporters have a tendency to want to include everything they have learned in their stories. But stories that get to the point are more likely to appeal to busy news consumers, and a news organization that lets stories run on won't have much space or time left to cover other news.

Generally speaking, news stories have shorter sentences and paragraphs than most other types of writing. Each paragraph contains one main idea. A new paragraph begins when a new idea, character, or setting is introduced.

Journalists use simple, direct language that is easy to understand, with more nouns and verbs than adjectives and adverbs. Well-written news stories are not vague, ambiguous, or repetitious, because every word counts. As E.B. White notes in his classic book, *The Elements of Style*, one of the basic rules of writing is simply this: "Omit needless words."

Good writers always make an effort to choose the most appropriate word to convey what they mean. As the 19th-century American writer Mark Twain said, "The difference between the right word and almost the right word is the difference between lightning and the lightning bug." Reporters routinely consult

dictionaries and reference books to make sure the words they choose really mean what they think they do.

Because they write stories for a general audience, journalists also try to avoid jargon-specialized language or technical terms unfamiliar to most people. A hospital spokesman might describe a person as suffering from "lacerations and contusions," but a reporter should use simpler terms: "cuts and bruises." If a technical term must be used for accuracy, it's a good idea to include a definition as well. For example, the term "fossil fuels" in a story about global energy issues should include a short list of what those fuels are: coal, oil, and natural gas. Journalists also must steer clear of euphemisms — words or phrases that may confuse or mislead the audience. If the city council votes to approve "a new interment facility," the story on the radio or in the next day's newspaper should tell residents that the city "plans to build a new cemetery."

One key principle of news writing is to show the audience what happened rather than just telling them about it. For example, instead of saying that family members attending a funeral were grief-stricken, a well-written news story would show their grief by describing how they hugged each other and sobbed. Instead of just telling the reader that a person is tall, a good writer would mention that he has to stoop to enter the front door.

Accuracy is critically important in news writing. An accurate story gets the basics right: grammar, spelling, punctuation, dates, addresses, numbers, and all the other details that go into a news story. Getting someone's name or age wrong is the kind of error that can erode a journalist's credibility. An accurate story also tells a complete story, not just one side or another. That doesn't mean that any single story should include everything there is to say about a topic, but it does mean that reporters must not leave out key information that could distort the story's meaning. For example, writing that a new test makes it easier to detect oral cancer suggests that the old test was unreliable. If the new test is merely faster, the reporter should say so.

5.3 Leads

The beginning of a news story is known as the **lead**. It is meant to capture attention and to draw the reader, listener, or viewer into the story. There are two basic types of leads: **hard** and **soft**. A **hard lead** summarizes the essential facts of the story — the five Ws and H— while a soft lead may set the scene or introduce a character. Another way to look at the difference between these types of leads is to consider a hard lead the answer to the question, "**What's the news?**" and a soft lead the answer to the question, "**What's the story?**"

Either type of lead can be used for a hard-news story. For example, a story about the election of a new prime minister could be written one of several different ways. A hard lead might read like this:

Former rebel leader Joshua Smith was elected prime minister tonight, winning more than 80 percent of the vote in the country's first democratic election since 1993.

A soft lead would take a different approach:

Growing up in Youngtown, Joshua Smith was a little boy with big dreams. Always small for his age, he says the bigger boys at school bullied him. When he told his grammar school teacher he'd be prime minister someday, she laughed.

No one is laughing now. Smith won yesterday's election with more than 80 percent of the vote, becoming the country's first democratically elected leader since 1993.

As you can see, a hard lead tends to be shorter than a soft lead — often only one sentence long. While soft leads can be longer, every sentence in the lead supports the main point of the story. And both leads include the most newsworthy elements of the story.

Choosing the right kind of lead depends on many factors, including the importance and timing of the story and the type of news organization, publication, or broadcast involved. Wire services, online-news sites, and radio newscasts that thrive on immediacy generally use hard leads. A weekly news program or magazine is more likely to use a soft lead, on the assumption that most of the audience already would know the central facts of the story.

The most common type of soft lead is the anecdotal lead, similar to the example used in the prime minister story. An anecdote is, by definition, a brief tale; when used as a lead it illustrates or foreshadows the larger story. A story about a social trend might begin with several related anecdotes or examples. On rare occasions, a quotation or a question may be the best way to begin a story. All of these leads also can be described as "delayed" leads, because the reader has to wait for several sentences to find out what the story is really about.

5.4 Story Structure

All stories have a structure in the same way that people have a spine, or, at least, they should! Without a structure, stories would be a jumble of facts with nothing to hold them together. Structure is essential for stories to be understandable and meaningful, but not all stories should be structured in the same way. Good writers choose the most suitable shape for the story they are telling.

5.4.1 INVERTED PYRAMID

Many news stories begin with the most newsworthy information, following a traditional story structure developed more than 100 years ago. The "inverted pyramid" form puts the most important information at the top, followed by other information in descending order of importance. This shape is useful when reporting important or breaking news, when timeliness is of the essence. If you are the first to report a significant development, you'll want to tell the audience what has happened right at the top of your story. A report on a massive storm, for example, likely would begin with the death toll and the location of the heaviest damage. Writers who resist using this structure when it is called for may be accused of "burying the lead," making it more difficult for the audience to determine the story's importance.



In the inverted-pyramid structure, information following the lead expands or develops the point that is made in the lead. In the case of the storm report, the writer might describe the scene of the worst devastation, and then include a quote from a survivor or an emergency worker. Supporting paragraphs would elaborate on the topic, filling in details and providing background on the storm. In a longer story, a reporter might include secondary information that is related to the primary theme but not directly. The storm story, for example, could include information about international relief efforts, and the needs of survivors, both immediate and long term. One reason for the popularity of this structure is that editors can cut from the bottom to save space and time without worrying about cutting vital information.

5.4.2 HOURGLASS



A modified form of the inverted pyramid is known as the "hourglass" structure. It begins, in a similar fashion, with the most important information — but after a few paragraphs it takes a turn and becomes a narrative, usually told in chronological order. Sticking with the example of the story about the massive storm, a reporter could start with a hard lead, provide a few paragraphs of support, and then tell the story of the storm as witnessed by one survivor. This kind of story form requires a clear transition between the opening section and the narrative. A reporter might write something like, "Farmer Iqbal Khan was in his barn when the wind

kicked up ..." to begin the bottom half of an hourglass story. Some stories are written in a purely chronological form, but this structure is most often used for features.

5.4.3 DIAMOND



Still another story form is the "diamond" structure. A reporter using this structure would begin with an anecdote, introducing a character whose experience illustrates what the story is all about. This small story would then broaden out to show its wider significance. Toward the end, the reporter would return to the individual character's story as a way of concluding the narrative.

Reporters using this structure often use a device known as a "nut" paragraph (or nut graph) to explain why the story matters — the word nut signifying the hard center of the story. Jack Hart, managing editor of Portland's *Oregonian* newspaper, says nut graphs "can answer any questions raised in leads, explain why stories are significant, and place stories in meaningful contexts." The nut graph needs to be early enough in the story to make clear to the reader why he or she should bother to keep reading.

The diamond form is frequently used in television news and newspaper reports. For example, a reporter might begin a story about a new AIDS treatment by introducing a patient who needs the treatment, then describe the experimental drug and how it works, and conclude by noting that doctors give the patient we met earlier only a limited time to live if the new treatment is not effective. Whatever form you choose, the middle of the story should keep the audience engaged and interested. Good writing, a magazine editor once said, makes the reader want to find out what happens next.

5.5 Endings

Unless you are using the traditional inverted pyramid style and you expect the bottom of your story to be trimmed by an editor, it's a good idea to have an ending in mind when you begin writing, much as it is helpful to have a destination in mind when you set out on a journey. This is particularly important in broadcast news because of the way it's presented. Unlike print or online news, broadcast news is linear — the audience can't choose the order in which they'll receive the information — and research has

found that viewers and listeners tend to remember best what they hear last. For that reason, many broadcast stories conclude with a summary ending, reinforcing the story's main point.

Endings often echo beginnings, in that they return to an important place or a person. In a chronological narrative, the ending is what happens last. If a story has raised a problem, the ending might offer a solution. Endings frequently look toward the future, to what might happen next. And occasionally a story may end with a strong quote or a sound bite. This is rarely justified, however, and should be used only when the quote is so powerful that writing anything more would be a letdown for the audience.

5.6 Attribution

A key difference between a news story and an editorial or opinion column is the use of attribution. Attribution simply answers the question, "Who says?" It identifies the source of the information reported, particularly any controversial statements or questionable information.

Attribution can be explicit or implied. Here's an example of explicit or direct attribution: "The man was arrested and charged with murder, police sergeant Antonio Costa said." Rewritten, using implied or indirect attribution, the sentence would read, "Police arrested the man and charged him with murder." In both cases, the audience can tell that the source of the information is the police.

One major reason to attribute information in most news stories is to allow readers, listeners, and viewers to decide for themselves whether to believe it. For example, a report that North Korea has decided to suspend its nuclear program could be seen as more or less credible by some audiences, depending on who is quoted as saying so: a visiting Chinese official or an international team of scientists.

Another reason for attribution is to place responsibility for a controversial statement where it belongs, with the person who said it, not with the reporter or the news organization. This does not imply immunity from lawsuits, as legal protections vary from country to country. But it is good journalistic practice to make clear who is making allegations or taking a particular stand.

Not all information in a news story needs to be attributed, however. Naming the source of every bit of information would make stories almost incomprehensible. Information that a reporter observed directly can be stated without attribution. Indisputable or well-accepted facts do not need to be attributed, either. For example, a reporter could say which team won a soccer match without attribution because the final score would not be in doubt. But writing that one candidate won a political debate would need to be attributed, or it would cross the line from fact into opinion.

5.7 Quotes and Sound Bites

News stories are told primarily in the reporter's words, but most stories also include the words of other people, in quotations or sound bites. When used effectively, quotes make stories stronger by sharing the direct experience of someone involved. Using a quote up high in a story can make it more interesting to the audience, because quotes provide a personal connection to the story.

By definition, a quotation must be attributed so the audience knows who said it. **Direct quotes** are at least one sentence long and are in the exact words of the speaker. They're used when most of what a speaker said is worth repeating. **Partial quotes**, primarily used in print, can be just a word or a phrase the speaker said, which are used when the full sentence may be confusing or too long. The reporter has the responsibility of putting partial quotes into context so the meaning of what the speaker said is unchanged. For example, when French President Jacques Chirac addressed his country after weeks of social unrest, he said: "We will build nothing lasting without fighting discrimination, which is a poison for society." Some reporters used that full, direct quote in their stories. But in London's *Guardian* newspaper, only one word of the quote appeared in the lead paragraph: "Jacques Chirac? launched an appeal to combat the 'poison' of racial discrimination."

It's never worth quoting everything someone says in an interview. But how do you choose what to quote directly? The basic rule is simple: Don't use a direct quote or sound bite if you can say it better yourself. Too many news stories are stuffed full of quotes that fail this test, most of which come out of the mouths of officials. Avoid quotes that merely state facts, especially in bureaucratic language. Who needs to hear the mayor say, "We expect to have a decision next week on contingency plans for the distribution of municipal funds to low-income recipients"? That kind of information would be much better paraphrased, that is, rewritten in clear, concise language by the reporter. In this case, the reporter might have written, "It will be at least a week before people can expect to get any money from the city, according to the mayor."

The best quotes are subjective, adding insight and perspective to stories. They use colorful language and reflect on personal experience or expert knowledge. They have passion, says television investigative reporter Tony Kovalesski. "During interviews, try and capture the passion," he says. "During writing, make sure not to miss it." One good rule of thumb is to use quotes that sound authentic, not as if they have been read from a script.

Once you've chosen the best quotes, build your story around them. But reporter Bob Dotson, with U.S. television network NBC, warns, "Don't use sound bites as substitutes for more effective story telling." Reporters who simply string quotes or sound bites together often are taking the lazy way out.

5.8 Numbers

A journalism teacher once described her students as "do-gooders who hate math." Most journalists will never come to love mathematics, but they need it, and they need to know why. Numbers may look solid and factual, but they are not infallible. Journalists need numerical competence in order to tell the difference between a meaningless number and a significant one, or they risk writing stories that are misleading and confusing, at best, and, at worst, flat out wrong.

Journalists need mathematics intuition so they can tell when the numbers they're looking at just don't add up. They need math mechanics to find the meaning behind figures and data. They need mathematical concepts so they can understand banking and business, bankruptcy and boom times. Simply put, journalists need mathematics skills to make sense of numbers the way they need language skills to make sense of words.

Competent journalists are both capable and careful with numbers. They're quick to spot an implausible number, and they have a basic working knowledge of arithmetic and statistics so they can confirm their suspicions. They know how to calculate percentages, ratios, rates of change, and other relationships between numbers that tell far better stories than raw data can. They can and should translate numbers into terms that readers and viewers can easily understand.

Journalists with numerical competence are more important than ever in today's highly technical world. They are the writers and editors who can assess and explain scientific, medical, technological, and economic developments. They are the journalists who can find stories in databases by crunching numbers themselves, instead of waiting for someone with a vested interest to do it for them.

Once the numbers have been checked and rechecked, the reporter has to decide how to use them in a story. The rule of thumb is: The fewer numbers, the better. Numbers should be rounded off for simplicity's sake, and put in context for clarity. "A number has little significance on its own," says Paul Hemp, author of *Ten Practical Tips for Business and Economic Reporting in Developing Economies*. "Its true meaning comes from its relative value." So a story about an increase in school spending might translate the raw numbers into the additional amount that will be spent per child. A story about the number of people who die of lung cancer every year might note that it is the equivalent of a jumbo jet crashing every day.

Journalists who fail to master mathematics lack a basic skill needed to decipher much of the information in the world around them, such as crime statistics, pollution standards, and unemployment figures. Without mathematics skills appropriate to their beat, journalists are bound to fall short in their quest for accuracy.

5.9 Editing the story

It's nine o'clock in the morning, and the editorial meeting in the newsroom begins with a discussion of the stories everyone is working on for that day.

Some reporters and photographers already have assignments and are out covering today's news. A few got their assignments last night; others were sent out early this morning after a conference call involving top news managers. Reporters who do not have assigned stories yet "pitch" their story ideas at the meeting, seeking a manager's approval to produce that story for tonight's newscast or tomorrow's newspaper. The assignment editor runs through a list of scheduled events that may or may not merit coverage. Once the decisions are made, the managers put together a "budget," or line-up of stories that they hope will soon be available for publication or broadcast.

At that point, you might think the managers could sit back and relax. But no decision in a newsroom is ever set in stone. Almost inevitably, plans change. News will happen that was not anticipated, and stories will be dropped because they didn't turn out as expected. Others will require more reporting and won't be completed today. Deciding what to run, what to drop, and what to hold is the job of the news managers, the editors, and producers. They will choose and change the stories of the day based on importance, interest, new developments, and the time or space available.

But the editor's job still isn't done. Before the newspaper goes to press or the broadcast hits the air, editors have another critical role to play. It's their job to ensure that the stories presented to the public are well written and presented, as well as accurate, complete, and fair.

Most newsrooms have more than one editor. No single person could handle the volume of stories produced by most news organizations every day. In large newsrooms, there may be several layers of editors, who ultimately report to the person in charge of the news division, the chief newspaper editor or the broadcast news director. As you will see the editor's job calls for a variety of skills, a high degree of literacy, as well as the ability to handle a changing agenda and work relentlessly under pressure.

5.9.1 The Editor's Role

A recent job listing for an editor at a small newspaper read, "This person should have strong writing, editing, and layout skills. ... He or she should be accurate, responsible, able to work well within a team atmosphere, and possess supervisory skills." A large television station seeking to hire a new producer asked for "expert news judgment ... superior writing skills ... must have management skills, must be multi-task oriented, and well organized."

As you can see, editors need to be strong journalists and newsroom leaders. They are involved in the news process from beginning to end. Editors need good news judgment because they serve as assignment managers, responsible for deciding what stories will be covered and by whom. They must be good writers in order to help to shape the story as it is developing, discussing it with reporters in the field and deciding where to deploy more people to cover additional angles. Editors are directly involved in decisions about story presentation, writing or choosing headlines, captions, photos, and illustrations. And they must lead and motivate the employees who report to them.

Editors and producers work closely with reporters, discussing and reviewing their stories. Newspaper editors check copy, choose illustrations — either graphics or photos — and decide how the story will be laid out on the page as well as the headline. In most broadcast newsrooms, reporters do not record their scripts or assemble their stories until a producer has approved the content. Producers also decide the order of stories in the newscast and the amount of time to be allocated to each story.

5.9.2 Copy Editing

Editors serve as a second set of eyes looking for any errors in a story. The emphasis here is on a second set of eyes. That's because reporters should always check their own copy for accuracy before submitting it to an editor. A first draft is a good start, but that's all it is. Every writer should allow some time for revising his or her own copy. Good writing, by definition, requires rewriting.

An accuracy check is the first level of copy-editing. Editors look for grammatical and usage errors, as well as for spelling mistakes. They pay particular attention to **subject-verb agreement** and **subject-pronoun agreement**. Editors make sure that all **numbers** in a story are correct: addresses, telephone numbers, ages, date, and time references. They rework any calculations the reporter may have performed to make sure the math is correct. They confirm that the reporter has used proper titles for everyone who is quoted, and they review the use of attribution throughout the story.

Editors also look closely for any errors of fact or issues of fairness. Thorough editors read stories with a skeptical eye, with questions like these in mind:

- How does the reporter know this?
- Why should the audience believe this?
- Is the main point of the story supported?
- Are the quotes accurate, and do they capture what the person really meant?
- Are all sides represented?
- Is something missing?
- Is the story fair?

Editors also pay attention to matters of taste and language, which vary depending on the local culture. Editors and reporters alike should read copy out loud — especially in broadcast newsrooms — listening for sentences that are too long, redundancies, awkward phrases, and double meanings. In many newsrooms, editors have the authority to change a reporter's copy without consultation to fix these kinds of basic problems.

Editors are not simply proofreaders, however. They are journalists in every sense of the word. Most editors and producers either have reporting experience or reporting skills. So when they read a reporter's story, they are looking for much more than basic accuracy. They want to know if a story would make sense to someone who knows nothing about the subject. They're mindful of the need to make stories engaging and interesting.

If a story falls short, the editor or producer must be able to work with the reporter to improve the final product. That's when their leadership skills come into play, as they use a process commonly called "coaching."

5.10 Headlines, Captions, and Teases

Besides editing reporters' stories, editors are responsible for additional material that accompanies the stories. In newspapers and online newsrooms, editors write headlines for stories and captions for photos. A headline is both a summary and an advertisement. It gives the audience a quick idea of what the story is about, and tells readers why they should be interested in reading the entire piece. A caption is more of a label, telling readers what the photograph or graphic shows. In broadcast newsrooms, producers may write headlines and also what are called teases, short descriptions of stories designed to make listeners or viewers want to stay tuned to get the full report.

Headlines, by definition, are short and catchy. A print headline summarizes the story, gets the reader's attention, helps to organize the news on the printed page, and, through the use of different sizes of type, indicates the relative importance of each story. When writing a headline, the editor simply does not

compress the lead paragraph into just a few words. Good editors try to capture the central point of the story in the headline, so they need to understand a story fully before trying to write a headline. The editor has to read the story from beginning to end, and look at the photographs and graphics that will accompany the story. If the main point isn't obvious, the editor should consult with the reporter rather than guess and risk printing a headline that is misleading or wrong. Besides, a confused editor is one indication that the story probably needs more work.

The language in headlines should be simple and straightforward. Use proper names and present tense. It's generally acceptable not to use conjunctions — articles like "the" — and to drop linking verbs like "is" or "were." A story that tells how a woman and her boyfriend were arrested for a string of bank robberies might be headlined: "Bandit, Boyfriend Held in Robberies." But avoid what editors call "headlines," verbs that appeal to headline writers just because they are short. Verbs like "probe," "eye," "nab," "vie," and "huddle" almost never are used in conversation, so they don't belong in headlines.

A headline should match the tone of the story. Hard news stories demand a straight summary, like this headline from the *Zimbabwe Independent* newspaper, "Smugglers Dent Zimbabwe's Gold Production." The headline makes sure the reader knows exactly what the story is about. Feature headlines, on the other hand, may only hint at the story's content, since they are written primarily to pique the reader's curiosity. For example, Argentina's *Buenos Aires Herald* ran this headline over a review of a new recording: "Sassy Madonna Goes Back in Time."

Because headlines have to fit in a restricted amount of space, the newspaper editor creates headlines the way you would build a jigsaw puzzle. The copy editor for an American newspaper — the *Newark Star-Ledger* — Joel Pisetznar, says, "I put words together like assembling a kidnap note. Scramble, descramble, mix and match." While it can be fun, editors say it's important to always keep the reader in mind. Avoid trite or overused expressions and be extremely careful with puns or double meanings. Headlines that try too hard to be funny, clever, or gripping often fail. Above all, headlines must be accurate and honest, not misleading. What is in the headline must be in the story. Nothing annoys a reader more than a story that doesn't deliver what the headline promised.

Much like a headline, a broadcast tease is designed to draw the viewer's attention to the rest of the story. Teases are subject to many of the same rules as headlines. Producers must watch the story and talk to the reporter before writing a tease. Trite and clever don't work in teases any more than they do in headlines. And teases should not over-promise or over-sell the content of the story that follows.

Unlike a newspaper headline, **the broadcast tease** is written in complete sentences. It stands alone, separated from the story by other news or advertising content. A tease usually does not summarize the story the way a headline would, since its goal is to make the viewer want to stay tuned in order to learn more. Instead, producers write teases that leave some questions unanswered, or they may create anticipation by promising to deliver a benefit to the viewer who keeps watching.

To illustrate the difference, consider the lead of this story from an American newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*, reported from Amman, Jordan: "An Iraqi woman appeared on Jordanian state television Sunday and confessed to being the fourth member of an al-Qaida suicide bomber team that attacked three hotels here last week, killing 57 people." The newspaper headlined the story: "Iraqi Woman Calmly Confesses How She Tried to Blow Up Hotel." But the tease for that same story on the NBC Nightly News on television was this: "Who is she? And why did she agree to be the fourth would-be hotel suicide bomber in Jordan? New details tonight." The television tease did not mention the woman's confession, but instead promised to answer the viewer's questions about her role.

Photo captions also have a different purpose from headlines. Instead of summarizing content the way a headline does, a caption helps the reader appreciate what's inside the visual frame. The photograph and caption together form a small story that the reader can understand without having to read the text of the story that accompanies it.

Captions should clearly identify the main people in a photograph. If several people are featured, it's often helpful to let the reader know that the central character is the one "wearing a cap" or "standing on the right." Captions should not repeat the exact wording of the headline or lift a sentence directly from the story. And caption writers don't need to spell out what can be seen clearly in the photo. "Carlos Fernz smiles as he gets off the plane" is a less effective caption than: "A jubilant Carlos Fernz returns from 15 years in exile."

Most captions are short, just one or two lines in small type. But on occasion, a newspaper or online site will carry multiple photographs with longer captions in a photo essay that tells a complete story. Longer captions can use quotations from the people pictured.

5.11 Graphics and Visuals

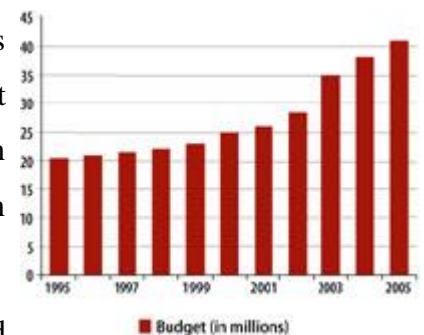
Newspaper reporters sometimes resent the use of graphics because they take up space, forcing stories to be shorter. But good graphics add to the visual appeal of the newspaper, attract readers' attention, and make stories more understandable. They help reporters' stories, rather than take away from them. As newspaper designer Ron Reason puts it, graphics are "information, not decoration."

Every graphic must have a purpose. Filling empty space or airtime is not a sufficient reason for using a graphic. A graphic should enhance the reader or viewer's understanding of the story, which means the editor must fully understand the story before designing or choosing a graphic to go along with it. Graphic artists usually produce the visual images; the role of the editor is to conceptualize the graphic, find the information it should contain or illustrate, and ascertain its accuracy.

Graphics can convey basic facts or illustrate a process. Imagine you are reporting on air pollution in your country. A map could be used to show where the air is most unhealthy. An illustration could be used to show how air pollution affects the lungs. Both types of graphics work just as well for broadcast as they do for print.

Whatever the medium, avoid graphics that are crammed with too much information. The reader or viewer should be able to look at the graphic and take away one basic idea. Think of a graphic as a highway sign — the driver doesn't get a chance to study it because things are going by too fast, so the information has to be clear and easily absorbed.

Let's imagine you have a story that says the city's annual budget is twice as large as it was 10 years ago. Reading closely, you notice that most of the growth has been in the last three years. A bar graph charting the size of the budget for each of the last 10 years would be an easy way to make that clear.



It is easier for readers and viewers to absorb information presented with shapes rather than raw numbers. For example, in a story about your city's business development crowding out residents, you could list the number of apartments and office buildings in the area. However, it would be more effective to create a pie chart showing the relationship between the two. Compare rates whenever possible, not raw numbers. It is misleading to show that one town has twice as many deaths from AIDS as another, when the first town has 10 times as many inhabitants. Calculate the rate of deaths per inhabitant so you can make a fair comparison. Editors who work with graphics need a grasp of statistics and a commitment to employ them transparently and accurately to enhance understanding.

Chapter Six: The Ingredients and Style of Writing

6.1 Ingredients of Good Writing

1. Simple Sentences: write simple declarative sentences by following subject-verb-object patterns. One sentence should contain one idea and image. If your sentence is very long try to put a period before the and or but. That will help you to divide a long sentence into two.

Whenever possible try to write average sentence that is readable:

Readability: This table is given to wire service writer:

Average sentence length	Readability
8 words or less	Very easy to read
11 words	Easy to read
14 words	Fairly easy to read
17 words	standard
21 words	Fairly difficult to read
25 words	Difficult to read
29 words or more	Very difficult to read

Paragraph should not be long. A long paragraph can discourage a reader. One way to keep paragraph length down is to limit paragraph to no more than three or four sentences.

2. Simple Words: media writers reach out their readers by using everyday language. The fewer big words, the better.

Adjectives and adverbs are the crutch of the inadequate writer, the writer who can not reach for the concrete nouns and the action verbs that enliven and propel writing. Adjective are props used to hold up shaky nouns and verbs. They get in the way of story movement.

3. Conviction: the manner of telling about the event should be appropriate to it; the event and its description should have a close fit.

4. Natural Style: out fourth ingredient of the well-written story is a writing style appropriate for the event. That is, the style of writing should fit the subject. The way a story is written is known as its style. We talk of broadcast writing style by which we mean that the writing attuned to the ear, not the eye. Sentences are short, the present tense is used and there is little detail that might confuse the listener.

6.2 Errors Galore

No matter how thorough the reporting and checking may be, or interesting the writing, all this work can be undone by a small slip, an error in spelling or incorrect grammar. A misspelled comma can kill a person:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Save him not, kill him. | Save him, not kill him. |
| 2. Woman, without her, man is an animal | Woman, without her man, is an animal |

1. Clichés

Over used words or phrases that are dull and boring because it have been said or told too many times. Clichés weaken the overall content of a story. Don't rely on clichés such as these to describe a situation or to present an image.

An eye for an eye	hit the nail on the head	the last but not the least
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2. Redundancy

It is unnecessary repetition of words or phrases. What do these phrases have in common: **serious crisis, trudged slowly, run quickly, ominous portent, carefully scrutinized?**

They belong to the same family as *totally destroyed* and *first annual*, the family of redundancies. The parents of these awkward children, these needless repetitions, conceived them in a passion of objectivities and adversities. Redundancies are also the offspring of muddy thinking.

Serious crisis-what crisis is trivial (adj.)?

Trudged slowly-you cannot trudge rapidly (adv.)

run quickly-try any other way to run (adv.)

ominous portent-see dictionary for portent (adj.)

carefully scrutinized-ditto for scrutinize (adv.)

Here is a list of common redundancies seen in newspaper copy. The Minnesota Newspaper Association compiled it.

Absolutely necessary	advance planning	ask the question	assemble together
at a later day	attached hereto	at the present time	canceled out
close proximity	consensus of opinion	cooperate together	each and every etc.

3. Journalese

The dictionary defines *journalese* as the language style characteristics of newspaper writing. Journalese known as the combination of clichés, hack writing, exhausted phrases and supercharged prose that are the signs of the hopeful beginner or the hopeless veteran.

6.3 Style and the Stylebook

Style is the way things are done around the news room. Style is the way you are supposed to do things. And style, you quickly find out, is often arbitrary, unreasonable and confusing. But it is important, and the first thing beginners should do is get a copy of the stylebook that governs writing practices and usage in the newsroom where they work and learn its rule.

All newspapers follow a stylebook of one kind or another. Many use the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual. Many large newspapers have their own stylebook, agreeing in most cases with the AP stylebook but often differing in one way or another.

Why Have a Stylebook?

A Need for Consistency

Stylebooks are devices for enforcing consistency in writing throughout the newspaper. This does not mean that the newspaper wants every one of its reporters, writers and editors to write exactly the same way. Far from it. No newspaper wants all its pages or all its writers to sound alike. But it does want consistency in punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation, spelling, the use of numbers and related matters. The AP, for example, says:

Use the abbreviations *Ave.*, *Blvd.*, *St.* only with the numbered address: *1600 Pennsylvania Ave.* spell them out and capitalize when part of a formal street name without a number.

Consistency is considered both a virtue and a necessity.

The Authority behind Style

Although stylebooks tend to be arbitrary and conservative about language, there is both authority and scholarship behind their rules. Stylebooks follow well-established standards. The AP stylebook, for example, bases its rules on spelling and usage on Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, a well-edited and up-date dictionary.

Personal Style

News style deals with mechanical matters-punctuation, spelling, capitalization, abbreviation and use of numbers- and with consistency. It presents some guidelines for clear and accurate writing, and it

establish some matters of newsroom policy. News style offers some useful and workable guidelines for organizing and writing news stories, but it should not inhibit you from developing your own style of writing. You can obey the newsroom stylebook and still develop your own style, your own way of saying things. Personal style is not the same thing as the style rules you find in the newsroom stylebook. Personal style is choice-your choice of words-the range of your vocabulary, your choice of colorful words, your ability to coin figures of speech, your ear for speech and dialect and apt expressions-, of idioms, of sentence structure and of grammatical alternatives. And it will come out of you.

Your personal style will develop overtime, and it will probably not start to grow until you have mastered the arbitrary and structured aspects of news style and the basic news structures. Once you feel comfortable with the basic matters of news writing, you will begin to reach out, to be more creative, to develop a style and approach to writing that is uniquely your own.

Chapter Seven: The Editorial

7.1 Editorial and Opinion Columns Writing

Journalists use the press power in various ways for different purpose. They used the power of the press for the intent of information and persuasion. The right words in a carefully constructed argument can change the world. Having this power, and recognizing responsibility to use it wisely, is why so many journalists love their work.

Editorial are the voice of the newspaper at large and are not signed even though they are usually written by one person. Editorial writers use the first-person plural pronoun, the *we* voice. **An opinion column** is signed and obviously represents the thought of one person. Opinion columnists use the first-person singular pronoun, the *I* voice. The journalistic “license” to use the *I* and *we* pronouns, restricted to editorials and other forms of opinion writing. By using the *we* in editorials and the *I* in opinion columns, the writers are putting credibility of the paper and their personal reputations on the line.

Because editorials are the voice of the paper and are unsigned, even though they usually written by one person, the opinions expressed in represent the majority those journalist staff members designated as the editorial board. An editorial board discusses the topic, arrives at some majority agreement and then presents one or more arguments in favor of the position it is taking.

Opinions expressed by columnists, usually don’t undergo the same discussion and consensus process as do staff editorials. This does not mean that a signed opinion column is not edited for style, content and legal factors such as potential libel.

7.2 Types of Editorials

Advocacy Editorial

Editorials that interpret, explain, persuade and advocate change will usually be tied to significant news, news features or sport story found with in the same issue of the paper. The editorial will tell the why whatever happened is important. It also explains the significance of an idea or condition. In some cases, it defines terms and issues, identifies persons and factors and provides background such as historical, cultural, geographical and pre-existing conditions, among others. The writers attempt to persuade the readers to accept a certain interpretation or conclusion may be overt or subtle.

Problem-Solution Editorial

This is another type of editorial. It is commonly found in most newspapers. Sometimes called an “editorial of criticism,” this type of editorial is used when the staff wants to call attention to a problem

or wishes to criticize someone's actions. Because of the needs for the paper to act responsibly, facts need to be presented to backup the criticism or to explain the causes of the problem, and solutions must be offered.

Editorial Cartoon

Perhaps the most succinct form for an editorial is the editorial cartoon. In a few words or a sentence or two if a cartoon is a strip rather than a single frame, the editorial cartoonist can do what the editorial writer does- commend, criticize, interpret, persuade and entertain. Coupled with distinctive art, usually a line drawing, the cartoon is a favorite form of commentary for readers.

7.3 Writing the Editorial

For an editorial, the writer should select a topic that is tied to some story that will be published in the same issue of the paper in which the editorial will appear or has some merit and the potential for high reader interest. A local angle, even on a national or international situation, or on a widespread belief, is important to the success of the editorial. Since it requires, the presentation of some facts, some evidence, the writer needs to do research.

Ideally, an editorial board, will review the topic, consider the evidence and agree on a position taken.

Most editorial are divided into three parts: The introduction, the body or evidence and the conclusion. The opening tells the reader what the staff believes; the body tells the reader why the staff has this belief or opinion; the conclusion tells the reader what the staff thinks should be done based on the evidence presented, or it summarizes the situation without providing any solutions.

7.4 Writing the Opinion Column

The editorial and the opinion column have one major similarity: They are either opinion or subjective analysis. They have some important differences as we have seen above. Unlike editorial, opinion columns are less formal than most editorials; columnists have more freedom and usually more space to present their ideas.

Columns often are structured the same way as an editorial, beginning with an introduction, followed by the body and ending with a conclusion.

Columnists often develop a style and a voice or select topics to write about that are consistently one type. Some always select topics that can be written about humorously. Other always write about money or travel or sports. Some write about what is often called "the human condition," the triumphs and tragedies of human life.

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