Teknik Pengumpulan Berita

KOJ 3431 (Unit 1-6/6)
Program Bacelor

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TEKNIK PENGUMPULAN BERITA

1. Salam Pengenalan

Saya, Muhamad Rosli Selamat, penulis dan penyusun modul ini mengucapkan tahniah dan syabas kepada semua pelajar yang telah berjaya meneruskan pengajaran masing-masing ke semester 7 program B Comm (PIJ)

2. Maklumat Penulis/Penyusun

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3. Tujuan Modul

Modul KOJ 3431 ini bertujuan untuk mendedahakan pelajar kepada bidang kewartawanan, khususnya akhbar dengan tumpuan kepada teknik pengumpulan berita. Aspek-aspek khusus yang disentuh, antaranya ialah pengurusan berita dalam era digital, aplikasi teknologi terkini dalam pengumpulan berita, prosedur dan panduan pengumpulan berita, faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi proses pengumpulan berita, pengumpulan berita untuk media cetak dan elektronik, dan teknik pengumpulan dan penulisan berita khusus

Seorang petugas atau pengamal komunikasi korporat yang berwibawa perlu tahu dan peka kepada kelainan dan keperluan publik-publiknya supaya ia berjaya dalam melaksanakan tugas dan berupaya mempertingkatkan ketrampilan dan profesionalisme komunikasi korporat masing-masing. Salah satu publik utama pengamal komunikasi korporat atau perhubungan awam ialah akhbar (sama ada wartawan, penyunting berita, institusi persuratkhabaran, badan penyiaran atau selainnya)
Maklumat atau berita merupakan salah satu komponen publisiti yang amat penting dalam pembangunan komunikasi korporat dan perhubungan awam. Berdasarkan perspektif komunikasi korporat, berita merupakan intipati publisiti dan promosi imej sebuah organisasi yang amat penting dan menjadi asas kepada mekanisme penyebaran maklumat korporat yang amat berpengaruh. Tanpa berita, imej tidak dapat dibentuk dan dicipta.

Untuk lebih spesifik, melalui modul ini pelajar akan didedahkan kepada beberapa maklumat asas tentang pengumpulan dan penulisan berita yang melibatkan aspek-aspek yang berkaitan dengan sumber berita, teknik dan prosedur pengumpulan berita, faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi proses pengumpulan berita dan juga aplikasi teknologi baru dalam pengumpulan berita.

4. Pengisian Unit

Modul ini terdiri daripada 6 unit. Cadangan kepada perancangan pembelajaran adalah seperti yang dikemukakan dalam rajah berikut,

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5. Penilaian

Melalui modul ini (pembelajaran setiap unit), pelajar akan diberikan latihan dan tugas yang cuba mengukur keupayaan mereka untuk mendapatkan maklumbalas dan kefahaman terhadap unit yang telah
dipelajari. Pelajar tidak perlu menghantar hasil latihan yang mereka lakukan. Walau bagaimanapun hasil tugas perlu dikemukakan kepada pensyarah bagi tujuan penilaian. Anda adalah digalakkan untuk membincangkan jawapan kepada latihan tersebut dalam sesi tutorial bersama tutor yang terlibat.

6. **Peperiksaan**

Soalan peperiksaan yang akan dikemukakan adalah berdasarkan modul dan bentuk soalan adalah secara subjektif atau esei. Maklumat mengenai tarikh peperiksaan akan dimaklumkan kepada pelajar oleh Bahagian Peperiksaan & Rekod Pelajar, IDEAL.

Terdapat dua kali peperiksaan, iaitu,

- Peperiksaan ½ Semester Soalan adalah berdasarkan Unit 1-3
- Peperiksaan Akhir Semester Soalan adalah berdasarkan Unit 4-6

7. **Maklumat Kursus**

Kursus KOJ 3431 (Teknik Pengumpulan Berita) bernilai empat jam kredit dengan komponen tiga jam kuliah dan satu jam amali untuk setiap minggu pembelajaran bagi pelajar sepenuh masa. Walau bagaimanapun bagi pelajar PJJ, anda perlulah mengurus masa anda sesuai dengan agihan komponen tersebut. Antara objektif kursus KOJ 3431 adalah untuk memastikan pelajar dapat,

- meningkatkan pengetahuan mengenai teknologi dan teknik yang terlibat dalam pengumpulan berita,
- mengenalpasti sumber pengumpulan berita,
- memahami pengaruh sumber ke atas proses pengumpulan berita,
- menerangkan teknik pengumpulan dan penulisan berita untuk media cetak dan elektronik,
- memahami pengaruh persekitaran terhadap proses pengumpulan berita,
- mengetahui teknik pengumpulan dan penulisan berita khusus.

Penilaian untuk kursus KOJ 3431 adalah berdasarkan agihan seperti berikut,

- Tugasan 40%
- Peperiksaan Pertengahan Semester 30%
- Peperiksaan Akhir Semester 30%
8. **Teks Rujukan**

Antara teks rujukan yang boleh anda gunakan bagi mengukuhkan kefahaman mengenai kandungan kursus KOJ 3431 adalah berdasarkan senarai di bawah ini,


Selain daripada teks di atas pelajar juga juga digalakkan untuk menggunakan perkhematan rujukan secara on-line yang disediakan oleh perpustakaan UPM. Perkhidmatan tersebut boleh anda layari melalui laman web (http://www.zeppnet.com/ehost/).

9. **Pendekatan Pembelajaran**

Untuk Kursus KOJ 3431 ini, anda diberikan maklumat mengenai tajuk-tajuk yang berkaitan dengan teknik pengumpulan berita. Pada setiap unit, dikemukakan maklumat mengenai objektif pembelajaran dan juga soalan-soalan perbincangan dan latihan yang boleh dilakukan oleh pelajar sendiri.

**SELAMAT MENELAHAH**

&

**SELAMAT MENGHADAPI PEPERIKSAAN**
Unit 1
Pengurusan Berita
dalam Era Digital

Objektif Pembelajaran:

Pada akhir pembelajaran unit ini para pelajar akan dapat:

1. Menerangkan ciri-ciri pemberitaan sesuatu peristiwa (event).
2. Menerangkan ciri-ciri akhbar "tabloid" dan "broadsheet".
3. Menjelaskan struktur pengurusan bilik berita
4. Menerangkan implikasi masalah tekanan bilik berita atau "newsroom stress" kepada pihak pengurusan media.
5. Menjelaskan ciri-ciri dan peranan seseorang wartawan yang berkualiti.

Topik Perbincangan Tutorial dan Latihan

1. Terangkan secara terperinci ciri-ciri pemberitaan yang biasa dilakukan oleh sesuatu media.
2. Bincangkan persamaan ciri antara akhbar "tabloid" dan akhbar "broadsheet".
3. Bincangkan perbezaan ciri antara akhbar "tabloid" dan akhbar "broadsheet".
4. Bincangkan struktur pengurusan bilik berita akhbar.
5. Jelaskan bentuk komunikasi dalam bilik berita.
6. Bincangkan implikasi tekanan bilik berita kepada pihak pengurusan media.
7. Jelaskan petanda yang menyebabkan berlakunya tekanan kepada seseorang wartawan.
9. Terangkan ciri-ciri dan kualiti yang perlu dimiliki oleh seorang wartawan.

**Sumber Bahan Pembelajaran Modul**

Rujukan yang digunakan sebagai bahan pembelajaran pada modul Unit 1 ini adalah sebagai berikut:

1. *News Values (m.s.4)*
   Sumber:
2. *Working in a Digital Age Newsroom*  
   *(m.s.25)*  
   *Sumber:*  
   *Herbert, John* *(2000)* *Journalism in the Digital Age: Theory and Practice for Broadcast, Print and On-line Media,*  
News Values

'Dog bites man' is not news, 'man bites dog' is
(John Bogart, editor of the New York Sun)

News is what somebody wants to suppress, all the rest is
advertising
(attributed to Lord Northcliffe in MacShane, 1979 46)

These aphorisms focus on particular elements of news but do not constitute a systematic analysis. Journalism textbooks provide definitions of the newsworthy features of events; the most famous is Macdougall's 'timeliness, proximity, prominence, consequence and human interest' (quoted in Romano, 1986. 59). However, such general principles are so general that without detailed discussion of examples they tell us relatively little. The earliest attempt to provide a more systematic definition was made by Galtung and Ruge (1970). They distinguish eleven features, or dimensions, of events which make them likely to be reported in news media.

1. Frequency: The event must be complete within the publication cycle of the news organization reporting it.
2. Threshold: The event must pass a certain size threshold to qualify for sufficient importance to be newsworthy.
3. Clarity: What has actually happened must be relatively clear.
4. Cultural proximity: It must be meaningful to the audience of the news organization in question.
5. Consonance: The event must be in accordance with the framework of understanding which typifies the culture of the potential audience.
6. Unexpectedness: Within the framework of meaningfulness identified in features 4 and 5, the event must be unexpected or rare.
News Values

7. **Continuity**: If an event has already been in the news, there is a good chance it will stay there.

8. **Composition**: Coverage of events is partially dictated by the internal structure of newsgathering organizations.

9. **Actions of the elite**: Events involving elite people or organizations are more likely to be covered than those of people perceived as unimportant.

10. **Personification**: Events that can be seen in terms of individual people rather than abstractions.

11. **Negativity**: Bad events are more newsworthy than good ones.

These features of events, singly or in combination, increase the chance of an event being considered newsworthy. Inevitably most reported events are characterized by more than one of these features; particular combinations define the type of story, or the ‘angle’ of the event, that is responsible for its newsworthiness.

The usefulness of these analyses of news values can be shown by considering one story which was prominent in the UK media in the days following Tuesday, 27 June 1995. The English film actor Hugh Grant, who had just shot to fame after the release of *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, was accused of ‘lewd conduct’ with a prostitute by the Los Angeles police; charges were brought and the police identification photograph was made available to the news media. Grant did not deny the charge.

First, the event was reported immediately after it occurred. The report was ‘timely’ in that sense, although it probably would have been ‘timely’ even if the information had been made public some time after the event, since the public availability of the information would itself still have had news value. However, this does not exhaust the question of timeliness. As Galtung and Ruge (1970) argue, it is important that the event in question should be complete within the cycle of publication of the news channel. They use the example of the construction of a dam: what is reported is the beginning of the project (funding agreement) and its completion (the opening ceremony); its gradual construction on a day-by-day basis would not usually provide events that are significant. Thus ‘construction’ comes to mean - in news terms - inception and completion. Similarly, court cases are commonly only reported (in national media) on the first and last days, with the exception of very high-profile trials, indeed, national media crime correspondents do not regularly attend in court on the intervening days, editors rely on agency reports. Another example is the reporting of a protracted event such as a war: what is reported on a day-to-day basis is what has happened during the last twenty-four hours, or what has happened since the last news report. If the latter is the case, some
element of explanation of what has occurred in the time lapse is
necessary and this raises the further question of the time frame that
surounds the news cycle and is implied in reports (Schudson, 1986-
84). Hugh Grant's arrest has an implied time frame deriving from the
reasons for his celebrity, but beyond that it is given only by the nature
of the event.

The next value to consider is 'prominence', which we can equate in
this instance with Galtung and Ruge's categories of 'threshold' and
'elite': it is Grant's fame that is responsible for the newsworthiness of
the event. More exactly, it is Grant's fame in the UK and the US that is
responsible. Well-known in journalism is 'McLurg's law' which
establishes a ratio between the size of an event and its distance from
(or relevance to) the news audience (Schlesinger, 1987: 117). Gans'
survey (1980: 4-6, 12) of those whose actions were reported in US
news media shows that roughly 75 to 80 per cent were 'knowns', as he
calls them; 20 to 25 per cent were 'unknowns'. The majority of the
knowns were in fact a group of approximately fifty people, all 'high
Federal officials'; the identity of these knowns is certainly affected by
his sample of news media, all of which had national as opposed to
regional circulations in the US, but the general principle is not in
doubt. All the media in question were non-tabloid, which would also
have had an effect.

In discussing 'prominence' we have already opened up the topic of
'proximity', which Galtung and Ruge call both 'proximity' and
'consonance'. In the case of Grant's arrest, prominence and proximity
are effectively the same: it is his fame that is responsible for both.
'Consonance' in this instance is unproblematic since the event is
perfectly comprehensible in terms of the cultural norms of our society.
Prostitution in relation to male sexuality, the bizarre lifestyles of the
rich and famous. A category of event which poses greater problems for
the cultural norms of our society, and which therefore makes the
theme of 'consonance' more visible, is the religious miracle. In
September 1995, all UK national newspapers reported a 'miracle' in
which stone statues in Hindu temples appeared to drink milk. This
constituted a problem for objective, factual news reporting since
miraculous events are only partially consonant with the norms of
modern Western culture. As a result UK newspapers were divided over
whether to report this as a miracle or as a sham. On 27 September 1995
the London Evening Standard presented a summary of press
reporting and commented that the nature of the event posed problems
for normal news procedures. Other mysterious events such as UFO
sightings may pose the same problem, depending on the credibility of
the source.

In the case of Grant's arrest, we can also consider the questions of
'proximity' and 'consonance' in relationship to 'consequence' and Galtung and Ruge's category of 'continuity'. Grant's arrest had consequence in relationship to his future as a star and especially the launch of his latest film; it was debated whether the scandal might fit well or badly with the public persona involved in the launch (Guardian G2, 29.6.95: 2-3; Evening Standard, 29.6.95: 15). Even more attention was paid to the potential consequences for his much-publicized relationship with Elizabeth Hurley, who was just about to be launched as the new 'face' of Estee Lauder beauty products. As a result, follow-up stories in the UK media focused on her (since Grant managed to hide for some days) and her reaction to the news: for example, photographs of her were interpreted through captions drawing attention to the emotional significance of her expression. Here we can see a fundamental news value principle in operation: the notion of 'consequence' operates both in the sense that an event may be considered newsworthy because of its likely consequences, and may remain newsworthy over time because of the way in which news attention produces material which enables a focus upon the unraveling of these consequences - Galtung and Ruge's 'continuity'. In the case of Grant's arrest, even the prostitute's version of events was newsworthy: she was paid $100,000 for her story by the News of the World (Guardian G2, 3.7.95: 13).

The event was also unexpected. Inevitably the 'unexpectedness' of events conflicts with their 'consonance', in the sense that consonance indicates comprehensibility whereas unexpectedness points in the opposite direction. It is the balance between the two that is crucial, as was noted many years ago by an American commentator: '[the journalist's] commodity is not the normal, it is the standardised exceptional' (Bent, 1927, quoted in Sigal, 1973: 66). This event was unexpected, not of course in the sense that it is unlikely that men should consort with prostitutes, but in the sense that it is a breach of the normal moral framework of our society, and - perhaps - in a much more emotionally charged sense. Grant and Hurley had become prominent public symbols of glamour, and it seemed incomprehensible that someone with that status should be revealed so dramatically to be involved in something sordid. Here the factual reporting of an incident is linked to cultural themes that are more or less well articulated in public discussions and private conversations. The conventional distinction between factual news reporting and editorial comment or feature writing operates to maintain this distinction, although in some media - especially tabloid - the distinction between reporting and commenting is frequently blurred. As a result, the points about glamour and sordid behaviour are not found in the news reports, although they were made in commentaries at the time: this
Spinning into Control

'Information' would be lacking in news reports even though - arguably - this was why so much attention was paid to the event.² Clearly the event was also negative, highly personalized and associated with elite people - here the importance of the event and the elite nature of Grant and Hurley's status are largely the same thing. Also, the 'personification' involved gave a personal identity to something that is otherwise publicly debated in the abstract.

By 'composition', Galtung and Ruge mean that news organizations balance coverage of different areas of activity in the world according to the subdivision of news organizations into sections. This claim is substantiated by Sigal's analysis of one year of the front pages of the New York Times and the Washington Post: he shows that 'whatever the variation in world events and news flow, ... the front page [of these papers] had a tendency to contain an equal number of stories from the national, foreign and metropolitan desks' (1973: 30–1). This balance is not the result of an average over time (which would not be surprising) but is achieved on a daily basis. Tuchman observed the same process in a US regional daily (1978: 33). The explanation offered by all three studies is the bureaucratic nature of news organizations and the importance of giving different groups of journalists the amount of access to news space they expect. The Grant story happened to coincide with the election of a new leader of the Conservative Party caused by the Prime Minister's sudden and dramatic decision to resign his position as leader and seek re-election, while it is likely that the Grant story would have been news-worthy under any circumstances, its nature made it a welcome relief on the pages of newspapers and broadcast bulletins dominated by the minutiae of political debate and produced predominantly by specialist political staff.³ Whether the balance found by Sigal would obtain in tabloid or broadcast news is unclear; certainly major news stories have the effect of 'unbalancing' the front pages.

There is a certain degree of inconsistency in these criteria which reduces their usefulness, despite the ease with which it has been possible to exemplify them. Some of the criteria are effectively elements of cognition, deriving from a social psychological approach to understanding data processing; they thus refer to subjective understanding of the world, whether on the part of the journalist or the reader - 'clarity' and 'proximity' are clear instances of such criteria.⁴ Others are specific to media routines: 'page composition' and 'frequency' fall into this category; such criteria are not a part of the normal cognitive apparatus. As a result, there is a certain randomness in the way in which these criteria are able to account for news events, for there is no obvious reason why an element of universal cognitive processes, such as 'consonance', should be adopted as a criterion of
News Values

news evaluation. If it is indeed clear that on occasions consonance is a relevant criterion - as in the instance of the milk miracle referred to above - it is obvious that the criterion of 'unexpectedness' is often close to incompatible with it: the tension between the two is clear. Galtung and Ruge's criteria probably cannot constitute a systematic basis for the analysis of news, but are useful as an ad hoc set of elements with a partial explanatory value.

It is implied in the preceding analysis that the general principles which constitute 'newsworthiness' are only to be understood in relation to particular contexts. In each case, we have to ask what features of the event in question make it conform to the news criterion in question. As an example, we can take Galtung and Ruge's own instance of the construction of a dam, where what is reported is various stages in the construction which are complete within a single news cycle, such as the opening ceremony. Of course, it is true that the ceremony does indeed conform to this criterion in the way that they say. But that is not the only - or even the main - reason why the event is reported; it is also because the construction of the dam - 'summarised', as they put it, in the ceremony - passes a certain 'threshold' of importance or interest. The criterion of 'threshold' is rather obvious in the example of Hugh Grant, but in other instances such as the construction of a dam, what occurs is that the actual event chosen as the peg for the report only crosses the threshold because it is the event that fits within the news cycle while depending for its importance on its relationship to the longer-term process which it summarizes. In other words, in an instance such as the construction of a dam, the news judgement is that the overall event is important and/or interesting and that its overall significance justifies the attention given to the particular event reported (e.g. its inauguration).

But this analysis needs to be taken one stage further. By referring to the importance of the event, we are still essentially in the realm of the 'universal' news criteria listed above. But an event is only important in a particular context, or - if you prefer - it is important because of some dimension of the event. A dam may be important because it is large and expensive, or because it is a threat to wildlife or historic sites, or because it will transform people's lives for the better (or all of the above and many other reasons). Whatever is the case in a particular instance, it is that particular understanding of the significance of the event that will constitute its newsworthiness and that will provide the theme of the coverage. Thus the 'universal' criteria of newsworthiness are always to be understood in terms of their relevance to the structures of particular events.

For example, in the summer of 1995, a report of an abnormally high number of hospital admissions for asthma in south London was linked
to the 'packaging' of some already published scientific studies of the
effects of air quality on respiratory problems by a public relations
company retained by various medical charities. Here the timeliness is
given by reported hospital admissions, which transforms the news
value of the already published research, but by the same token, it is the
wider frame of public concern about pollution and health which gives
the fact about admissions its impact power: the news value of the
events in question derives from the nature of their links to the context
in which they occur. We have already seen the way in which the news
coverage of Leah Betts' death could not be explained without
reference to features of the social context in which the events
occurred (the crystallization of parental fears about teenage drug use
in 'ordinary' families, for example). This principle applies to all news
stories in the sense that the general principles of newsworthiness
discussed above can only operate within particular event-contexts.
Thus Hugh Grant is famous, but being famous implies being famous
for some particular kind of activity. In his case, it was his association
with the world of glamour, produced through his personal relation-
ships and his film persona. This fame - as opposed to any other fame -
seemed incompatible with the sordidness of the event. Increased
hospital admissions for respiratory ailments passed the threshold test
because of the context of well-developed public concerns about the
impact of pollution.

Thus when we explore events in terms of their articulation of news
values - in other words, when we analyse the information flows in
which the public profile of events is constituted - we expect to do so
in terms of the relationship between the events and the framework
within which they occur. Such frameworks are interpreted according
to the general news principles outlined above, but in order to explain
the relationship between news values, source strategies and journal-
istic judgements, it is the features of particular contexts which need to
be examined. In Chapter 1, I argued that news values were not an
empirical entity, but an 'ideal object' akin to a language, in other words
a semiotic system: they consist of a set of criteria which transcend
individual judgements, but whose empirical existence is manifested in
their application in particular contexts. Now we can see that news is
doubly a semiotic system as well as an empirical one: it is cast in the
terms of the 'universal' news values and also in the 'local' symbolic
terms of understandings of the meanings of events or categories of
events. As a result, the discussions of particular series of events in this
book will concentrate primarily on the context-bound elements of
news values rather than the 'universal' ones to be found in textbooks.
But it is significant that news criteria always involve understanding
events both in terms of their relationship to ongoing contexts and,
News values

simultaneously, in terms of their conformity to the 'universal' news
values of timeliness, etc. In other words, news value consists of that
aspect of an event which is in accordance with the timeliness, interest,
importance, etc., of the event's relationship to its context. From the
point of view of news sources, it is the capacity to define an event in
terms where their own interpretation and news criteria converge
which provides the motive for attempting to achieve a public
definition of it via the news media.

Gans (1980. 145-80) defines newsworthiness in terms of the
'suitability' of events, of which there are three basic forms: 'substantive',
'product' and 'competition'. Substantive suitability consists of elements
of story content, essentially its importance or interest; Gans' argument
here is little different from Galtung and Ruge. 'Product' suitability is
based in the relationship between the story and the format of the
medium or channel reporting it. It may be, for example, the size of a
story in relation to the audience's presumed interest in it; or it may be
the availability of some particular element in the composition of the
story. For example, in the case of Hugh Grant's arrest, his photograph
was made available to the media close to the moment the story broke in
a way which gave it a certain rarity value; the police identity photograph
was made available to the media by the local police - a routine
occurrence - and an enterprising agency photographer, realizing its
potential, re-photographed it and promptly made it available on the
Internet; the rapid availability of a photograph, which was the exact
opposite of the usual film star 'glamour' pose, was clearly part of the
profile of the story (Decisive Moments, BBC2, 28 12 95). In other words,
the photograph was certainly 'timely', but it was also its pictorial impact
which was significant, and this can only be understood in terms of the
context - the contrast between a police identity photograph and a
glamorous publicity photograph. In general, all other things being
equal, television is more likely to give news attention to an event where
film is available; this has led organizations that seek publicity via the
news to ensure the availability of relevant, fresh video footage at times
that fit with TV channels' output schedule (known as 'video news
released', their role in maximizing TV coverage of events fell somewhat
into disrepute in the aftermath of the Brent Spar affair). Competition
suitability refers to the desire not to miss something that rival channels
have got, and if possible to scoop them with an exclusive.

All of the above are features of events which make them potentially
liable to attract editorial attention and to be selected for inclusion in
news reports. However, journalists also distinguish between different
categories of news. The most common are 'hard' news, 'soft' news,
'spot' news, 'diary' news, 'breaking' news and 'investigative' journal-
ism.
The reliability of information about events is another feature of decisions about their inclusion (or exclusion) in news reports, and thus part of news values. Reliability derives in part from the journalistic evaluation of the sources from which information is obtained, in part from corroboration. Information is considered to be reliable when it comes from a proven reliable source, or when it can be verified. Journalism textbooks often use ‘triangulation’ as a way of assessing the reliability of information, i.e. checking it with two independent sources. A reliable source may be one whom a reporter has come to trust through extended personal experience, or one whose institutional position makes him or her reliable because she or he is obliged to take public responsibility for any on-the-record statement. Thus any such statement, if made within the speaker’s competence as the representative of an organization or a body of knowledge with a valid public profile, will be acceptable as ‘true for all practical purposes’ (Murphy, 1993: 12; cf. Gans, 1980: 128–31, 181–6, see also Chapter 7). In other instances, reliability may be more problematic: if information is given ‘off the record’, ‘unattributably’ or as ‘background’ only, the speaker is not obliged to take public responsibility for what is said; the role that such information flows play in political communications is well known, and the ethical implications have been widely debated in both the USA and the UK.\(^{10}\)

Here we should distinguish carefully between two different news judgements: in one, the fact that X claimed such-and-such, where X is an important or interesting person, is a fact worthy of publication even if there is no reason to think that X is telling the truth, or no way of checking it; in another, journalists will only accept a piece of information as factually correct and worth printing if it can be shown that X was in fact telling the truth. The relationship between these two judgements is complicated and enormously varied according to circumstances. To take a simple fictitious example: if someone with large, well-defined public responsibilities (say, the prime minister) says that he thinks that X is the case, the fact that he has said so is in itself worthy of attention, even if he is mistaken or lying. But in other circumstances the process may be very different: during the events that subsequently came to public attention as the insider trading scandals on Wall Street in the late 1980s, two bankers tried to launch a price rise in some shares they had bought by publicizing the plan (which they knew to be true) that the company would shortly be the subject of a take-over bid; they did this by tipping off a Chicago business-page journalist. The journalist checked the story and decided it was not true, or at any rate unsubstantiable; it was not printed. It was printed only when the bankers substantiated it with details of private meetings which other sources corroborated (Stewart, 1991:
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125). The journalist's care was no doubt due to the fact that attempts to
launch rumours in order to move share prices ('ramping') is a well-
known device (see Chapter 4). A more complicated example is the
origin of the scandal concerning rigged quiz shows in the USA in the
late 1950s (Stone and Yohn, 1992: 13–19). Here an actor who had been
a contestant objected to what he saw and approached various people
with a view to stopping it, including a newspaper reporter. The
reporter persuaded him to write out an affidavit to give to the Federal
Communications Commission and - without telling him - sent it to the
FCC; sometimes together, sometimes separately, they approached
various members of the quiz-show organization and their sponsors,
and eventually the New York District Attorney's office. At the quiz-
show offices the actor was eventually given a substantial amount of
money in cash in return for signing documents, which he was not
allowed to retain in copy form; the journalist's paper considered that
without the documents the story was not printable. However, they
subsequently ran the story on the basis that a complaint had been
made to the FCC and the District Attorney. In this instance, the reporter
clearly believed that the complaint was essentially true, but was having
some difficulty in substantiating it because there was only one source
and no documentation. By involving the two official bodies, even if
only passively, there was the core of a story which had objective
validity: a complaint had indeed been made, even if it had
subsequently turned out to be unjustified. Clearly the hope was that
publicity would unleash a further sequence of events which would
bring the truth into the open and validate the complaint. In this
instance, the 'objective method' of reporting only facts ('a complaint
has been made') served the interests of truth rather well, but it is often
said that this method makes journalists into accomplices of established
public authorities because of the tendency to accept the fact that they
say something as sufficient warrant for publishing it as if it was the
truth (for example: Willis, 1991; Weaver, 1994; Hallin, 1986): in this
account 'objectivity' and 'truth' are not at all the same thing (see
Lichtenberg, 1991, for a cogent defense of the objective method
against such criticisms).

So far this analysis has proceeded as if news values were uniformly
distributed across media systems, but there is an important reservation
to be made: the distinction between tabloid and broadsheet formats.
These two formats have traditionally been associated with differences
in news values; the type of event which might figure in tabloid formats
might not pass the threshold criteria of broadsheet media, and vice
versa.14 Again the instance of Hugh Grant's arrest is a good example:
this event in fact did figure in both types of media, because his arrest
made it hard news, but had the event consisted of somebody less
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authoritative than the police asserting that Grant had been guilty of the behaviour he was in fact charged with, it is possible that the allegations might have been reported in the tabloids but not in the broadsheets. The actress Gillian Tayforth sued the Sun over a report in which the newspaper claimed that she had been questioned by the police over an incident of lewd conduct with her lover; the source of the allegation was certainly not official. The original report in the Sun appeared some
time after the incident in question, and was little mentioned by broadsheet media until the court action.

The differences in news values are held to be considerable, as the tabloids are accused of sensationalization and triviality, implicitly suggesting that broadsheet journalism is characterized by the opposite of these attributes. For example, the commentator Roy Greenslade, writing in the Observer (14.7.96), made the accusation that the news values of UK national tabloids led to self-evidently inadequate coverage of the ‘stand-off’ between Ulster Loyalist marchers and the Royal Ulster Constabulary at Drumcree in the previous week; coverage was relegated to brief mentions on their inside pages. However, another recent journalistic commentary suggested that in the last ten years the differences between the tabloids and the broadsheets had been considerably eroded; both in layout design and choice of stories, the broadsheets had become more like the tabloids (Matthew Engel, Guardian, 3.10.96). For instance, the coverage of an event such as Hugh Grant’s arrest would probably have received little coverage in the broadsheets before the 1990s.

There are no wide-ranging systematic studies of these differences but we can address the question by considering what the potential differences are. They fall into the two categories, which are effectively different dimensions of comparison:

1. the choice of stories covered, i.e. the decision whether or not to give any space at all to a particular event,
2. the treatment given to the story.

Both of these dimensions need further development.

Story choice can be seen primarily in terms of the importance, interest and meaning of the event in question relative to all the other events that are potential candidates for inclusion – this is the purpose of traditional studies of news values, summarized above. But it should also be seen in terms of the time in the life-cycle of the event at which editorial choice is to be made; this involves a calculation about whether treatment by other media makes coverage necessary, and – crucially – decisions about whether to continue coverage of the event after the first day in a potential news event life-cycle. Analysis of this variety can only be done on a longitudinal basis, following one or
more stories through at least some part of their life-cycle. The Louise Woodward case study does this; the case studies in other chapters are all based on longitudinal analysis.

Treatment can be analysed in both quantitative and qualitative terms: the amount of coverage devoted to the event; its place in the paper (an indication of the importance attributed to the event); the choice of themes within the event which are deemed to constitute its meaning.

The quantitative comparisons, amount and position, need some refinement. The absolute amount of coverage devoted to a story in a newspaper is not a good indication of the importance attached to it since newspapers have very different amounts of space available for news reports (the 'newshole', to use US newsroom jargon), and therefore in my analyses the absolute size of reports is expressed in a device which makes allowance for this difference. The qualitative comparison between themes can be quantified by measuring the amount of space devoted to each theme as a percentage of report space; some of the longitudinal studies in later chapters are based on this technique.

Analysis of a small and chronologically random sample reveals the following similarities and differences between the tabloid and the broadsheet press:

- There is substantial agreement between the two sectors about what constitutes the main story or stories on any given day. This does not imply that all papers always choose the same story as their lead story, but that more often than not there is majority agreement about the events to which substantial attention is to be given by the national press; exceptions are likely to come from scoops, from the fact of previous coverage producing a new agenda, and from the search for title identity. The latter probably derives mainly from commercial rivalry, where sector-specific rivalries dictate tactics rather than differentiation from other-format papers.
- Where stories are covered by a substantial proportion of the press - but neither universally nor with the degree of emphasis given to major events - story choice is not very likely to correlate with the tabloid/broadsheet distinction. Where this distinction is concerned, variations in story choice are less important than variations in story treatment, this is as likely to be a product of title identity or of idiosyncratic news judgement as it is of format.
- A large percentage of the stories to which not much attention is given are reported in only a small minority of the press, and it is difficult to discern any consistent pattern in their distribution.
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- Where there are clear differences in story choice between the two press sectors they are predicated primarily on two features:

  The tabloid press carries substantially fewer foreign stories than the broadsheet. With the exception of major political stories, the criterion of choice for tabloid inclusion of such stories is either human interest (e.g. disasters) or UK involvement in some form, availability of photographs is also important here.

  The distinction between human interest stories and policy community stories; although both sectors carry both types of story, there is a clear difference of emphasis in this respect.

- Where the same stories are covered across both sectors, broadsheets extend coverage (beyond the tabloid limits) by including more material which refers to background information, policy context or a wider range of reactions to events.

This analysis probably over-emphasizes the similarities and underestimates the differences between the two sectors. First, in order to simplify the contours of the comparison, the mid-markets have been placed in the same category as the red-top tabloids, however, although the format of both is tabloid in the literal sense, this similarity hides a mass of differences, the mid-markets have a larger newshole. (In the case of the Daily Mail the difference is considerable - in our snapshots it covers more events than the Independent.)

Secondly, the analysis is based upon general news pages, and many of the most obvious differences between tabloids and broadsheets are to be found elsewhere - in sports coverage, in features, and in competitions and promotions; by the same token, this analysis omits pin-ups. In particular, the red-tops' constant attention to showbiz stories is omitted from the comparison because it is subsumed under variations in story choice. Also, the random sample which underpins this analysis does not include any days on which either of the red-top tabloids was campaigning on any issue. Overt campaigning is one of the striking differences between the two sectors. For example, the Sun ran a protracted campaign on behalf of the Dunblane parents' attempts to get a comprehensive ban on handguns following the massacre in the local primary school.

The content analysis in Curran and Seaton (1985: 114–5) which compares percentages of total space devoted to different types of content by title and across time can be reinterpreted to allow some comparisons which are relevant here (although the small number (two) of broadsheet titles in the sample must lead to caution). Most significant is the balance between human interest and public affairs reporting, where the figures are as follows over all papers, average
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public affairs space is 18 per cent, average human interest space is 22 per cent, tabloids are consistently below the public affairs average, broadsheets are consistently above it, mid-markets are on or close to it. In human interest reporting, the mid-markets and the tabloids are consistently above average and the broadsheets well below it (figures for 1976). Tabloids consistently give roughly 8 to 10 per cent more space to photographs than broadsheets. This reveals a significantly different approach to news.

Thirdly, in an attempt to make valid comparisons about the treatment of topics, the analysis is disproportionately based on stories which were in fact shared across sectors. But equally interesting would be an analysis which looked at story choice based upon a selection of events which allowed the type of treatment which was typical of the paper's 'general approach' or identity, which is not separable from its sector position. For example, on 30.10.96 the entire national press with the exception of the Sun put on the front page the story of the disagreement between the then Education Secretary Gillian Shepherd and the Prime Minister about corporal punishment in schools. The Sun led on a story about a postman who had been sacked for looking through a woman's letter-box and seeing her in the nude, and relegated the 'canning' story to the inside pages. There were two possible reasons for this: the Sun had in fact broken the story about policy differences apropos corporal punishment in a brief exclusive report the previous day and perhaps felt it did not want to give it maximum prominence on the second day, but no doubt it is mainly a question of the type of treatment the two events lend themselves to.

Finally, very little attention has been paid to differences in news values deriving from political affiliation. This is largely an artefact of the actual days chosen for the snapshot analyses, where political differences were relatively low in salience; it is also possible that the nature of UK parliamentary politics in the final months of the Major government and the first few months of the Blair government blurred the traditional political allegiances of the press, albeit for different reasons. The relationship between news values and the political affiliations of newspapers is sufficiently complex to require separate analysis.

A balance between our two types of analysis suggests that in the case of major news stories there is a great deal of similarity between the two sectors where both story choice and the core of story treatment are concerned. However, as soon as we move away from this area of concern, the differences are marked. What is unclear - and needs a form of analysis that is more subtle than this one - is the extent to which differences in identity between ules and between sectors lead to both differences in the types of story chosen for coverage, and differences in emphasis within story treatment. The final section of this
chapter follows a particular story that was universally and massively covered during one weekend in an attempt to see how such differences and similarities affect the coverage of one event: the trial verdict in the case of au pair Louise Woodward, charged in the USA with the murder of the baby she was caring for. The October trial attracted attention in all UK national dailies and on television, following more sporadic coverage during the spring and summer.

The guilty verdict was delivered on Thursday evening, 30 October, at around 9:30 p.m. local time (2:30 a.m. Friday UK time); sentencing was the following morning. The already high volume of attention increased dramatically at the moment of the verdict. On Saturday and Sunday, all national newspapers carried coverage. No doubt the motive for the wide coverage was the extent of earlier coverage, and in particular extensive TV coverage of the trial while it was in progress, using live footage from the courtroom. Thus the coverage at the weekend must be seen in the context of the continuation of interest from the earlier stages of the story, and in particular from the previous day's TV coverage. It is also - arguably - a tabloid story in the sense that coverage is dominated by or predicated on the sensational nature and human interest element of the events, as will be seen in the content analysis; yet analysis of the coverage of the whole case reveals that broadsheets paid as much and as regular attention to events as did the tabloids; indeed, in the period between the opening of court proceedings in the spring and the trial proper in the autumn, the Daily Telegraph provided the most regular coverage.

The thematic core of the story as it developed from the moment of the verdict can be seen by looking at the reporting in an evening mid-market paper which has a regional monopoly. The London Evening Standard covered the event extensively, devoting the entire first seven pages of editorial content to the story. The front page had a banner headline and a photograph spanning the width of the entire page, the
pooled courtroom photograph taken at the moment she reacted to the verdict by a photographer for the Boston Globe (Decisive Moments, BBC2, 31.12.97). They occupied more than 50 per cent of the page, the majority of its editorial content. The rest of the page reported the defendant’s shock at the verdict, brief comments from both sets of lawyers, and a brief report of public reaction. Pages 2 to 7 contained the following material: details of the defendant’s reactions and the length of the jury’s deliberation, lawyers’ comments, a portrait of her prison, UK attitudes to American trials, a report from the defendant’s home village in England and columnists’ comments.

In this coverage we can see clearly the core of the human interest elements of the story (shock caused by the verdict in both the defendant and others) and the way in which the extent of the interest leads to a search for extra details to flesh out the bare bones of the story as defined by the traditional hard news questions of ‘Who? What? Where? When? How?’ The core of the story is what drives it forward across time, but the drive results in the accumulation of ever-changing details. On Saturday, the national press added to the core as defined on Friday. The Daily Mirror overtly campaigned to define the verdict as unjust, and papers were able to add background material about the defendant’s personal history and the reactions of those involved in the trial or observers of it. In addition, many papers carried analyses of the au pair system as it functions in the USA, including the information that the agency responsible for placing Louise Woodward was paying her defence costs (which had already been noted earlier in the year).

All newspapers took fundamentally the same line on the story: that the verdict was very surprising and (implicitly or explicitly) wrong. All tabloids explicitly reported the verdict as wrong, broadsheets and midmarkets followed the conventions of objective reporting by summarizing opinions and facts which pointed implicitly in the same direction. As well as the common core of reporting focused on the conduct and result of the trial, and the immediate reactions of those most directly concerned, the range of material covered was as follows: reactions of people less directly concerned (residents in the defendant’s home village, her ex-boyfriend, other friends, other au pairs); the range of protest against the verdict, and the organization of it; direct campaigning by the newspapers themselves; possible future tactics by the defence team; the opinions of the jurors and the judge; portraits of legal personnel and of the bereaved parents; legal and cultural differences between the USA and the UK; courtroom television; the regulation of the au pair system; and the difficulties of child rearing.

In this range of material we can see the same basic outline as was found in the Evening Standard coverage on the day the verdict was announced: a core of detail predicated on the human interest of the
case, surrounded by a range of issues characterized by greater or lesser distance from the core. Thus the campaigning tactics adopted by some tabloids are very closely related to the human interest core because they presuppose that the human interest has sparked off great sympathy for the defendant (evidence of which was already available to the papers through details such as Sky viewing figures). The policy-oriented issues such as the regulation of the au pair system are clearly much further removed from the core of human interest. We could anticipate that tabloid coverage would be characterized by majority focus on the core of human interest material, whereas mid-market and broadsheet coverage would include a wider range of the potential issues. Analysis of individual titles' coverage broadly supports this contention.

The content analysis shows that on the day after the verdict the primary emphasis of all titles' reporting are the trial, the verdict, predictions about the immediate future, and the reactions of those involved in some degree or other with the trial. The reactions of those directly involved received relatively little coverage on the day after the verdict, due to lack of access. All titles gave space to the subject of the defendant's future, but this eludes significant differences, as it does not distinguish between human interest stories about what the defendant's life in prison would be like, and discussions of future defence tactics, the tabloid titles gave more attention to the former, less to the latter. Also, attention to reactions of those not directly connected with events - again a feature of all titles' reporting - fails to distinguish between lawyers' reactions to the verdict and that of other interested parties (e.g. friends and neighbours), again this balance roughly correlates with the tabloid/broadsheet distinction. The three themes which are most distant from the core of the story - differences in culture between the two nations, the US system of justice, and the international childcare system - are emphasized more in the broadsheets than the tabloids. The Daily Mail pays extensive attention to the childcare system, but its coverage is thematically distinctive in that its focus is the low value accorded to motherhood in the modern world rather than to the norms of paid childcare, a more dominant theme in the broadsheet titles.

On the Sunday - two days after the verdict - the primary focus did not shift. However, the story slipped down tabloid news agendas; fewer themes are mentioned, and the reduced amount of space given to the story as a whole, as well as its placing, indicates a changed priority. On the Sunday too the broadsheets consistently gave more space to those elements of the story that are furthest away from its core than did the tabloids, indeed, it is likely that the low availability of new material directly related to the core played a part in tabloid decisions to move it down their news agendas.
However, the relationship between tabloid and broadsheet coverage of these events cannot be resolved in these terms alone: other factors are equally important. In particular, they say nothing about the emotional tone of the treatment, and the extent to which this differed between tabloids and broadsheets. Several factors are relevant.

First, the question of language. It is often said that tabloid style is characterized by exuberant, dramatic use of language, and it is indeed easy to find examples: the two-column, by half a column, white-on-black headline "Your justice stinks" (Sunday Sport) contrasts easily with the three-line, three-column "Jury believed nanny did not murder baby" (Sunday Times). However, informal analysis of the coverage of Louise Woodward's trial verdict shows that most of the tabloid reporting of the case is not sensationalist in its use of language. Yet 'most' may be misleading: it is true that words whose role is clearly to dramatize are relatively infrequent, but even one in a paragraph is capable of changing the overall impact of the writing. For example: "In a stunning admission of the flimsiness of the case against Louise, juror Jodie Godber said they felt obliged to deliver a guilty verdict because of the judge's instructions to them" (Mail on Sunday, 21.11.97: 1).

Here the single word 'stunning' changes the impact of the whole paragraph. Indeed, what may be characteristic of tabloid style is not the constant use of such language, as is often alleged, but its relatively infrequent use, calculated to change the overall tone of reporting. Here the paragraph is close to the top of the story, which increases the impact.

Secondly, the role of pictures and other graphic devices. Large headlines and prominent photographs tend in general to increase the emotional impact of reporting. Traditionally, these have been associated with tabloid coverage rather than broadsheet; however, all the broadsheet Sundays used large headlines and photographs in their coverage. As we have seen, the photographs were largely TV-derived, and it seems likely — although unprovable — that the widespread circulation of courtroom TV coverage via UK broadcast news bulletins increased the relevance of photographs in newspaper coverage. It has been said that one of the ways in which the broadsheets have come increasingly to resemble the tabloids is in terms of layout and especially the use of large headlines and photographs. The coverage of Louise Woodward's trial verdict by the Sundays supports this view. Whether this should be understood as a criticism is less clear. The advantage of contemporary layout norms, including photographs and headlines, is that items are very clearly signposted, enabling readers to follow patterns of interest in their reading of the paper's content; it is difficult to see how this could be viewed negatively. However, the use of graphic devices may also infect the interpretation of events
of the death of Leah Betts and Hugh Grant's arrest for 'lewd conduct'.

The graphic devices may offer an interpretation of the event which is
not in accordance with either the story as reported in the main body of
the report, or with reality. For example, during the Korean war an
American soldier was persuaded to pose for a photograph giving a
dying Korean a drink of water, in fact, he was only willing to do so if it
was done quickly and using the photographer's water ration (Evans,
1978. Introduction, n.p.). When a photograph is not misleading in this
sense, and is entirely appropriate - as is clearly the case with the
courtroom photographs of Louise Woodward - it may none the less be
the case that the photograph acts as an incentive to the reader to
interpret the event in terms predicated on, or dominated by, the
evidence of personal emotions as revealed in the photography; the use
of TV clips may have the same effect. In principle, the same is true of a
headline. It reflects the interpretation of the report that follows. If a
headline is not inaccurate in either of these two senses, its visual
prominence is none the less an incentive to the reader to interpret the
detail presented in the body of the report in the light of what it
suggests. The headline is a significant relay in the construction of
meaning, and the more one-dimensional and prominent it is, the more
it is likely to have this effect. For example, a story in London Evening
Standard (24.2.98) bore the headline 'Brother flies to join British nurse
facing the electric chair', a story concerning a British resident of Florida
who had shot her husband after discovering he was having an affair.

While the headline is not misleading - since she was charged with
murder which could if proved bring the death penalty in that state - it
focuses attention on the question of penalty rather than guilt or
innocence, which is (arguably) at least as important a question.

Thirdly, the role of broadcast media. As has been briefly suggested
above, the Woodward trial was prominently featured in broadcast
media, and the availability of live coverage from the courtroom (still
forbidden in UK trials) certainly played a part. The availability of
video footage is always a consideration in TV newsroom assessment
of the value of particular stories (although by no means the only one).
Here the focus on personal response as shown in facial expressions
and body language, which is a necessary accompaniment of the
norms of broadcast mise-en-scène, emphasizes elements of the events
which are comprehensible in terms which derive from personal
response, and may correspondingly marginalize elements of events
which do not derive from it; of course, such other elements can
always be re-emphasized through other journalistic devices, such as
analytic commentary. In the case of the Woodward trial it is arguable
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that the widespread protests that followed the verdict (reported in most of the Sunday papers analysed here) derived from an empathy with the defendant which would have been far less likely were it not for the television coverage. To the extent that these factors are indeed operating, the norms of TV reporting are subtly altering the relationship between the different factors involved in public perceptions of the criminal justice system; the extent to which they impact upon the conduct of trials themselves is a more complex matter which must be debated elsewhere. The principle is the manner in which news agendas are driven by the circulation of information by different media appearing at different points in the daily news cycle, something which is only visible when individual stories are tracked across time.

This analysis suggests that the distinction between broadsheet and tabloid styles derives primarily from the selection of elements of a story in order to create a distinctive profile for events. Preference for the personal rather than the policy elements derives from event selection, but also from the use of pictures, which invite personalization, and from headlines which reflect the understanding of subsequent detail.

It is clear that this story was driven by the human interest elements: they form the common core that runs through all the coverage surveyed. To this extent we could say that the story was tabloid-driven, although we have already seen that in fact the broadsheets paid the same level of attention as the tabloids. However, it is also true that the level of public interest in the events was what allowed the broadsheets (and to a lesser extent the tabloids, see pp. 41-3) to expand the scope of their reporting beyond the narrative of the events and to bring to public attention matters that were peripherally relevant but also of wider public significance: for example, the regulation of au pair arrangements, or more generally the status of childcare arrangements in the USA and elsewhere. In the range of issue coverage the tabloids' focus was narrower than the mid-market and broadsheet media. However, in another respect, this distinction starts to break down, for the peripheral topics were indeed mentioned in all three.18

To summarize this chapter: news values transcend individual judgements, although of course they are to be found embodied in every news judgement made by particular journalists. These values are in effect a system of criteria which are used to make decisions about the inclusion and exclusion of material, and also - crucially and less obviously - about which aspects of stories to present in the form of news output. We have also seen that news values are far from a unified entity, since it is clear that they are divided by medium and by format, as well as by ttle identity. In particular, where the differences between
Spinning into Control

broadsheet and tabloid formats in the UK national press are concerned, we can see that.

- there is a core of news values which are more or less shared across media and across sectors;
- this core is only operative in conjunction with an understanding of the significance of events in relationship to their contexts;
- this significance is subject to wide fluctuations of assessment between media sectors, but less so where major public events are concerned, to the extent that coverage of many such events is orchestrated around a consensual core;
- the history of stories – in other words, of the public profile of events in so far as it derives from the media – must also be seen in terms of the circulation of news between media and media sectors, and in particular across time.

Lastly, we should stress that this set of values constitutes a symbolic system which is the currency in which access to news space is negotiated, and therefore also in which access to below-the-line publicity is negotiated between journalists and sources. At this point we can turn to the subject of the motives and strategies of news sources.
Working in a digital age newsroom

News is a cultural discipline. Choosing it an intellectual skill; collecting it a profession

Anthony Smith
The Shadow in the Cave, 1974

THE NEWSROOM

Newsrooms are complex places, places of creative conflict, of fast decision-making; where egotistical individuality and competition sit side by side with teamwork and high speed production values. They are also becoming increasingly complex technologically.

Newspaper newsroom organization

Newsrooms tend to be personal – and management of them tends to be personal. But they need to be managed, and reporters need to be able to work in them freely and creatively. Managers need to be able to control the creative process without squashing it. Management control comes from the top (the board) and is exercised through a number of executive or working directors, each responsible for separate departments in the newspaper. It is essential for there to be communication between these separate departments, not constant fighting over who gets the biggest share of the resources and favours. The senior executive of the newspaper has a two-fold job; letting the boardroom know what is happening in the newspaper departments, and offering specialist advice for formulating policy at departmental and board level. The difference between a news organization and other companies is the way in which control is exercised and the precise limits of that control, which is organized at an administrative but not at a content level.
Working in a digital age newsroom

The directors of the newspaper exercise control by initiating and imposing budgets and taking decisions, within the overall policy guidelines, on such things as:

- expenditure on capital equipment
- preparing trading statements
- statistics
- controlling departmental activities.

They also exercise control by making the main and senior appointments in their area and to the whole newspaper. These directors and the managing director are usually the final court of appeal in departmental disputes. Budgeting and financial forecasting by departmental directors are helped by daily checks and reports from line managers. Below the director level comes the senior management, which might include a general manager who is involved more with the mechanical production and administration and with the overall problems of the workforce, never with editorial matters. The production side of a newspaper has a complex series of middle management jobs:

- a production manager
- a deputy production manager
- usually several assistants
- a night production manager.

They are important because they control the main mechanical workforce, and it is here that problems of quality and work flow are most likely to arise, and where quality control is vital. This requires constant physical managerial presence.

Other managers and departments will probably include:

- advertising and circulation
- personnel
- publicity and promotions.

Below senior management comes middle management. Their job is to ensure that their departments are properly manned, and that work is completed to schedule and to the required quality. Managers and their deputies are responsible for normal appointments, budget control, duty rostering and work planning.
Below middle management, and reporting to it, are the line managers. Their job is mainly quality control, organizing the actual work on the job, and making sure there is someone competent on the job at all times. They are the first point of contact when job problems arise.

In a newspaper, the editor is the person who counts most, and it is the editor alone who can control content. Editors traditionally run the editorial function as a separate department of the newspaper, but their responsibility is usually the greatest of all department heads. The administration side of the newsroom is usually delegated to a deputy editor or a managing editor. Editors pride themselves on having great independence, and use it for the good of the newspaper and newsroom.

Although the editor is such an important person in the hierarchy of any news gathering organization, newspapers must have editorial delegation and good communication. The daily work is delegated to executives such as:

- the news editor
- the features editor
- the picture editor.

Editors usually exert overall control by means of an ‘inner cabinet’ of the deputy editor, night editor and the various assistant editors. Communication occurs at the daily news meeting, where everyone finds out what everyone else is doing.

Newspapers are a very high-cost industry. The biggest single cost is newsprint, at between 28 and 33 per cent of the operating costs. Newsprint costs have reduced as new methods of providing it have risen. All other news costs have increased constantly, the main increases being in salaries. Good newspapers keep a balance between advertising and editorial content. Managers and editors have to fight over this target, which ideally should be about 40 per cent advertising to 60 per cent editorial. This will give a reasonable profit margin.

**Radio newsroom organization**

Newsrooms in newspapers, radio and TV used be very similar, all based on an old-style print news organization. The structure and job
titles were sometimes different; sometimes not. Radio newrooms, however they are organized, contain:

- news gatherers (reporters)
- news processors (subeditors etc.)
- news managers (section editors etc.).

There is also sport, features and, of course, in most radio organizations there is, separately, current (public) affairs. Because radio is an immediate medium, the normal newspaper newroom organization was found to be too slow. Nevertheless, checking and rechecking still remain vital, although in radio every reporter and producer is expected to be able to gather, collect and write the story and, in most cases, read the story on air. In radio, it is essential to have a good voice that can broadcast. Radio newrooms are small because they are simple. They operate round-the-clock. They need a good reporter, with a good sense of news, a good voice, and a telephone. That's all. Compare it with TV, and it is obvious why radio is so immediate and will never be replaced by the Internet or any other form of transmission for news and information. Radio newrooms can exist on the smallest number of staff, and with the smallest amount of equipment. That's why it is so exciting. That's why it is so difficult.

Behind any radio news output lies the combined efforts of dozens of news editors, sub-editors, reporters and experts. There is no guarantee that the titles will be uniform from organization to organization, but the people are there, sifting news, writing it, preparing it for broadcast, presenting it. As titles and jobs change between organizations, there is no point in being too specific about job titles. A news editor in one place may be called something entirely different in another place.

Of prime importance at the start of any shift is the reading-in period. This is the 15 minutes or so used by the news editor and the rest of the news-desk staff to read the copy and bulletins of the previous shift so as to know precisely what has been covered. The copy taster and news editor also glance through the spiked copy (rejected newagency reports which, before computers, were actually put on a spike on the copy taster's and news editor's desk. Today, of course, it is all in the computer, but still the word spiked survives). This gives an idea of the sort of things that have been coming in from reporters and newagencies.
It is important that newsagency material coming into the newsroom is rewritten in the local radio house style. Newsagencies tend to write in print style, and this needs to be changed so that it sounds right for radio.

As much as it offends personal pride, every news editor (and journalist for that matter) has his or her own ideas about good writing and good news sense. So don’t be hurt when the next shift comes in and tears apart everything that’s been done, rewriting furiously, throwing away stories and resurrecting others. That’s journalistic life! It also illustrates the subjectivity of news values and style.

Radio technology

Although it only needs a telephone, the technology in radio is moving at a fast rate and is very complex. Radio is going digital in many ways:

- digital recording for reporters to use in the field
- digital editing for reporters to use in the newsroom or in the field
- computers to edit stories, and on which stories can be received
- satellite phones to contact base
- laptop computers for use anywhere.

The important thing in radio is to remember that a reporter does it all: collects, edits and presents. The reporter decides on what inserts to use, edits the inserts and puts them into the latest digital storage space, then presents the news and the inserts in a studio, using digital replay equipment. Radio also invented and uses extensively touch screen studio operations.

Therefore, although radio is simple, its reporters require an operational and technical ability that no other reporters need. In radio, reporters are totally in control. This means great satisfaction; it also means if something goes wrong, everyone knows whose fault it is!

Communication in the newsroom

Journalists can be great communicators with their readers, viewers or listeners. They can also be the worst communicators with one another in the newsroom.
Working in a digital age newsroom

An editor briefs or discusses a story with a reporter: that’s communication. Communication is not just about sending messages (the e-mail problem versus actually talking). Many things can happen between the time a message is sent and the time it is received. Newsroom people colour the instructions by their perceptions of the editor, and if they think the editor is no good, they won’t respect his or her ideas.

People each have their own style of communicating. Some are blunt, to the point, direct; others are vague and reporters have to work out what they’re trying to say. Some are compulsive memo (e-mail) writers, some are talkers and others are meetings people. Each method has its particular place (memos for complicated "on the record" matters, etc.). If speed is the main thing, a conversation is the best way to communicate. The interpersonal communication process is influenced by the way newsrooms operate and are organized. Decentralization in newsrooms means a high degree of participation between editors and staff members. Messages can go direct from editor to reporter, and not through the many different layers of hierarchy. This reduces the opportunity for message distortion – the more layers an oral message goes through, the more likely it is that the message will become garbled. Remember: communication is expectation. We perceive what we expect to perceive, we see largely what we expect to see, and we hear largely what we expect to hear.

Newsroom communication takes two forms:

1 Communication between individuals
2 Organizational communication that flows up or down through the various levels of authority (Giles, 1995).

Communication between individuals takes place in meetings, via memos and notice boards, and during conversations in the passageway, one-to-one discussions, phone calls, lunch or a drink after work. This is how individuals communicate within the newsroom structure. Managers spend about 80 per cent of their time in oral communication, more often listening than talking. Newsroom communication is quick and casual. Managers decide what to share and what to hold back. Negative or discouraging information might be held back; however, if the manager/editor does not keep staff informed, there will be gossip. Newsrooms are great places for gossip.
The manager/editor is a filter, stopping the flow of unnecessary information to the staff and giving them only what’s necessary. Managers are gatekeepers, and so are secretaries. The manager/editor is a go-between, linking various parts of the newsroom or other departments with the newsroom. Sometimes, the editor is the spokesperson for the newsroom, their defender. Staff respect the editor’s opinions and he or she sometimes has sources they don’t have to make better informed decisions. Editors who hide between piles of paper are bad editors and bad managers. The editor is too busy, the editor isn’t interested, the editor doesn’t want to know new ideas or opinions, the editor doesn’t care; these are all things to watch if you hide between piles of paper and are not approachable.

Employees want a continuous flow of knowledge about the company and its goals, but prefer it to come from their immediate superior. Good newspaper communication needs:

- a keen interest at all levels in what is happening in the newspaper profession
- an understanding of the art of communication – both speaking and listening – and a determination to practice the art.

This way you build a friendly, tightly knit, enthusiastic management team. Good newsroom communication makes employees think their ideas are valued and that the editors care about their feelings and attitudes.

**Newsroom creativity**

The best stories come from free newsroom discussion. Stifle the discussion, and you stifle the stories. People often feel least free to speak out in the workplace because of the fear of managerial retaliation. Most people feel it is moderately likely that their manager may make things more difficult for them if they speak out. The ability to speak one’s mind is important in solving problems confronting contemporary managers.

Freedom of expression encourages creativity in journalists. Creativity is about freedom. By definition, creativity springs from within us all, not from outside. It needs freedom to flourish. Creativity does not flourish in an authoritative, hierarchical workplace, but in open, unstructured surroundings in which the individual can create order from chaos, without
being directed closely how to do it. Creators have a high tolerance for complexity and ambiguity. Imposed order means little creativity. Freedom to explore issues and all the options for solutions to problems is a necessary condition for the creative individual.

It has been proved that co-operation and the free flow of ideas among the various functional areas of a newsroom enhance creativity. It is crucially important to provide both managers and employers with the freedom to think and question, and to encourage them to form independent judgements and take responsibility for changing the way newsrooms work. The big problem for newsroom creativity is managerial timidity, which provides an unforgivable sameness to the news output. There’s no creativity, willingness to initiate or risk taking.

Newsroom managers have many problems. They are constantly forced to adapt to changing circumstances and to the accelerated pace of technological revolution. They are also faced with declining readership and circulation, newsroom changes, staff problems, ownership changes and increased competition. The solution is better managerial use of their own employees and their own creativity. Managers who allow freedom of expression from journalists also benefit themselves from their staff experiences and insights. Employees are a vast source of new information, and change in an organization requires the stimulus of new information. We’ve always done it this way is a major reason why creativity in newsrooms doesn’t happen. Good newsroom management innovates (takes creative ideas and produces something new from them). If journalists don’t feel they can express their own ideas, then the new ideas that are necessary for creativity won’t occur. Managers can’t think of everything. The result will be a sameness, blandness, a conformity to established practices and ways of acting and thinking. The result is a decrease in creativity and ideas for new stories and different angles.

Employees have a right of free speech in a newsroom. Free expression in the newsroom does not undermine authority; it simply allows democracy in the decision-making process. If the employees are involved in the decision-making process, they then feel it is their decision, and will be better motivated to carry it out. There is no harm or loss of face in asking people what they think. Good management should always allow staff, and themselves, to question existing customs, conventions, processes and institutions. Journalists are always
asking, WHY? The same applies to newsroom management. Dissent is a vital newsroom tool. This is the doctrine of dissent: good newsroom management creates an open market place into which all viewpoints can be placed. By tolerating varied opinions, an organization is better able to reach common decisions that will meet the needs and aspirations of its members. This is all about individualism, and in some societies individualism is not considered a 'good' attitude. However, for creativity and journalism, individualism is better than collectivism.

Freedom of expression also means the manager is respecting individual staff members' views. As a matter of basic human respect, people owe it to one another to listen to others' views. They don't have to agree; they only have to listen. The philosopher Thomas Emerson says: suppression of belief, opinion and expression is an affront to the dignity of man, a negation of man's essential nature. The newsroom manager who recognizes the value of individual self-worth and self-esteem and the management role in enhancing these values is also one who is likely to foster a culture of freedom and free expression, and thereby provide organizational stability by accommodating and acknowledging whatever interests exist.

Newsroom politics

This is simply power in action. Political newsroom behaviour is increased by a scarcity of resources, by decisions or goals that are ambiguous, and by change. Editors can increase their power by building alliances. The best kind of management leadership in a newsroom occurs when the editor uses skills and human insight to enhance the development of individual abilities. The pace of management requires a leadership style that includes shifting gears as situations change, forming creative viewpoints, acting quickly on simple problems, setting up mechanisms for feedback, and using social skills, rewards and punishments to control the newsroom organization.

Newsrooms and power

Power is a great motivator. We need to control or have influence over others in the newsroom. Managers have a high need for power, and
this is important since managers have to influence the behaviour of others. Some employees are motivated by a desire for personal power. They want to dominate. Employees with a highly developed sense of power often assume leadership roles in newsrooms. Clever editors use such people for their own ends. They put them on a planning committee, where they can be influential.

Newsroom journalists attach value to their work. In a newsroom, a strong work ethic produces a goal of accomplishing more, which then causes employees to work longer hours. So good newsroom managers develop ways of translating goals into performance.

Good editors clearly define the goal for their reporters (without making them feel they have no room to be creative). When an editor asks a reporter to do a specific story, they should then discuss together the specific goals required, the kind of questions and the kind of headline that might occur, so the reporter will have a clear understanding of the assignment. If the goal is made more difficult, the reporter will usually try harder to achieve it successfully. The editor says that a reporter can’t become a specialist until he or she improves the way the story is organized. The reporter accepts this as a goal and starts to work towards it. The good editor will keep a watchful eye on this improvement, and reinforce the goal by occasionally asking how things are going. Journalists are independent workers and independent thinkers. This independence is part of the creative work approach. It is therefore important for a good editor to make reporters feel they are part of the decision-making process in setting goals for the future. Good editors don’t say: this is how you’ll do it. Their attitude is: how do you think you can do it better, and how can I help? The reporter owns the decision-making process, and therefore has more motivation to make it work.

Feedback is important. It keeps reporters on target, and encourages them to make greater effort. Reporters can improve their writing if the editor keeps offering suggestions and observations. Creative managers find it very easy to criticize; they find it much harder to be constructive, with some words of praise or encouragement before the criticism. Newsrooms are full of strong egos, so peer competition is part of the furniture, and competition makes performance better. Individuals have to accept the goals set for them. Never use the weapon of fear in trying to motivate creative workers like journalists;
it has the opposite effect. The focus of motivation should always be on achievement.

**Newsroom stress**

There’s a lot of stress in newsrooms. Some is good; the stress of a big story and working for a long time covering it. That’s great excitement. Other kinds of stress aren’t so good.

Giles (1995) says stress in newsrooms is a major cause of:

- absenteeism
- high staff turnover
- low productivity
- unrest and unhappiness
- low morale
- family break-ups
- substance abuse
- health problems.

Good management can and should eliminate many of these problems. Stress results from undue demands on the body. If it is pleasant, the body adapts. If it is disagreeable, the body doesn’t adapt, and the results can be unpleasant. Any effect on the body sets into motion a chain of events that includes a rise in blood pressure, heightened senses, increased energy and other physical reactions from adrenaline action. Signs of stress include the following:

- digestion stops
- blood is shunted to the brain
- muscles tense for action
- the heart pounds
- blood pressure increases
- skin becomes cool and clammy
- the adrenal glands give out a hormone, adrenaline, which increases heart action, supplies extra glucose to fuel the muscles and relaxes and enlarges the airways to allow more air to reach the base of the brain. We are now ready to deal with the stressful situation.

When stress occurs, we respond by flight or fight. We cope by fighting (confronting the editor over a decision we disagree with); fleeing
(withdrawing and passively accepting the decision); or adapting
(adjusting to the new situation and making the best of it
pragmatically). The secret is to maintain a balance, and when this
balance is disturbed for any length of time, we have physical or
emotional or mental health problems. The first reaction to stress of any
kind is alarm. We get frightened. After the initial shock, we either
fight, flee or adapt. If the stress continues, we get tired of fighting the
problem. Our defences wear away and we experience stress-related
illnesses or symptoms. The basic element of stress is tension, which
can occur due to:

- inner conflict (neurosis)
- external factors (problems in the newsroom, goals etc.)
- the need to be creative (we, working in creative areas, need a special
  environment to work as creative people). There can be great tension
  from performing, writing and reporting a long, complicated story or
  analysing a difficult newsroom management situation.

Stress can be good. It can be a crucial part of creativity, and can
contribute to production and satisfaction. Stressful energy can be
channelled into achievement. We can be stressed because of:

1. The environment: when it’s good, we’re OK; when it’s bad, we’re
   stressed. This can be at the office, or at home, or because of
   personal relationships.
2. Vulnerability: this determines the effect of stress on an editor or
   newsroom employee. It depends on the individual; the personality,
   physical and psychological makeup, and preparation for unexpected
   events.

Indicators to check your vulnerability to stress include:

1. Your response to life changes. Sickness (colds, rashes, stomach
   upsets) may follow major changes in life.
2. Your personality. There’s a link between personality and heart attack,
   but stress can also be a major influence.

In general, people divide into two types: Type A and Type B:

1. Type A people:
   - have a chronic sense of time urgency
   - are constantly involved in deadline projects
   - have a persistent desire for recognition and advancement
• have excessive competitive drive
• are only interested in work
• take on too many responsibilities — only I can handle this
• are fast speaking, fast living, fast playing.

2 Type B people:
• are serious but easygoing
• are able to enjoy leisure
• have no high drive feelings.

Most journalists and creative people are usually Type A. Newsroom stress is caused by excessive workload and unrealistic deadlines; by disparity between executives’ goals and levels of achievement; by the political climate at work or within the company; and by lack of feedback on job performance. Editors find the worst sources of stress to be demands on their time, and overall responsibility for the production of the newspaper. Political pressures also build stress. The deadlines are always with them, and they are always responsible, even on days off. Editors are never completely free. Editors are their own worst critics (so are all creative people), and they are never satisfied with their own or others’ output. This causes internal stress and tensions. There is also the stress of maintaining professional standards and accuracy and credibility of the newspaper. Executive stress is common in editors and newspaper managers. This is partly as a result of recognizing the creativity of journalists and reporters, and that creative people have a different approach to work and control. They have to be managed differently, and lightly. Reporters are independent, and therefore do not take kindly to being managed or told what to do: they see it as an infringement of their freedom to report. Change can produce stress; so can new technology and learning about it. Some people can handle stress well; others can’t. Newsroom people like the stress of working to deadlines, the urgency of handling news and managing people who are stimulating and challenging. The editors and managers who have health problems are usually those who have problems with the boss. The key is to keep stress in balance. As stress increases, so do efficiency and performance, but only to a certain level. When stress goes beyond that level, performance and efficiency decrease.

There are a number of ways to keep stress levels in check. Keep calm. Tell yourself to keep calm and enjoy the situation. Encourage staff
members to take exercise, to keep a balance in their lives, to relax, take scheduled days off and vacations. Regular exercise that involves at least 30 minutes sustained effort three times a week helps the body combat the physical effects of stress. Substance abuse is often a newsroom problem. It's also a general creative problem. Alcoholism is a major problem, although things are changing. Time management is essential to reduce stress. Analyze what needs to be done; set priorities; determine the best and most effective way to do a job; focus on the most important aspects of the job; eliminate time wasters. Make enough time to accomplish tasks, handle requests and do things requested by the editor.

NEWSROOM MANAGEMENT ROLES

Newsrooms, unlike most other organizations, depend on personalized, charismatic leadership for success. Newsroom employees tend to become committed to the editor/manager rather than to the organization. Newsroom management is often based on professional journalism codes, ethics and commitment to deadlines. Managers must realize that this is the way journalists work, and allow them to do so. Managers also need to remember that there are significant differences between workers in various media fields. For example, advertising grew out of the need to make money for the advertisers. Radio and TV grew out of the entertainment industry. Newspapers have grown over the centuries from institutional clashes, fighting political/government entities, business organizations, religious groups and military structures.

Newspapers and journalists are all about dissent, and that philosophy carries over into the management of a newsroom and of creative newsroom personnel. It needs a particularly strong leadership. Hence it is traditional that there is conflict between news departments and the rest of the organization. The traditional centralized hierarchical alignment of different departments should stop at the newsroom door. The newsroom is different, with a separate professional ethic from all other divisions of the news organization. In a highly organized hierarchy, there is a militaristic assumption that staff will obey once the decision is made. In journalism, it's different. If that assumption should extend to journalists, then the professional news as we know it
will sooner or later become discredited, not only with its staff but with its audience.

News employees tend to be sceptical, untrusting and suspicious, even of colleagues within their own news organization. It's a historical condition, and is expected of them by other professionals in their own field. The editorial office of a newspaper is a subculture within the larger newspaper culture. A newspaper ultimately should be a reflection of some personality who is willing to become identified with and take a stand for what the product is and what the product is not. Newsrooms have leaders and they also have managers. The best is when they have both in the same person ... the manager/leader.

Good editorial management means working through and with others to accomplish organizational goals, while the broader concept of leadership involves using influence to establish an atmosphere conducive to achievement. Some editors have instinctive management gifts. They can plan, organize staff, direct and control, but they lack true leadership. They are administrators, not managers. They can’t influence their staff towards strong dedicated performance of quality. Editors/managers supervise, lead and manage.

The management ladder

At the top is the editor or executive editor. The editor reports to the publisher, board of directors and managing director.

Managers have three categories:

- Top
- Middle
- Supervisory (first level).

Top management

Top managers are most influential. They make policy. The editor or executive editor is the person who is most influential in this area of management, and is responsible for the overall news management, news policy and style. The editor also co-operates with other members of the top management team: the advertising director, circulation director, production director, personnel director and promotions director.
Middle management

Middle management is usually headed by the managing editor – the person who is the day-to-day boss of the news operation. Middle managers supervise the work of other managers.

First level managers

In newspapers there are various supervisory editors: political, finance, city, sports, chief artist, graphics editor, photo editor. Their main tasks include the supervision and direction of reporters, copy editors, photographers, artists etc.

All three levels of management carry out the basic management functions of:

- planning
- organizing
- staffing
- directing
- controlling.

All newspaper managers have authority: the right to make decisions. All newspaper staff members have some authority; photographers make decisions about which pictures to shoot, and reporters make decisions about how to write a story. Authority does not come with the title. Just because someone has the title, it does not mean they have authority and that people recognize it. It has to be earned. Newsroom authority is the recognition that members have the right to direct the work of the people on the staff who report to them.

They also have responsibility (the obligation to direct work of the staff) and accountability (which ties together authority and responsibility). In a newsroom, everyone answers to someone. That’s accountability.

As a manager moves up the newsroom ladder, the job becomes more conceptual (ideas and planning) and less technical (hands on). The theory of supervision means that, for full accountability for the performance of staff, the manager must be able to control the following:

- hiring and firing
- work assignments
- performance assessments
performance rewards
• assignment of resources
• decision making.

National papers have a night editor, who is in overall charge of the paper production once the main decisions about content have been taken (usually at the daily news conferences). Assistant editors occupy the area between the deputy and the various department heads, such as the news editor and the features editor. They usually have complete responsibility for specific areas of the newspaper, with titles such as assistant editor (news); assistant editor (features); assistant editor (special projects or future projects). Their job is not to run the administration, but to initiate new ideas with individual reporters and co-ordinate stories.

There are also other titles, such as city editor, political editor, foreign editor, sports editor, business editor, leisure and lifestyle editor.

Newspapers are built on autocracy and democracy. Newspapers work on delegation from the editor. Daily editorial planning and decisions about the contents and plan of the paper occur at a twice-daily news conference, usually held in the morning and afternoon. Subjects are discussed and decisions taken about the news and future features. The editor is solely responsible for the policy of the newspaper, and it is the editor’s responsibility and duty to make policy announcements and to discuss the previous paper, mentioning good and bad points and how the next issue can be better. At the conference, the various editors present their story ideas (which the reporters have already given them) and the balance of the newspaper is discussed. An important function of the news conference is for everyone to find out what the others are doing. This provides the all-important interdepartmental communication, and communication between editors and reporters.

News managers manage and communicate by involving themselves in various roles. They are leaders, figureheads, liaison. They have to represent the organization internally and externally. They have an important informational role, communicating up and down the workforce and with other management levels. They also have a public relations role, sometimes making personal appearances, giving speeches or writing editorials for the paper. They have a vital decision-making role within the newsroom and the whole organization, and are the main initiators of change within the organization. Planning
Working in a digital age newsroom

for change means decision making. Editors and newspaper executives decide how much time, money and equipment can be committed to a project, and there are many projects all going at the same time. There are also daily personnel decisions to be made, sometimes in consultation with others and sometimes alone.

Good editors spend a proportion of their time making the judgements of Solomon between competing and sometimes warring staff and higher management, deciding in areas of employee competition and conflict. In the news media business there’s lots of staff rivalry, friction and infighting because of the creative, competitive nature of the business. The editor or deputy is called on to mediate in disputes of all kinds. They will have to decide who is at fault, and then make critical decisions that might involve disciplinary action or termination.

The modern editor is also a negotiator combining the technical and creative operations. These negotiating duties can be formal or informal: with trade unions, staff associations, with manufacturers over the cost of new equipment. Media managers must be skilled negotiators.

Successful news media managers have to have basic technical, human and conceptual skills. Technical skills are needed because the media is built on a foundation of technical operations. This knowledge of how technology operates allows proper managerial decisions about new equipment, operations and innovation. Managers in the media need interpersonal skills to lead and motivate the creative and often competitive and difficult individuals who make up the media workforce. In general, media managers have extrovert, gregarious, charismatic personalities. They also need conceptual skills: intellectual, analytical and judgemental abilities to make difficult decisions extremely quickly. Their tasks include: planning (this is vital since the industry is always in crisis and in the midst of some change or other); organizing (vital since media facilities are characterized by internal structuralization, departmentalization and the need to delegate); staffing (constant turnover through staff burnout, competition – there is usually great turnover in media industries); and controlling (using preset objectives to assess corporate and employee performance appraisals). Managers communicate internal successes and failures to staff, make changes and revise or restate corporate and departmental goals. They also need to have new ideas (developing new and better ways to conduct a news media business). This is a particularly important
management function, since the industry is always at the front of new technologies and managers must decide which new products and services are worth buying or developing.

Managers lead their staff and company and serve as liaison between the organization and outside groups and institutions. They monitor external conditions and obtain, synthesize and present information to their staff. They keep them informed about what’s happening. They allocate resources, adjudicate differences, supervise negotiations and make the hard choices facing management in a dynamic, constantly changing industry. And, of course, they are where the buck always stops.

Motivation in the newsroom

News managers need to know how to motivate themselves and their staff. Old-style media management was “by the seat of the pants”: managers could do everything their staff could do and better – write stories, lay out ads, set type. However, increased competition, new technology and reader expectations have changed all that. Now, personality and motivation are as vital to management as the ability to perform set tasks.

Bad managers will try not to let go of the skills they have grown up with (and possibly the reason they have been promoted). They feel comfortable with them. They must learn the new skills of management. Managers must be motivated to lead others. Managers must lead, direct, delegate, train. What they do not do is the jobs their employees should be doing. Bad managers create low production, low morale and other serious problems. An efficient and effective management team matches jobs to people, and this in turn improves production and motivation.

The trick for a manager is to get staff to believe they can do the job. A manager has got to get staff to believe that their talent is equal to or above the demands of their current positions, and that specific career goals and hard work, confidence, freedom and creativity will lead them to their goals.

Efficient managers motivate their staff by getting them to believe in themselves; in their ability to do the job; and that if they work harder
and better they will have a better performance and achieve their goals of more money and promotion. To understand the motivational factors driving staff, managers must first acknowledge that staff are individuals who are all different. They also have to achieve a happy workplace. Happy journalists are productive, creative journalists. For journalists, who are usually highly motivated and dedicated people, there is also a desire to do the best they can, without fear or favour. Satisfaction comes from doing the job itself.

A US research study found that the portrait of the journalist at work showed that public service, helping people, was the most important aspect of a newspaper journalist’s life. Second was autonomy; third was freedom from supervision. Then came job security, followed by pay and fringe benefits. Most journalists are achievement-motivated. They need to excel or reach challenging goals, and demonstrate the following characteristics.

Journalists tend to be high achievers, and managers need to take this into account. Telling a high achiever to do something in a particular way may achieve the opposite, and they may decide not to do it. If a manager defines the tasks and the means of performing the tasks, and journalists feel restrained by tradition, they won’t be satisfied. Co-operation is needed from copy editors, specialists in reporting, freelance writers, photographers and artists. The journalist high achievers tend to move quickly into senior management positions and become senior news executives. The challenge for the editorial manager is to fit the needs of the high achiever (feedback, for example, and independence) into the framework of an efficient news operation.

Journalists are very conservative, and usually don’t like change. Editors are agents of change, and have to use good management and persuasion to make subordinates realize that change is good. They also have to help initiate change. The editor’s approach to managing change can vary, depending on the individual management style and personality. Some editors use trust – in other words, they foster trust from their reporters and, as a result, the reporters allow change to occur. For change to succeed, managers and editors must be committed to themselves to the change and show staff that it is a good thing. They also have to learn how to integrate new ideas and change into the existing system or environment. It is never a question of changing
everything. Change should be introduced in small doses, otherwise staff see it as threatening. Some changes alter routines, others mean more work or different ways of working and changes of responsibility (more or less). The editor’s main role in this situation of engineering change is to strengthen individual staff skills and knowledge and improve the way they work. Changes in individual behaviour are sometimes necessary. Because this is so personal, it can sometimes be very difficult. Change of this kind can involve emotions, attitudes, experiences, customs and traditions that have developed over many years.

To succeed in having change adopted willingly, staff in the newsroom must be aware of a problem that needs sorting out. They must be made to understand that what is happening is an integration of old knowledge, equipment or ways of working with the new. The best of old practices will be kept, and integrated with new ideas. Staff have to be coaxed to accept the change, and actually adopt it. There is no point in introducing change if no one works to the new system. Change must always be seen as positive, not negative for each individual, rather than solely for the organization. There can only be change if the staff member realizes there is a need for it. Show staff how beneficial a new work practice can be for them, otherwise there will always be suspicion that change is only for the good of the company, and to the detriment of the staff. Managers have to change that way of thinking by assuring staff that the changes are for the benefit of everyone. The editor must then get staff members to accept that change is necessary, and also to accept responsibility for the change. Changes will work if staff think the change is a result of their own decision, or if it will satisfy a need and is for the best. Nothing is secret for very long in a newsroom, and news of an impending change won’t remain confidential in a news organization; gossip about it will be everywhere. So don’t withhold information. This creates anxiety and starts rumours. Providing only partial information is bad. Inform peer group leaders, and get them on side before the full announcement. Involve the informal leaders in the planning for change.

Technological change is becoming very important as new technology is being implemented all the time. Staff will want to know whether new technology means fewer jobs and redundancy for those who can’t master the new equipment. There must be cultural change if there is to be an organizational change; for example, staff on an afternoon paper
must be prepared to change to a morning newspaper; from a news to a business paper. Staff are sensitive to a new lifestyle that represents a change in both their personal and professional lives.

There also has to be personal change for people changing roles within the organization. Here, the emphasis is on assisting staff members to adapt to new roles within their own newspaper. Orientation programmes acquaint new management with their responsibilities as supervisors, as well as helping them examine the value of finding and working with a mentor, building a network for peer group support, and understanding the dynamics of the new newspaper organization.

REPORTERS

Newsrooms consist basically of editors and reporters. The roles and organization differ from newspaper to newspaper. Editors edit and manage; reporters research, find the news, write it and then give it to the editors for final approval before printing. Reporters do hard news (the ‘beats’ of crime, politics, etc.) and/or features (‘Focus’ etc.), which take longer and involve investigation and lots of deep background reading and knowledge.

Newspapers look to the reporters for their main news content. Staff reporters provide a specific flavour to a specific newspaper – they give the newspaper the best control over news coverage and news gathering and allow individual newspapers to get exclusives, that is, stories before any other newspaper.

The reporter’s job

The following are the basic qualities that reporters should have, whatever medium they are working in:

- credibility
- curiosity
- confidence
- courage
• the skill to understand complex detail and present it simply and clearly
• interest in many different subjects, all at the same time sometimes
• impartiality (hang your opinions up with your coat when you enter the newsroom)
• a healthy scepticism (check and recheck: If your mother says she loves you, check it out)
• wide general knowledge
• sources and contacts.

One editor once described reporters as people who get what they are sent to do (when I was young, I was told: don’t come back without the story). Other editors define reporters as people who can meet deadlines, write well, are able to gather information fast and accurately and generate story ideas. Reporters need to be self-critical, and not worry about being criticized. In fact, they must expect to be criticized: it’s all part of the job. Reporters are people who know how to dig out information, whatever the source, and no matter how hidden or obscure. They should be skilled at:

• seeing and hearing
• taking notes
• finding information
• asking questions
• checking and verifying information
• analysing and interpreting information
• writing well.

Young reporters often feel uncertain and angry when they first join a newsroom. They are ignored; they aren’t given any work to do. Everyone else is given stories, but they are not. They begin to feel they are not liked; or that others are more favoured. There is favouritism in every newsroom, but it’s favouritism based only on how well you do the job, not on other things. Work hard, do a good job, find good stories, and you will sooner or later be rewarded with the best assignments. In the meantime, reporters have to earn the trust and confidence of the editors. They are not going to give the most difficult stories to the most inexperienced reporters. New reporters have constantly to prove that they are good enough to do the top stories in the top way. In the meantime, the new reporter will be expected to have the following skills and abilities.
Working in a digital age newsroom

Checklist of necessary reporter skills

- Works fast and enthusiastically on a story
- Aggressively follows-through on stories
- Gathers facts carefully and accurately
- Seeks a variety of sources in covering a story, and effectively develops sources of continuing stories
- Uses documents effectively
- Handles a variety of stories and writing approaches
- Writes clear, well-focused and well-organized stories
- Writes effective appropriate leads
- Writes with authority based on clear understanding of the topic or beat
- Produces stories that are fair and balanced
- Self-edits for crisper, cleaner copy before giving to editors
- Works well under pressure and meets deadlines
- Maintains a steady flow of ideas and stories.

Checklist of professional approaches to work

- Can use library and computer systems
- Understands the newsroom and can work effectively within it
- Is a good team player and can work with other reporters, photographers, artists and editors
- Takes direction, suggestions, criticism
- Lets people know about schedules, work in progress, problems, changes
- Is co-operative
- Reads newspapers and watches TV news every day
- Can work on more than one story at a time when necessary
- Comes to staff meetings and meets story deadlines on time
- Maintains good staff communications and relationships
- Helps less experienced reporters.

Checklist for doing the job

- Is willing to perform routine but necessary duties, such as the calls
- Consistently suggests ideas for stories, photographs and graphics
- Produces new stories and story ideas without being told
Types of reporter

Reporters are either generalists or specialists. Most are general reporters, and can be assigned to cover any sort of story, either individually or as part of a larger reporting team (a disaster or deep investigative story normally requires a team effort). Reporters must be trained to assess news value in various situations so they can be relied on to identify it for their readers as they do their assignment. Such news might come from something completely new: disclosure about pollution on farms in the country, or rumours of an outbreak of disease in pig farms. It might mean expanding on a known news story (doing a follow up); for example, a chat to the wife of a newly appointed member of parliament or the family of a policeman who has just won an award. Reporters are in charge of the facts once they have been briefed by the news editor or specialist editor (political editor, finance editor, sports editor).

By the story deadline, the reporter must have checked the facts, talked to the people concerned, and written it in interesting, accurate, readable form for the editors finally to assess. It is essential for every reporter to check the facts of every story they do. Editors must be able to trust the accuracy of the reporters, and the reporters must take this as a primary responsibility to check and sometimes re-check the facts of the story, and to get the quotes absolutely right. This includes the spelling of names and places, the style and titles of people in the news, geographical information, the business and literary backgrounds of people, and information arising from references in previous news stories (context). Reporters should check the cuttings files in the newsroom or library before leaving to cover a story, and use reference books when writing the story. If they need a particular fact while in the field, they can always ring the office and ask them to check. Reporters doing the story must verify the important facts while they cover the story by making sure they take careful notes of interviews with the people concerned, or of the evidence in court cases.
Working in a digital age newsroom

Reporters must ask the people who are competent to give the right information. If there are two sides to be considered, both must be allowed to offer views. Good relations with important people and those such as the police, hospital staff and people in public life are most important. Every reporter needs to cultivate contacts. One of the basic jobs is to make the calls: to visit or telephone contacts in local life, such as the police, the hospitals, local councils and public services. This is where news is found firsthand. Other areas, such as airlines and transport companies, also help. Such contacts can provide valuable names for future reference, and should all go into a personal contact book.

As well as hard news, young reporters also get involved in other parts of the newspaper: writing entertainment pieces, shopping guides, helping out with sports coverage. This is how the reporter learns: by doing these easy things.

Survival tips for young reporters

1. Keep in touch with the editors when covering a story. Telephone or let them know any new developments or change of angle, or that copy might be late or different. It helps the editors to plan the pages.
2. Immediately discuss with the editors any point that might be a legal problem.
3. Keep a copy of the story and check it with the final version that is going into the paper. This is a valuable learning experience: it also enables reporters to let the editors know if there are any problems of accuracy from changes, or if there is any disagreement over the changes. This is particularly important if the story carries the reporter’s byline. A byline on the story means that the story really is yours.

The broadcast reporter

Broadcast reporters are the ‘foot-in-the-door’ people, actually getting the news, the facts and the eye-witness accounts, either for writing up themselves or for others to write in the newsroom, or for a direct contribution to a news or current affairs programme. They are
particularly important on local stations, because it is they who reflect the goings-on of the local community. Local radio and TV stations, in whatever country or locality, are first and foremost for the community they serve. And it is in the news service of a local station that this service to the community is mainly manifested. Newsrooms should, as much as staff and resources allow, be self-originating in their news output. It is the reporters who make this self-sufficiency possible. Their job is very similar to that of a detective. Their ear must always be near the ground for news and possible news.

Reporters should build up their own set of local contacts and make their own set of calls regularly. Some, like police, ambulance and fire stations, should be rung or visited at least twice a day, as close to major bulletin times as possible. Then there are calls which should be made at regular but more infrequent intervals; local council and civil service contacts, local business leaders and professional people. If, for example, there’s some big construction job in the neighbourhood, it is always a good idea to keep regular contact with the various firms connected with the project: consulting engineers, architects, builders etc. It’s amazing the snippets of information that can be picked up from such sources. Local travel agents and airline offices are also useful contacts. There’s sometimes a VIP on a local visit, which is said to be private but might turn out to be very important. Reporters need to make it their business to know everything that’s going on, newsworthy and seemingly unnewsworthy. Something apparently insignificant can often assume importance later.

Whatever other reporters a station has, there are two at least that are specialist jobs and vital to local news and information: crime and local government. Crime news needs a reporter who can become known and trusted by the local police. Sometimes this reporter might even be asked to help the police, and it is here that a local station can score, both locally and nationally. Local government, the other vital beat for a local station, should also have a specialist reporter who can become known and trusted by local councillors and members of local government committees. Local radio and TV is community broadcasting. The community needs to know everything about its government.

When a story breaks, the reporter sent to cover it should contact the station as soon as possible, either from a radio car or telephone, and
provide a report that can be broadcast live into a programme and recorded for further use until it can be replaced by an updated version. These voice reports are the staple bread and butter of broadcast reporting.

The reporter’s next job is to record on-the-spot interviews with eyewitnesses and officials, together with actual sounds of what is happening: gunfire, for instance, or the crash of a collapsing roof. ‘Actuality’, the jargon for this kind of material, always adds that extra bit of flavour and colour to the station’s reporting. Sound is essential for radio; pictures for television.

Before returning to the station, the reporter should send material back from the scene, live for each news bulletin, and should also dictate copy stories for someone else to read in bulletins; record a wrap-up piece for broadcast later. This enables the newsroom to alternate and ring the changes so that, while the reporter is on the way back to the studio, the story still sounds fresh and live. Often, when the reporter is back at the station before the next bulletin, there will be time to prepare a longer package, wrapping up the whole event with inserts of interviews, sound effects and scripted reports. The producer of a local magazine programme may well also want a piece or longer interview for later. Reporters must always remember that there are a number of outlets for any one story, and should provide appropriate material for as many as possible.

Reporters and pictures

Reporters have a responsibility for getting the best pictures to go with their story. Sometimes they take the picture themselves; sometimes they go out with a photographer and tell them what to shoot; sometimes the photographer will go out separately after being told the general outline of the story and what kind of picture is wanted. Pictures are vital to any news story. Reporters should take a pride in getting the best possible picture to illustrate graphically what they are trying to tell the reader. Pictures give information such as how a person or a place in a news story looks, or what actually happened, more effectively than words in many cases, and they thus add and extend the text. They can of course also be news in their own right. Every story should have pictures. Normally, however good a picture is,
it cannot stand alone without some relevant explanatory text. Reporters should get used to thinking of a suitable piece of text to go with the story (a caption) to create an emotive effect in the reader’s mind.

THE EDITORS

Editors were once reporters, and they have individual editorial management styles. Some hate reporters. They rewrite everything they get their hands on; they focus attention always on the news writing and feature writing style. Other editors leave this to their staff. They are production people, and have probably been promoted from the “back bench”, the executives who control the putting together or production of the paper. They are mainly concerned with the look of the paper – with the pictures, headlines, etc. They see editing as a job of good presentation. They are fussy over the wording and fit of headlines; the amount of white space between items on a page; the size of a picture is likely to print and the visual balance between the top of one page and another as the paper is opened. The editor (or chief editor) is the person physically responsible for what goes into the paper, how it is edited, how it is presented to the public, and for getting the paper out on time. If there is a serious problem – legal or otherwise – it is the editor who is responsible and who will go to gaol. The editor is always presumed to have seen everything and to have authorized everything (unless they are out of the country and uncontactable at the time). Newspapers always have a deputy editor. The deputy will do what the editor isn’t doing; if the editor is a writing editor, the deputy will probably be responsible for the production style of the newspaper. In general, the deputy editors take the weight of administrative duties.

The editor as manager

The job develops the editorial mission of the newspaper, including the organization of the staff, the news policy, major operational practices and performance standards. The editor:

1. Plans the budget, changes in news or feature content
2. Organizes resources based on the budget plan
3. Selects and develops newsroom staff
4 Directs the work of the staff
5 Controls performance through feedback, appraisal, rewards.

The editor manages by forming a unified news staff out of a group of individual journalists and creating a newspaper out of a whole selection of different news stories, photographs and illustrations. The editor is the conductor of the newspaper. Editors, like conductors, maximize individual strengths and minimize weaknesses. The editor, like the conductor, has to balance interests: journalistic standards and economic goals. Satisfying one at the expense of the other can cause trouble. The editor has to balance the long-term goals of the newspaper with the short-term daily decisions on coverage and staffing.

Good editors are planners. This involves thinking, looking ahead, anticipating the future, setting goals, generating ideas for improving the newspaper and making appropriate decisions. Planning establishes the foundation for organizing, staffing, directing and controlling.

Editorial planning involves the 5Ws:
1 What – the goal
2 When – timing
3 Where – the place where the plan will reach conclusion
4 Who – the people involved in performing the tasks
5 Why – the justification.

It also involves the how – the steps to take to achieve the goal, including cost.

There are two kinds of editorial and managerial planning: strategic and tactical. Strategic planning involves the whole news operation, and requires co-operation of individuals at all levels. It needs thought, analysis, imagination and judgement. Tactical planning involves the goal; the plan must be pursued in a systematic, well-organized manner that converts a plan into action. The tactical plan follows from the strategic plan (which means the editor gives the overall strategic plan to a lower level team to implement).

Many editors don’t like planning. They prefer to react to situations (crisis management) rather than plan ahead. Their plans should:

• be realistic (not just wishful thinking)
• be specific (details should be clear about what is to happen, how, how much it will cost, how long to achieve)
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- have a deadline (this is a control mechanism for the editor and gives everyone a target).

Others on the staff should also participate in the planning.

The relationship between planning and organizing is close. Organization has four activities:
1. Determining what work is to be done to achieve the objectives
2. Classifying the type of work and the groups of workers into manageable units
3. Delegating appropriate authority and assigning work to individuals
4. Designing a hierarchy of decision-making relationships.

Newsrooms are organized both functionally (with separate operations for reporting, editing, photography etc.) and as a production line (the product of a particular desk, such as sport, is different from the product of the politics desk, but they all come together to form the final news content of the paper). Authority flows from editor to each news area through the principle of unity of direction. There is one authority figure for each major task. This makes for a proper decision-making structure. This then allows an effective flow of information and decisions up and down the chain of command.

People are the most important part of a newsroom; journalists the greatest resource. This means the editorial manager has to be closely involved in the people activities, such as recruitment, selection, orientation (integrating a new employee into the staff), training and development, performance appraisals and employment decisions (which flow from appraisal: pay, transfers, promotions, termination).

Delegation

In all these matters, editorial managers have to delegate. Other members of management have to have the ability to make decisions. There are two types of delegation:
1. The regular task (the daily news meeting)
2. The special situation (the morning routine meeting with the managing director. If the editor is away this has to be delegated once-only to someone else).
However, when editorial managers delegate, the ‘Buck still stops with them’.

Managers need time to manage, to think, to plan. The best manager can leave the office and not be called to sort out a crisis. An effective delegator has more time to think. Many don’t delegate out of fear – the subordinate might do the job better.

**Guidelines for delegating**

- Specify the expectation
- Explain why you are delegating
- Give necessary authority
- Let others know about the delegation
- Display confidence in your subordinate
- Delegate important tasks; not just small ones
- Set high standards
- Invite participation
- Audit the work thoughtfully, but don’t check up all the time – delegation means trust
- Give credit for results.

The editor monitors, the other functions of management, and establishes standards to measure performance; measures performance against the standards and takes action to correct performance that falls short of the standards.

**The news editor**

All newspapers have a news editor. The news editor’s main job is to organize the news gathering and news writing activity of the day by assessing information at hand, briefing reporters and local correspondents, planning the coverage of stories in the light of the day’s news schedule, and checking the finished work before it is passed to the subeditors. Stories are mostly in the diary beforehand, so that it is easy to tell what is coming up and who is covering what. The news editor prepares a daily news schedule from the diary for the information of the editor and senior colleagues. This shows the stories that are being covered and by whom. The news editor must also authorize any money spent by reporters, such as transport costs.
On morning papers the newsroom works a long day, usually from about 1000 hrs until after the last edition has been printed at about 0300 hrs the next morning. The duties of the news editor and deputies and of the reporters are divided into shifts, with some on early shift, a few on the night shift, and the bulk of shifts overlapping to give maximum coverage for the main part of the day. Reporters should have a good idea well beforehand of likely stories that are coming up. Reporters can and should therefore have story ideas well in advance, and be assigned to cover them for later editions of the newspaper. Not all news works day-to-day. Some works months in advance. Reporters should learn to think well ahead, and so, of course, should editors.

**Picture editing**

This is important, and should be discussed by the relevant editor and the reporter whose story is involved. Imagination and experience is needed to look at a photograph and decide whether this will make the right picture that will print well and enhance the page. Factors about the choice will include the relevance to a story and the position of the figures in the picture in relation to the space available on the page. For instance, figures should not look away from the story that the photograph illustrates.

The photograph may have been chosen from a large number of the same person or incident. Once it has been chosen, and the final decision must always be the picture editor’s, it is then actually edited by the reporter or artist involved. Decisions about photographs include how much to use – in other words, which parts to exclude, such as people or detail not essential to the story – so as to give the best picture. This is cropping.

**The features editor**

There is a features editor whose function is similar to that of the news editor although the news editor thinks today and the features editor thinks well ahead. Staff reporters might be moved to in-depth investigations that tie them down for weeks and involve much detailed assessment of a situation which might have a “news peg,” but is a news feature rather than a report. Non-news editorial
content is usually called features. There can be news features or
timeless features.

Reporters need to be able to do all kinds of reporting. A reporter
writing features needs to think differently from the news reporter.
The reporter writing a feature assembles a number of facts (some
current, some old) and some figures, quotations and descriptions and
writes them into a pattern of argument in order to come to a
conclusion. The conclusion can be the explanation that lies behind a
news story, behind some government policy or current economic
problem or simply behind someone’s success.

The feature reporter must have facts and quotations from people,
though it is not the newness that is important. The feature
reporter is concerned with what people say or do, but for more
selective purposes. The feature uses facts, quotes, background and
new statistics to illustrate a point of view. The feature reporter is
looking for argument and conclusion that is important, not the
‘happening now news event’. Feature reporters explain, deduce, and
have the material pinned specifically to their name. It is their point
of view.

Features editing

The process of news and features editing follows the same basic
procedures. Some newspaper features relate very closely to the news
of the day and are in effect extensions of them on another page.
Others are quite separate and topical. However, features have a
different type of editing to news stories.

Features should not be rewritten very much at all. Features are
ordered from a reporter who will be expected to become an expert
very quickly in the subject, and they will often be to a specified
length and pre-planned for a specific page. The editing of features
should therefore be much gentler than for a news story. Features
should be edited for accuracy, grammar and legal safety. Any
rewriting should normally be checked with the reporter first (or the
reporter asked to rewrite, expand etc.). Such rewriting must always
be within the style of the original reporter. Some writers actually
forbid any changes or cutting, but editors can and should still edit
features to fit the page etc.
The sub-editors

All newspapers have sub-editors (sometimes in American newspapers simply called editors). They carry out the detailed editing, usually working under a chief sub-editor. Their job is to:

- check the story facts, names and places in a story
- check and put right grammatical errors and spelling mistakes
- cut the text if necessary to fit a given space on the page
- combine material from different sources to make a composite story of the required length
- reword all or part of the material, if need be, to attain the required balance, length and house style
- check the story is legally safe
- key in the appropriate command instructions so that the story is set in the right type size and measure, with correct header instructions indicating catch line, page, column and edition number
- revise the story as needed for editions in the light of later information or edition requirements
- provide any captions for pictures
- write a headline for the story in the required type to fit the space available
- make sure the procedures are carried out so that the story is ready on time for its page and edition. In other words, to make sure the reporters give in their stories to deadline.

In the newspaper world, it is the editor who is finally responsible for accuracy. Sub-editors should be always suspicious of everything, especially the spelling of names and places. They should check with the reporter. Sometimes the sub-editor might find in the checking that the reporter’s story is old, or the particular angle is. There should then be discussion between them about how to fix the story and give it a new angle or drop it. Sub-editors should always be checking and talking to the reporters. There might be vital facts that the reporter has forgotten to put in the story, or there might be very good reason why the reporter has left out a certain fact. This requires constant communication.

Rewriting

Sub-editors might do some basic, but not too much, rewriting. They might also decide that a story is so poorly written, with the facts in the
wrong sequence, or the wrong lead, that the reporter needs to rewrite. This is normal, and communication between the two will solve any problems. Some newspapers – particularly in the US – have rewrite subs, whose sole job is to do this.

Caption writing

The job of the caption is to explain the subject of a picture, and there are two sorts:

1. Self-contained stories built around the subject of the picture and often carrying a small headline
2. Simple line captions to explain the pictures used to illustrate the story.

Caption writing is a skilled job, and is usually given to a specialist sub-editor. Writing captions gives lots of scope for imagination because it often has to establish a justification for using a picture which in itself may look good but may not be newsworthy.

Getting on with the editors

This is an always problem. Reporters and editors don't get on very well professionally because reporters want the story to be used in their way and editors always want to change it for some reason or other. The secret of success is not to take things personally. Editors are busy people, who only have their mind on one thing: getting out the newspaper. Reporters should also have their minds on one thing only: getting the story, first, and accurately. Get used to it: that's life.

When the editor receives copy there are some basic questions and decisions to be made:

• Is information missing?
• Does the story need to be developed?
• Does it need more background?
• Are there enough/too many quotes?
• Are the quotes good enough to use?
• Does the lead need to be polished?
• Has the reporter chosen the right lead or should another angle be emphasized?
Is it worth publishing at all?
How long is it worth?

The editor will then discuss these points with the reporter and sometimes ask for changes, further information that is needed etc. After the changes are made, the story is re-submitted to the editor, who will look at it more closely this time. If the editor is happy (unusual), the reporter’s job is finished; if the editor isn’t happy (usual), the job continues with another rewrite. In some newspapers and news magazines there is another level through which each story goes: the fact checker. This is always a frustrating experience for all reporters. Reporters are egotists, who think they know what makes the story and how it should be written. They don’t like editors, who are also egotists and think they know how the story should be done, telling them to make changes. This can be discouraging, but generally the story is improved (although not always).

FURTHER READING

Unit 2
Sumber Pengumpulan Berita

Objektif Pembelajaran;

Pada akhir pembelajaran unit ini para pelajar akan dapat;

1. Menerangkan aplikasi peralatan baru dalam penerbitan dan pengumpulan berita.
2. Menerangkan kesan aplikasi peralatan baru dalam dunia kewartawanan.
3. Menjelaskan sumber pengumpulan berita "online".
4. Menerangkan strategi pengurusan sumber berita yang tidak berauthoriti.
5. Menerangkan kaedah pengumpulan berita yang berwibawa.

Topik Perbincangan Tutorial dan Latihan

1. Senarai dan bincangkan jenis peralatan untuk pengumpulan dan penerbitan berita secara digital.
2. Bincangkan bagaimana aplikasi peralatan baru dalam pengumpulan berita memberi kesan kepada dunia kewartawanan.
4. Nyatakan empat perkara yang perlu diberi perhatian apabila mengumpul berita menggunakan perkhidmatan "online".
5. Terangkan ciri atau tabiat seorang wartawan yang berjaya.
7. Bincangkan dua panduan asas pengumpulan berita yang dilakukan melalui penyelidikan.
8. Bincangkan bentuk pengumpulan berita yang boleh dilakukan melalui penyelidikan "online".

Sumber Bahan Pembelajaran Modul

Rujukan yang digunakan sebagai bahan pembelajaran pada modul Unit 2 ini adalah sebagai berikut;

1. **New Tools for News Gathering (m.s.65)**  
   **A Reporter's Field Guide to the Internet (m.s.77)**  
   **Sumber:**  
2. Where do Good Stories Come from? (m.s.98)
   Research (m.s.109)
   Online Research (m.s.116)
   Handling Sources, Not Them Handling You (m.s.129)

Sumber:
Technology has always played an important part in the news-
gathering and production process. Whether scribbling notes on a page, re-
cording an event on videotape, or taping a telephone interview, journalists
are accustomed to using a variety of technical tools to acquire the raw data
they use to tell their stories.

Advances in new media technology are transforming these technical
tools, which offer new ways to process raw news data in all its forms, whether
handwritten notes, audio interviews, or video content. This chapter exam-
ines three broad areas of new media tools for digital news gathering and
production. First, it examines tools for image acquisition and processing in
which journalists interact directly with the content of those images. Second,
it reviews tools for processing handwritten notes and audio content. And,
third, it considers the mobile journalist workstation as an integrated system
of news gathering and production for the reporter in the field. This chapter
touches only briefly on the implications of the Internet in news gathering,
which chapter 4 examines in detail. By and large, the Internet is a tool for
secondary data collection (i.e., collecting data from other published sources)
and for accessing public transactional records and represents a large enough
subject to warrant a chapter of its own.
Interacting Directly with Images

Consider how journalists will soon work with images and video in digital format. Traditionally, images, whether still or moving, analog or digital, have been searchable in two ways; the same is true for audio. One technique is to search the images based on text descriptors someone has written in order to catalog them. This method works well enough but is very limited if you want to find a picture or video that has not been cataloged or was cataloged in a way inconsistent with your search. The problem is growing more severe as the amount of image and video content being produced worldwide grows exponentially with the widespread distribution of low-cost image capture technologies such as still and motion picture digital video cameras. At Time Inc., for example, hundreds of thousands of images are being added each year to an already vast collection.

This leaves the second, older technique for searching stored pictures, looking at all of them. Needless to say, this can be a very time-consuming process, especially when the images may number in the millions or extend over thousands of hours of video. It is especially problematic when a journalist is on deadline.

A number of researchers are developing a new class of storage, search, and retrieval tools to address this vexing problem: Content-based indexing, storage, and retrieval tools enable the viewer to search the actual content of an image or video. How does this work? One current prototype developed by a Columbia University research team is called Webseek. Computer science professor Shih-Fu Chang and his doctoral student, John Smith, developed Webseek in 1996 as a software tool to enable Web surfers to find images and video easily on the World Wide Web. Using a software agent known as a spider (an intelligent agent, or software robot), Webseek has cataloged some 650,000 images and videos on the Web. The spider doesn’t completely ignore existing text descriptors when cataloging the images. Rather, it uses keywords, file names, and file types to make initial classifications. Then, users can search for images based on certain low-level features of the images themselves. For example, one way to use Webseek is to select a broad category of pictures, such as sunsets. Having cataloged some 530 sunsets, Webseek gives the user a random selection of 20 sunsets to view first. The user then picks which of the random selections comes closest to what he or she is looking for and instructs the computer to search
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the other 510 sunset images for those that match the selected image most closely in terms of color distribution or the amount of red, green, and blue. This may not sound like a profound breakthrough, but a demonstration is remarkably convincing.¹ And this is just the beginning.

Within a few years, much more powerful search tools will be available that search not only on low-level features such as color or texture but on higher-order features such as objects, patterns, and semantic meaning. Imagine an automated surveillance system employed in a bank utilizing an omnivision camera to monitor all traffic in the lobby. Faces are instantly scanned against known criminals or for anyone wearing a mask (other examples of visual search tools search on skin color and can recognize nude bodies).² Anyone meeting the known profile instantly triggers a silent alarm notifying bank security personnel and the police. One such system is employed in a German bank as a final step in controlling access to the vault.

In 1998 Professor Chang developed VideoŒ, a software tool for searching the content of digital video. Consider the time and human capital that might have been saved if such technology had been used to find an archived video clip of President Clinton embracing former White House intern Monica Lewinsky (of course, this assumes a future scenario in which video news is in digital form, but this is happening quickly with the coming digitization of television in the United States).

For journalism, these tools will create a system for automatically indexing and storing video as well as a powerful means to retrieve images and video that fully exploits both the information contained in the index and the actual content of the images themselves, thus making possible efficient searches that go beyond the scope of the original keyword index. Even a single reporter working for a local television station or a freelance Internet journalist will be able to conduct searches of massive databases of images and video in a fraction of the time teams of researchers need today.

Video and sound production are also undergoing a new media-morphosis (to adapt a term coined by new media pioneer Roger Fidler).³ First-generation digital postproduction technologies have been cumbersome, slow, expensive, and inefficient. As a result, many producers have opted to continue working with analog production tools, such as tape cutters. New digital tools for audio, image, and video editing are being developed to run not just on expensive dedicated newsroom systems such as Avid but on portable personal computers that a reporter can take into the field. I discuss these applications
further later in the portion of this chapter devoted to the mobile journalist workstation.

Digital Tools for Handwriting and Audio

Two staples of raw, unprocessed news data are a reporter's handwritten notes and her or his audio recordings of interviews and ambient sound. For most of the 20th century, these raw unedited data have been cumbersome, awkward (not to mention illegible in many cases) and difficult to work with, especially for an editor or producer who may not have been on the scene when they were acquired. As a result, handwritten notes and audio recordings are frequently a cause of one of the basic bottlenecks in the news production process. Typically, a reporter after returning from the field or after completing an interview, needs to sit down for a considerably lengthy time to review the raw data she has collected, index it, perhaps by subject and data, time code the audio (as is the case with video) and then begin to structure a story. All this is a relatively inefficient and time-consuming process for the journalist, and can lead to errors when the reporter faces a looming deadline.

Recent developments in new media technology present potential solutions to the problem of processing raw data in both handwritten and audio/video format. Handwriting recognition has proven to be a difficult challenge for engineers in the digital age, and despite the successful handwriting recognition capabilities of Apple's Newton MP 2000 (with roughly 90 percent reliable handwriting recognition), there have been no commercially successful handwriting recognition tools to date. The MP 2000 was discontinued in 1998 because of looming competition from a host of other small and cheaper PDAs, such as the Palm Pilot (which has an effective handwriting recognition system based on a form of "graffiti," or adapted writing style, the user must learn).

A new device from the Cross Pen Computing Group offers the first viable solution to the vexing handwriting recognition problem endemic to journalism (and other fields). Rather than requiring the user to write with a special pen on an electronic screen (as with the MP 2000), the CrossPad (dubbed the first portable digital notepad, or PND) allows the user to write on a regular pad of paper using a regular pen or pencil. Light weight (2.2 pounds), inexpensive (less than $400), and wireless, the CrossPad sits un-
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derneath any 8.5-by-11-inch pad of paper and uses a radio frequency (RF) transmitter to scan in the handwriting sensed from each pen stroke. The handwriting is not converted into so-called machine-readable text, however; rather, it is left in analog format as written, with the device using IBM handwriting recognition software to scan in digital format only user-selected passages and automatically add indexes, such as date, subject, and so forth. The notepad can store up to fifty pages of single-spaced text or one hundred pages of loose notes (typically more than sufficient for an average reporter's day's work), which can be ported electronically into any desktop computer. A tray on the side of the notepad can hold up to five additional storage cartridges, each capable of storing another fifty pages of text, thereby meeting the needs of even the most prolific reporter's notes.

With such a device, after completing an interview (or set of interviews) the reporter can return to her workspace, transfer her notes to a desktop computer (this can also be done via modem from a remote location to another reporter or a central newsroom), and then begin writing up the story from data that are already partially organized and can be easily converted to machine-readable format.

Similar advances are poised to transform the processing of digital audio recordings. An increasing number of newsrooms are equipping their reporters with digital audio recorders for use in conducting interviews in the field or via the telephone. In digital format, those audio (or video) recordings can automatically create a time code and be seamlessly edited in digital audio workstations, supplanting the need for physical tape cutters. Experience at Columbia University's Digital Audio Newroom at the Graduate School of Journalism indicates that even beginning reporters can learn to use digital audio production technology more easily and quickly than traditional analog systems, thus reducing the learning curve and enabling the reporters to focus on the content of their stories.

Only recently, however, has there been any increase in the efficiency of the scanning, indexing, and sorting of the actual audio content, even in digital format. Recently released voice recognition tools will soon change this situation dramatically. Via Voice® from IBM, Dragon Dictate's Naturally Speaking®, and Kurzweil's VoicePro® are parts of a new class of voice recognition tools with significant implications for journalists. Unlike past computer dictation technologies, these new software products process continuous speech (i.e., speech that does not require discrete pronunciation, or a brief pause between each word), have vocabularies of some thirty thousand
words, run on standard PCs, and cost less than $200. Although these systems are designed primarily for dictation and to transmit voice commands to a computer, they may also be useful in creating instant transcripts of audio interviews stored in digital format. In controlled environments, the IBM system has been found to be effective. The biggest immediate challenge will be to acquire clean audio in the field, when many competing sounds may introduce noise into the digital audio. These technical challenges will likely be solved in the coming months.

The Mobile Journalist Workstation

Finally, consider the mobile news system being developed through a collaboration of Columbia University’s Center for New Media and its Computer Graphics and User Interfaces Lab. Now in prototype stage, the mobile journalist workstation (MJW) involves a combination of off-the-shelf technologies and software developed by Columbia computer science professor Steven Feiner and students in Feiner’s lab. It utilizes a hybrid user interface combining five primary technologies: a wearable computer backpack, a handheld PDA with a high-resolution screen, a GPS receiver that can pinpoint the user’s location within one centimeter, a high-speed, eleven-megabit-per-second wireless WAVLAN (local area network) link to the Internet and the World Wide Web, and a head-mounted display equipped with a see-through visor and silver-halide reflective mirror, earphones, and head tracker that provides a precise measurement of the spatial and directional orientation of the head.

Invented by Steve Mann in 1980 (founder of the Humanistic Computing Lab at the University of Toronto and formerly of the MIT Media Lab), such wearable systems have been refined and advanced by Feiner and others to develop what is called augmented reality. Primarily used in manufacturing, augmented reality provides the user with additional information layered on a real-life scene or situation. For example, in aerospace manufacturing, engineers estimate that as much as 60 percent of the time is spent referring to blueprints rather than welding. Augmented reality systems now in testing enable a welder to see a transparent overlay of the blueprint on top of his work, enabling him to locate precisely the position of the next weld, and almost eliminating the time spent referring to the blueprint.

The current generation of the MJW under development at Columbia University incorporates a variety of image and sound acquisition devices, in-
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cluding tools for digital audio and video acquisition. Similar research is underway at Kansas State University and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (the computer science department’s Oxygen Project is headed up by Michael Dertouzos), as well as in the television news industry, where tools for more efficiently capturing and transmitting multimedia news content are at a premium.

The acquisition devices for the MJW include both digital audio and video sensors (microphones and cameras). Perhaps the most significant devices are the new generation of so-called megapixel cameras, which capture more than a million picture elements, or pixels, in a single picture. Although these megapixel cameras are still not at the quality of 35 mm film, they are getting reasonably close and produce images more than suitable for online publication, where one or two million pixels in a standard image provide more resolution than many monitors can display and more detail than the human eye can sometimes process. Among the best megapixel cameras are the Kodak DC4800, the Sony CyberShot DSC-S70, the Olympus C-2020, and the Nikon Coolpix 990. They offer the quality of more expensive digital cameras priced between $2,000 and $15,000 but offer fewer options, such as interchangeable lenses and an extensive color range. In general, these new cameras represent a quantum improvement in image quality and at a lower price (about $500-$1,000) than earlier generations of digital still cameras. Megapixel cameras replace an earlier generation of VGA cameras producing images with 640 by 480 pixels (the product of these numbers yields a pixel count of 307,200 and a wallet-sized color photograph). With megapixel cameras print size can be increased to 4 by 6 inches without producing jagged edges, or what is termed pixelation. Amateur photographers can produce 5-by-7-inch glossy color prints at home. Kodak claims its DC4800 produces high-quality 8-by-10 prints. As a result, an increasing array of news organizations are using these cameras, which offer photographers the ability to take pictures on deadline and still make the late edition of the paper or go directly to online publication because there is no processing time as with film-based cameras. Most megapixel cameras have a liquid crystal display (LCD) permitting the photographer to see the image instantly. Images can then be stored, sorted, and transmitted anywhere.

Professor Steve Mann has pioneered the use of wearable photographic and video technology. Details on how Mann has used his wearable camera to capture and publish news photos not only online but in traditional print newspapers follow in this chapter. For small news operations and for freelance journalists, it is worth noting that there is no incremental cost for
using a digital camera, as there is with film cameras that require continual purchase of film and associated film processing. Digital storage cards can be reused indefinitely. In addition, the new megapixel cameras are smaller and lighter than earlier versions, thus making them more portable and an effective part of the MJW. The cameras vary slightly in size, weight, and battery life; the typical camera is 4-by-4-by-2 inches and weighs ten to fifteen ounces. When connected to a personal computer with image-editing software and attached to a color ink-jet printer, megapixel cameras bring additional advantages over conventional film photography: inside a digital darkroom, it is an easy matter to crop, enhance, resize, rotate, or recolor (this requires a scanner and imaging software such as Adobe Photodeluxe) an image (these processing features raise important ethical issues, which I examine in detail in chapter 5). A typical digital darkroom includes a scanner (although this is not necessary when working exclusively with digital cameras), imaging software such as Adobe Photodeluxe, and a standard PC. All of this can be incorporated into an MJW.

High-quality MPEG (digital) video cameras are also increasingly ubiquitous, powerful, and cheap. Models such as the Hitachi MPEG1A, for example, can record motion video (MPEG, which is a form of video compression), still images (JPEG, a form of compression for still digital images), and JPEG with audio (or still images with accompanying audio in digital format). Such a camera can typically record twenty minutes of full-motion MPEG-1 video and audio, three thousand still JPEG images, or one thousand JPEGs with ten-second audio clips. The files are compressed in real time and stored on a removable 260 mb PC card. The camera features 6x zoom capabilities (which can magnify an image by 6x) for long shots. The user views the shots using a color 1.8-inch LCD and can instantly delete or retake any video clip or picture. Files are automatically indexed with recording mode, date, and time and include a thumbnail image for easy scanning and retrieval. The contents can be transferred to a computer for processing and editing, presentations, and Internet or intranet news delivery. These acquisition devices are an essential element of MJW technology.

Steve Mann has field-tested applications of wearable computing for journalism. On at least two occasions, Mann, the original cyborg (he wears his wearable computer system virtually twenty-four hours a day), has happened across news events before local news providers could get to the scene. Mann, a two-time recipient of the top photography award in Canada with a Ph.D. in engineering from MIT, captured images of the events via his head-worn
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camera, immediately contacted a local news organization by cellular communications and alerted them to the breaking news events, and had his images published after the paper downloaded the images Mann had transmitted from his wearcam via wireless transmission to a remote Web server. In one case, the paper's editor requested that Mann stop taking pictures and get his film to the paper at once. Mann informed him that there was no film and that the pictures were already available via the Internet.

The three following journalism scenarios illustrate how a reporter equipped with an NMM (or similar device) might produce a more contextualized news report.

Scenario One: Political Reporting

As the candidate for district attorney began his speech, Jackie Oregel, a reporter for the New Media News (NMM), listened intently to the former prosecutor's claim that he had an unprecedented conviction rate for homicide cases. Oregel thinks this claim impressive, as do most of the other reporters present at the press conference. But is it true?

Using her handheld PDA—which she uses for note taking (it recognizes her handwriting as a security measure, so no one else can tamper with her notes, and automatically indexes her notes by subject, keywords, and date), communications, and a variety of other applications—Oregel taps on the Web browser button of the touch-sensitive screen. Linking to the Internet's World Wide Web via a 56 kbps digital personal communications service (PCS), her PDA immediately goes to the NMM intranet, which provides not only instant access to the entire contents of the Web, including an archive of all NMM stories published to date, but also to the news service's digital archive of public records. These records include data on the homicide conviction rates for the state. Running a cross-tabulation of the former prosecutor's name against the rates for homicide convictions for the past twelve months quickly confirms his claim. He does have an unprecedented conviction rate for homicide cases: it is the worst.

"Would you elaborate on your unprecedented homicide conviction rate?" Oregel asks the candidate, obtaining a time-coded digital audio recording of the candidate's comments and a simultaneous transcript created using voice recognition software. After finishing her questioning, Oregel prepares to file her report. As part of the NMM reporting team, the first step is to use
her PDA to communicate via email with her editor, producer, and the newsroom Web master regarding the lead, length, and modality of her story.

The team requests three reports: a linear text report for the news service, an audio report using the digital audio she recorded on her PDA and edited in the field via her portable PC, and an interactive report for the service's Web site, incorporating not only a written report but also audio and photos of the candidate, which she took with her megapixel digital still camera, as well as raw data culled from the candidate's prosecution record. She uses her wireless PC to file her three reports using file transfer protocol (FTP) for the Internet.

Is this scenario science fiction or journalistic reality? Although no commercial news organization currently makes use of this complete technology system—every element described above exists in off-the-shelf commercially available software and hardware products—many news organizations are expanding their use of these technologies, and many pioneering reporters use some of these tools. The facts of the case are real and are based on the true-life experiences of Elliot Jaspin, a pioneering investigative reporter who once reported a story in which a former nun turned prosecutor ran for district attorney in Rhode Island (which Jaspin dubbed a reporter's theme park) and made exactly this claim at a press conference. Subsequent investigative work by Jaspin proved her performance to be the worst on record, but the investigation required Jaspin to return to the newsroom of the Providence Journal-Bulletin, thus eliminating the possibility of questioning the prosecutor at the time she made the claim.

Scenario Two: Foreign Reporting

Entering K Kisangani, a formerly wealthy trading post on the Congo River, a young freelance journalist uses her MJW to survey the scene quickly. Looking at the crumbling ruins of a once-grand building, her head-mounted display overlays the identity of the building: the Hotel Leopold. Tapping her finger on the touch-sensitive screen of the personal digital appliance that serves as the information interface to the MJW, additional background information about the hotel appears on the display: Humphrey Bogart stayed there during the 1950 filming of The African Queen. As the reporter journeys deeper into the heart of the old Belgian colonial city, her MJW provides instant access to rich databases of news and other information available via
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the World Wide Web and other online sources, including text, images, graphics, video, and audio, all presented as augmented reality, or information layered onto the real scene she is reporting from. She uses this information to put into context the original reporting she is doing today. She takes a photograph documenting the scene, with the exact longitude, latitude, altitude, and time encoded into the digital watermark certifying the authenticity of her photographic work and protecting its copyright. Later, from a remote encampment in northeastern Zaire, the intrepid reporter transmits a series of digital dispatches via her MJW’s satellite phone to an eagerly awaiting global audience. Imagine having access to such technology when reporting a terrorist attack such as happened in August 1998 in Kenya or Tanzania.

Scenario Three: Convention Coverage

A third scenario brings the MJW closer to home. At the Democratic National Convention in Chicago during the 1996 U.S. presidential campaign Vice President Al Gore delivered on August 28 an emotional and moving speech in which he explained how his sister had died of cancer in all probability caused by her cigarette smoking. The next day, most major newspapers and television networks reported on the front page about Gore’s eloquent and stirring speech. Even 1988’s McNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, the most-respected news program on television, reported that “when he [Gore] spoke of his sister’s fight with cancer, one delegate writes that the United Center was ‘quiet as a church’.”

The Gore speech was not delivered until late in the evening on the twenty-eighth, and there was little time to check facts afterward because the reporters were all on deadline. Forced to report without any context, they could only report on the event itself, the emotionally stirring speech. The next day, however, research uncovered the fact that the Clinton-Gore campaign had accepted contributions from a number of tobacco companies and lobbyists and that the Gore family had even accepted tobacco subsidies from the federal government long after his sister’s death. Stories that explained this connection ran the next day in major papers, but they were generally small items deep inside the papers, not the front-page reports of the day-one story.
What difference might an MjW have made to this story? In 1996 it would probably have made little difference, largely because the infrastructure for accessing public transactional records on the Internet was relatively primitive and undeveloped. Two years later the case was entirely different. By accessing the Federal Election Commission's Web site for campaign contributions, a search on August 25, 1998, showed that Gore's campaign committee had received some $68,000 in contributions between January and June 1998 from fourteen organizations, including both corporate contributors and political action committees (PAC) as diverse as the AT&T Corporate PAC and the Walt Disney Productions Employees PAC. Bell Atlantic Corp.'s PAC was the single biggest contributor, with three contributions totaling $13,000. Although there are no tobacco companies on this list, how useful might such information be as a reference point during future campaign speeches by the vice president, who is known for his leadership on issues involving telecommunications deregulation? Each contributor is linked to additional details, including committee identification number, mailing address, treasurer's name, and committee type (e.g., party affiliation). This information might be useful for a reporter conducting further research or in need of a source at a relevant PAC.

This spectrum of digital news-gathering technologies presents the journalist of the twenty-first century with an exciting and perhaps intimidating digital toolkit. None of the tools discussed in this chapter comes with any guarantee of success, nor is it certain they will be used wisely or ethically. They do, however, offer the well-trained journalist in the field the capabilities to put stories in much better context, to check facts on the spot, and to work more efficiently and effectively when in remote or unfamiliar locations or when under the pressure of deadline. It is also certain that the tools will continue to evolve, becoming smaller, lighter, and more powerful. No doubt the sources journalists cover, especially those in wealthy corporate behemoths, will have access to these same technologies.
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Prologue: About the Internet

The Internet is a global network of computer networks using a common set of technical protocols known as TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocols). Born of various industry initiatives but primarily a U.S. Defense Department project to maintain communications in the advent of a nuclear holocaust, the Internet is largely a product of the innovative minds of Vinton Cerf, now a vice president for MCI, and Robert E. Kahn, president of the Corporation for National Research Initiatives. Not controlled by any one person or organization, the Internet is a medium of multimedia content, interactive communications, electronic mail, and much more. Content is produced by millions of people, companies, governments, and others in more than 180 countries on all seven continents. The quality of that content varies widely, from the exceptional to the confused to the deliberately misleading. Most of it is available at no cost to the user, although there are exceptions. Most of the material discussed here is available to journalists at no cost. Although there are other online resources outside the Internet (e.g., parts of proprietary online services such as America Online are not available via the Internet), the majority of online content and services is on the Internet. This primer therefore focuses on the Internet (although AOL membership now exceeds twenty million, its growth rate is slowing; according to David Simons, managing director of Digital Video Investments,
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membership took 133 days to move from twelve million to thirteen million, compared to the 86-day jump from eleven to twelve million). For an excellent and thorough history of the Internet see Hobbes' Internet Timeline (hosted by the Internet Society). See also the www.cnn.columbia.edu "research" link to CNN research reports by Mischa Schwartz on the telecommunications network, John Carey on the "adolescence" of the Internet, and Paul Sagan on the "network economy."

About the World Wide Web

The World Wide Web (www) is a global electronic publishing medium accessible via the Internet. It contains more than five thousand news sites published by newspapers, television and radio broadcasters, and magazine publishers, as well as some news sites original to the online world. The Web is perhaps the most important and fastest-growing part of the Internet. A Web axiom is that if it exists in the real world, there are probably at least one hundred Web sites about it. The corollary is that if it doesn't exist, there are probably at least a thousand Web sites about it (i.e., the Web is a haven for rumors).

The Web is an interconnected set of computer servers on the Internet that conform to a set of network interface protocols created by Tim Berners-Lee, then of CERN, the European high-energy physics laboratory in Geneva, Switzerland, and now of MIT. The Web began as an electronic library for physicists and grew rapidly into a global publishing medium. Any individual or organization with Internet access can create what is called a home page, a document, or a site on the Web, as long as it uses the programming protocols established at CERN and since updated at least a half dozen times. The www protocols include assigning the home page a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) based on its TCP/IP Internet address and using what is known as hypertext transport protocol (http) that enables the standardized transfer of email and other text, audio, and video files. The creation of a URL involves selecting a domain name, which is the unique term that identifies a site, such as Columbia, IBM, or White House; domain names are registered for two years with any of more than two dozen accredited registration organizations, called registrars, at a cost of at least $200 (registration was free until 1996; ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, is the nonprofit oversight body that accredits the registrars; see
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www.icann.org). The suffix after the domain name may be .com (for commercial), .edu (for education), .org (for not-for-profit organization), .gov (for governmental), .mil for military, or .net for Internet administration. For example, the URL for Columbia University is http://www.columbia.edu.

In addition, each Web document tagged with Hypertext Markup Language, or HTML, allows automatic routing from one electronic document to another, whether elsewhere in the same Web document or anywhere else in the entire World Wide Web. A user achieves this simply by clicking the mouse on highlighted text.

Assessing Quality of Online Information

Because so much information on the Internet is of high quality, it can be a very good source of journalistic information on important stories, sources, and leads. But because so much Internet content is of dubious or unknown origin, sometimes worthless or intentionally misleading, it is essential that all journalists critically evaluate the information they obtain online. It is also important to verify online information from off-line sources and never to rely exclusively on online information for a story, just as one should avoid relying on a single source for any story (e.g., many of the best news organizations generally will not publish a story until they have confirmed it with a second source). It is useful to develop a list of trusted sites that are produced by known organizations or people and contain reliable, quality content.

Dan Middleberg, CEO of Middleberg and Associates, and Columbia journalism professor Steven Sander Ross have collaborated on research on the evolving state of online journalism since the mid-1990s. The valuable Middleberg/Ross "Media in Cyberspace" study of how journalists increasingly use the Internet is published annually online. Here are some of the most important findings of the sixth edition of the study (released on March 2, 2000) for newspaper reporters:

- Virtually all print journalists (newspaper and magazines) now use online tools for researching and reporting. Fully 99 percent of respondents say they or their staffs in some way use online services at least occasionally. Three-quarters of the respondents say they or
their staffs go online every day. Only 1 percent say they or their staffs never use online technology.

- When reporting a breaking story after hours, journalists try for the source first, almost every time, but indicate they next turn to company Web sites for information. During nonbusiness hours or when live sources are not available, Web sites thus play a significant role in delivering information to the media.

- Journalists cite as most useful Web sites containing financial information, followed by those with photos and press releases. Journalists expect complex sites to have a search engine.

- Most respondents indicate they are using the Web for gathering images and other materials that had to be physically carried to the newsroom just a few years ago.

Middleberg and Ross also published in 1999 their first study of broadcast media in cyberspace. The study shows that broadcast journalists who have a news-oriented Web site (only a small portion: about one in five) use online resources more often than do print journalists (compared to earlier cyberspace studies), especially for reporting breaking news and crises.

Another relevant online resource on how to evaluate and use online resources was developed by staff members of the newsroom at the Columbia Missourian, the student newspaper at the University of Missouri, home to the world’s first journalism school. Four rules established at the site are:

1. Verify with a source before publishing any information obtained online.
2. Attribute information obtained from a Web site (e.g., if information is obtained from the EPA Web site, write “EPA figures show”).
3. Check the URL extension to assess the likely point of view of the publisher of the information. Don’t assume that data are reliable because the source is the government (they may be trying to hide something); look for suspicious patterns or anomalies.
4. Check when the page was last updated and make sure the information is current.
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Tools: Browsers, Search Engines, and More

A wide variety of powerful digital tools are available to journalists today. Among the basic building blocks on the Web are browsers, the graphical user tools for accessing Web content. In 1995 there were many browsers to choose from, but Netscape (Navigator, Communicator) soon became the dominate browser, controlling an estimated 70 percent of the market in 1998 (Microsoft's Internet Explorer controlled approximately 25 percent). With the release of Windows '98, however, and the incorporation of Explorer into the operating system, Explorer became the dominant browser in the late 1990s. Today, however, the antitrust case against Microsoft has opened up another window of opportunity for Netscape, and that browser may make a comeback in the early years of the twenty-first century. In addition, Linus, the alternative operating system and browser favored by many on college campuses, may make inroads into Explorer's dominance.

Search engines are tools for searching for content on the Web. They typically use spiders (intelligent agents) to scour the Web for content or accept site registrations and compile their databases accordingly. Tips on how search engines work and how best to use them are available online.7 Another effective resource containing online tutorials on how to use search engines and many other computer-related subjects (e.g., tutorials on designing Web pages, writing Java script, etc.) has been developed by business professor Bob Jensen of Trinity University.8

Search engines include directory-based tools, such as Yahoo.9 The 1998 Middleberg/Ross cyberspace study shows that "Yahoo, which uses Alta Vista as a Web catalog and search system, and Alta Vista itself have become dominant as entry points for journalists on the Web. Combined, they get about half the search activity by journalists."

The director: approach employed by Yahoo! gives targeted results but may miss some things. Other search engines are text-based, such as WebCrawler. One of the oldest search engines, it offers personalized channels of content (e.g., categories of news selected by the user). Alta Vista uses the full text of Web pages and offers advanced search capabilities, including instantaneous translation of Web sites into and from multiple languages, such as English, Spanish, French, and Portuguese. InfoSeek is similar to Alta Vista. Lycos is a popular search engine that also offers other Internet services, such as Web guides and the like. HotBot was created by Wired and is easy
to use with customizable results and presentation. Excite offers concept-based searching and extensive company profiles useful in business and financial reporting. Northern Light is one of the newer text search engines and combines a comprehensive database of Web content and a special collection of twenty-nine hundred journals, books, magazines, and more, as well as video search tools, such as WebSEEK and VideoQ.\textsuperscript{10}

Various computerized content analytic (CA) tools have been developed in journalism research. Two of the leading researchers in this regard are Mark Miller, University of Tennessee, and Roderick Hart, University of Texas. Miller’s CA tools are available online, as are a variety of other CA tools. Such tools are useful to journalists interested in examining patterns of news coverage, such as the frequency of occurrence of certain key terms or people’s names, or in identifying trends in the textual portions of public records. Some also provide similar capabilities in the audio and video realms.

Online headline aggregators are also of enormous use to journalists. In an age of frequent news and information overload, tools such as newshub.com and newshar.com provide a valued service. Updated every fifteen minutes, these free services use a combination of intelligent agents (see chapter 11 for a detailed discussion of agent technology and its implications for journalism) and human editors to aggregate in near real time news headlines on every news subject, from health to sports, as well as general breaking news.

Yahoo! and many of the other major search engines have become significant portals into Web content and services and have evolved new forms of content access and presentation that go far beyond simple content searches. For example, Yahoo! offers MyYahoo!, which includes customizable news, chat, travel services, and much more.

Searching on deadline is a fundamental skill needed by all journalists. Since journalists are usually on deadline, it is important to conduct searches strategically in order to reduce wasted and irrelevant hits and quickly zero in on the desired information. Some strategic considerations include selecting search terms carefully, using advanced search tools that allow Boolean searching, and employing search engine combined searches called metasearch engines. Examples of these include www.metafind.com and www.metacrawler.com, although they don’t offer as effective advanced or refined features on concept searches.

A new class of search tools emerging in 2000 may have profoundly important implications for journalists and news consumers alike. One experi-
mental application being developed by Internet technologist Konata Sti-
son, enables "associative" information discovery. iNo (Internet Navigator and
Organizer) dynamically analyzes the content and structure of Internet re-
sources to make contextual information salient. iNo is not a search tool as
much as it is a discovery tool: it enables journalists, news consumers, and
others to uncover information and relationships they may not know to look
for. This speaks directly to the essence of journalism, which is to discover
the unexpected but highly relevant. In contrast to traditional search tools,
which narrow investigation, associative discovery tools broaden it to create
a more contextualized analysis.

A related search technology is called Google. One of the most interesting
search engines available, it was developed by Sergey Brin and Larry Page
during their doctoral studies at Stanford University in 1998. Using link pat-
terns and Web structure to identify sites relevant to keyword search terms,
Google often turns up sites not found by the more traditional search engines.
Many traditional search engines not only are organized by human editors,
but their results are shaped by the amount of advertising dollars spent by
different Web sites. In other words, if you enter a keyword search, the first
site returned is likely to be the one whose owner/operator paid the highest
advertising dollar to the search engine you used. Google doesn’t work that
way. The process is entirely coded by computer, and the sites returned are
ranked according to their link patterns. Plus Google does not rank hit priority
based on commercial funding. Those linked to most often are rated more
authoritative and are returned first.

For example, on August 16, 1999, search for Walt Disney biographies
returned one site when run on Yahoo! “Walt Disney Records—Download
sound clips, artist biographies, and song lists, as well as soundclips and pic-
tures from read-a-longs and sing-a-longs.” The same search run on Google
returned 1,684 sites, including:

Books on The Walt Disney Company on Amazon.com

. . . how to enjoy them WaltDisneyBiographies—different looks . . .

. . . THE WALTDISNEY COMPANY Here are the books on the
machine known as . . .

www.billcotter.com/it-book/company.htm Cached (13k)

Walt Disney biographies on Amazon.com

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. . . WALT DISNEY BIOGRAPHIES Come learn about the man behind it. . . .
. . . the man behind it all—Walt Disney. The books here range from

www.billcotter.com/tvbook/bios.htm Cached (11k)

Walt Disney: An Intimate History of the Man and His Magic
. . . Cédérom Walt Disney: An Intimate History of the Man and His Magic . . .
. . . Après plusieurs biographies non autorisées, Disney a maintenant

www.entertainment.com/francais/divers/walt.html Cached (4k)

Disney books about Walt himself
. . . Disney reference books Disney books about Walt himself . . .
. . . in Russian. Bessy, Maurice: Walt Disney published by Seghers;

www.pizarro.net/didier_private/walt.htm Cached (14k)

SRVUSD School Accountability Report Card: Walt Disney School
. . . WALT DISNEY SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT CARD 3250 Pine . . .
. . . Established: 1974 Enrollment: 305 Walt Disney School serves the

www.srvusd.k12.ca.us/sar9798/disney-rep.html Cached (32k)

A Walt Disney (Walter Elias Disney) Biography: Terraformers®Tombtown®
. . . Disney was born in Chicago, Illinois, on December 5, 1901. Walt . . .
. . . parents were Elias and Flora Disney. Walt had three brothers, and

www.tombtown.com/bios/disney.htm Cached (9k)

Autograph Reference Library—Walt Disney
. . . WALT DISNEY Below is an authentic Walt Disney . . .
. . . and signatures attributed to Walt Disney were actually done by

www.autographics.com/ken/WaltDisney.html Cached (6k)

Walt Disney—Biography at Generation Terrorists
A Reporter's Field Guide to the Internet

Walt Disney (1901–1966) Movie animator, producer, showman; born . . . drawing on his studio's productions; Disney World, in Orlando, Fla., did . . .

www.generationterrorists.com/bio/disney.html Cached (4k)

A related search tool also useful to journalists is alltheweb.com. It uses an approach similar to Google and is especially effective at finding news sources.

Email

Finding electronic mail (email) addresses is a straightforward process on the Internet. The typical structure of an email address is username or initials (such as jpb), an "at" sign (@), and a domain name (e.g., Columbia). This might include an additional two- or three-character abbreviation indicating a subdomain, such as .jrn.columbia, for journalism at Columbia. The address concludes with a suffix indicating the type of organization (.edu for education, .gov for government, .com for commercial, .org for nonprofit organization, etc.): jpb@columbia.edu. International addresses include a country code, such as .it for Italy or .jp for Japan.

Using email to interview a news source is an increasingly viable option, especially for international sources. Email can also be useful in obtaining a specific piece of information on deadline by allowing a journalist to send out a specific question to several known and reliable sources (anywhere in the country or the world). Because email uses asynchronous communication (i.e., there is no live, two-way exchange) one can send a request and frequently get a response within thirty minutes to an hour. Email also allows one to keep in touch with sources and to check facts easily and quickly by sending technical details to a source for verification as needed or wanted. Email can also help journalists stay in touch with their readers. One can include an email address (or one designed for readers to use) and then correspond as appropriate.

People Finders

Finding people, leads, and stories is a fundamental news-gathering skill. A variety of tools are available for locating email addresses, people, and possible news sources. Many are available at the search engine sites.
Here are some useful tips for finding people.

1. Take advantage of directories, e.g., http://www.switchboard.com/ or http://www.yahoo.com/search/people

2. To find people, use search engines, such as http://www.four11.com.

3. To search for a phone number using an address or vice versa, try reverse phone and address directories. One such directory is http://www.databaseamerica.com/html/gpfind.htm, to use this directory, enter a phone number and get an address. Or search for neighbors who may live near the person you wish to locate. A useful service is http://www.555-1212.com/look_up.cfm; to use it, enter the street address, city, and state (two-letter abbreviation), and click on "find" (it uses the Four11 database).

4. Try using Bigfoot.com to acquire contact information, such as email address, as well as other personal information, such as gender, marital status, name of spouse and children, address, current and previous employers, and type of computer.

*Mailing lists, newsgroups, and more.* A variety of other online resources are also useful for finding leads, story ideas, sources, and more. Surprisingly, the Middleberg/Ross cyberspace study reports that "LISTSERVS, email, the Web and Usenet Newsgroups together were named by 9 percent of respondents as their primary source of story ideas— altogether about the same as newswires." More than one hundred thousand electronic mailing lists, among them Listserv, provide detailed discussions of a wide range of topics. Those of particular interest to journalists include the Computer-Assisted Reporting and Research (CARR-L) journalism mailing list, subscribe via email to listerv@ukyvm.louisville.edu. The Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE) housed at the University of Missouri School of Journalism also maintains a popular mailing list, subscribe to IRE-L via email at listproc@lists missouri.edu.

There are also numerous specialized mailing lists, covering areas such as children and families, the environment, higher education, international reporting, police and courts, religion, and science writing.

Subscribing to, participating in, creating, and unjoining a mailing list can be somewhat complicated, although usually it is as simple as sending email. One good source of protocols, as well as a searchable directory of more than
seventeen thousand of the more than one hundred thousand electronic mailing lists worldwide is maintained by L-Soft International. Majordomo instructions (for managing lists) are available online courtesy of David Barr at Ohio State University.

Although mailing lists and bulletin boards (BBS) can furnish story ideas, leads, sources, and more, they can also mislead, and one should never rely exclusively on information obtained from such as source for a published story. This is the mistake journalist Pierre Salinger made when he reported an Internet rumor suggesting that the U.S. military had itself downed TWA flight 800.

Usenet newsgroups and bulletin boards are also useful sources for finding stories and potential sources. Newsgroup categories include everything from computers, to sciences, news, and “alternative,” which is a catchall category. A variety of Web-based search tools are available for finding a desired newsgroup; one such tool is tile.net, which also provides a searchable database of mailing lists.

Intelligent agents—software robots that act autonomously on behalf of another entity (typically a human, but sometimes another software robot)—are also becoming increasingly common on the Web as tools for sifting through the millions of pages of Web content, conducting specific assigned tasks (such as booking flight reservations), making online purchases, or searching through newsgroups (see chapter 11 for a full discussion). Many of these agents are now being used in online journalism products, for tasks as varied as the automatic handling of subscriptions to online news products and services to sorting through thousands of Usenet newsgroups and thousands of news stories from hundreds of online news sources every day and compiling easily digested summaries. See http://www.newspage.com for an example.

Online source lists. Online source lists are the digital equivalent of an online Rolodex. One particularly useful ready-made one is http://www.profnet.com/ped.html. Started at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, Profnet offers access to thousands of experts at more than two thousand participating institutions, mostly universities, although many corporations, not-for-profits, public relations firms, government agencies, and think tanks are also included. Journalists use Profnet by visiting the site and posting a request for a source on a particular subject. Profnet works best for enterprise stories, not spot news. Stories are kept confidential, and sources
are verified. Reporter requests are sent out three times a day, at 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., and 4 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. A reporter can also submit a request via email at profnet@profnet.com or via the phone at 1-800-PROFNET.

The National Press Club provides a database of sources, searchable by category, including hundreds of categories from abortion to workplace. Searches can be conducted using keywords or actual organization or contact names. A search on the environment turned up twenty-nine organizations, from Allied Signal Flourine Products to Zero Population Growth, most of which were linked to Web sites. The database also provided organizational descriptions and contact names, addresses, and phone numbers.

*Place Finders*

Finding places in the real world is a frequent challenge for journalists. Online technology provides a new set of tools for locating places, people, and properties. Visit some of the following sites to obtain directions, maps, and more:

http://www.Zip2.com
http://www.citysearch.com
http://maps.yahoo.com/
http://www.mapblast.com

*Public Records*

Obtaining public records is also increasingly straightforward. One important online portal to public records is the Federal Online Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) form (courtesy of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press). The FOIA form can get access to any information collected by the government, although agencies have the right to censor information deemed a threat to national security. Making the same request to multiple agencies may produce the desired information, since different agencies may deem different information a threat.
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On a state level, the State Level Online Form (for each of the fifty states with open records laws) is available online courtesy of the Student Press Law Center.18

U.S. population statistics are also available online at the Department of the Census Web site. The news section of the Census site contains press releases linked to raw data and is especially useful for story ideas. Reporters use the search tool to find details by state, county, and city. Census state data centers are also available online.19

Legal citations (LexisNexis), as well as news stories, are also available via the Web, but at a substantial cost.20

Also available online are reliable Internet statistics, including data on usage in the United States and around the world, published by Nua Ltd (nua means “new” in Gaelic), an Internet consultancy and developer with offices in Ireland and New York. Data are kept current. On September 15, 1999, I obtained the following data from an August 1999 report from Nielsen Media Research and CommerceNet: 94.03 million U.S. adults, aged sixteen and over, use the Internet, effectively representing 45 percent of the total U.S. population.21 The most useful section of the site, headed “Internet Surveys,” provides many pages of data on Internet use around the world.

Another site tracks the volume of Internet traffic.22 The email portion of this site estimated (for the United States only) that in 1999 there were 150 million messages per day. The site also includes a chart graphing the increases in both messages and users from 1994, with projections to 2001.

Foreign country population statistics, maps, and so forth, are available online at http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html.

The U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) provides extensive data online as well.23 The GPO site includes day-of-publication digital copies of the federal budget; the Federal Register, the official daily publication for rules, proposed rules, and notices of federal agencies and organizations; and executive orders and other presidential documents. These are directly accessible online.24

The Inspector General’s (IG) office also provides extensive data online from its audits of sixty federal agencies, “as well as their peers in state and local government, education, non-profit organizations, and the private sector.”25 The IG also provides detailed information on the Y2K (year 2000) computing problem, also known as the millennium bug.
Largely available only through a trip to Washington, D.C., until the mid-1990s, the Library of Congress (LC) is another important reporting resource available online. The vast repositories of the LC contain the largest single-institution collection of human knowledge in the world.

Thomas, named after Thomas Jefferson, is a comprehensive and official source of legislative information on the U.S. Congress. It includes floor activities, bills, the Congressional Record, committee information, historical information, and documents, such as the Federalist Papers. It is available through the Library of Congress Web site.

Another important reporting resource is the General Accounting Office (GAO), the investigative arm of Congress. "Charged with examining matters relating to the receipt and disbursement of public funds, GAO performs audits and evaluations of government programs and activities."  

Environmental databases are also available online. One is offered by the Right to Know Network, created in 1989 as a result of the Emergency Planning and Community Right to Know Act (EPCRA), which mandated public access to the Toxic Release Inventory. It is operated by two nonprofit organizations—OMB Watch and the Unison Institute—and funded by various government agencies and foundations.

A comprehensive inventory of online sources of public records is available online, courtesy of Steve Ross, at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism Web site. Among the other types of databases available online are federal government sites, political and congressional representatives sites, sites on federal and state campaign finances, public opinion polls, business directories, nonprofits, the Securities and Exchange Commission, workplace health and safety, health and medical data, searchable full-text medical articles, health organizations and drug information, the Mayo Clinic online, federal and state appellate courts, Supreme Court legal references and directories, grand juries, and state and local governments, including mayoral, gubernatorial, and congressional records.

Particularly notable is the comprehensive database of campaign finance information (state and federal) made available courtesy of the Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE). The Federal Election Commission also publishes online reports disclosing who contributes how much to the president, senators, and representatives or makes "soft money" contributions (money exempt from limits), as well as much more. Available either free or for a small fee are reports from 1990 to the present. The site is extremely well designed and easy to use. Options available include an imaging system,
which allows one to view actual financial disclosure reports for House and presidential campaigns (unfortunately, campaigns for the Senate file their disclosure statements with the secretary of the Senate, not with the FEC, so they are not included in the imaging system), electronic filings, and a query system that allows one to search the disclosure database for contributions to presidential, Senate, and House campaigns, parties, and PACs beginning with the 1997/98 election cycle. The resources at this site are now the central means available for accessing such public records for all federal campaigns. The query system is especially powerful and simple to use. It allows the user to conduct individual searches for contributions from individuals, committee searches for contributions made by a specific committee, and candidate searches for contributions received by an individual candidate. For instance, using the individual search, I entered Trump, Donald, and instantly learned that he gave $10,000 in soft money to the Democratic Senators Campaign Committee on April 24, 1998, as well as $1,000 on February 19, 1997, to incumbent Republican senator (Pennsylvania) Aslen Spector. In 1999 Politics.com launched a new search feature based on FEC data for the 2000 presidential campaign that permits users to enter any zip code and find out which citizens in the area covered by that zip code made donations, for how much, when, and to which candidates.

Jack Dolan of the National Institute for Computer Assisted Reporting provided this description of another online resource in 1999:

The Campaign Finance Information Center now has downloadable data from 10 states. Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin.

We have links to online search engines (or download sites) hosted by state boards of election or newspaper consortiums in 15 states: Arizona, Hawaii, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington.

In addition, Tracker editor Ann Kim just built a registry of campaign finance reporters. If you aren’t on the list, and want to be, send an email with your name, affiliation, address, phone and email to ann@nicar.org.

Also, CFIC staffer Aaron Rothenburger has just begun to make easy to read HTML tables to guide you through the labyrinth of states’ varying campaign contribution limits. We have these for Indiana, Kansas,
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Michigan, Ohio, Washington and Wisconsin. (More are on the way)
Idaho and Kentucky already have usable tables on the Web, we have
links to those.†††
(persenal email from jack@ncar.org, October 15, 1999)

Also worth noting is the nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics’ Web
site on the Federal Election Commission.‡‡‡ And a comprehensive set of links
to a variety of public records is provided by the Columbia University librar-
ies.†††

Finally, of particular use to journalists working online or covering regula-
tory matters in communication or telecommunications is the Web site of
the Federal Communications Commission.‡‡‡ The FCC has aggressively util-
ized the Web to reinvent itself as a virtual commission, and it publishes all
its proceedings, rules, and much more online, including the full text of the
Telecommunications Act of 1996.

General Reference Materials

A broad spectrum of general reference materials is also available online.
Among the most useful for journalists is University of California professor
Jim Martindale’s online “reference desk.”‡‡‡ Since 1994 Martindale collected
hundreds of links to information on a wide variety of subjects from biosci-
ence to the Y2K problem. The site is organized in directory fashion, with
major sections on health sciences, interactive multimedia and the environ-
ment, and disasters and safety, as well as a general reference section. The
site includes more than just text-based information (with translation capa-
bility for English, French, Russian, and Swedish), including maps, interac-
tive tutorials, and translations into sign language and Braille. The site has
links to 261 countries, territories, and principalities now online, ranging from
Abkhazia to Zimbabwe (where you can find the Zimbabwe Independent
Online, among other things), more than three dozen major international
organizations from the Association of Caribbean States to the World Trade
Organization, and live real-time video and interactive maps of automobile
traffic congestion in some three dozen major cities such as Athens (with
live traffic patterns updated every fifteen minutes), New York City (an inter-
active map for the tri-state region and more), Rio de Janeiro (including real-
time video), and Singapore (with cameras installed by the Television Cor-
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poration of Singapore that present views of two dozen locations around the island updated every fifteen minutes, including the view from the Marriott Hotel in the popular shopping district at the junction of Orchard and Scotts Roads). Although these images may seem a bit Orwellian, they may prove useful to news organizations covering breaking news events around the world.

Another useful resource for journalists is Bartlett's familiar quotations, which came online recently.14 I selected the following quotation from Isaac Newton because it reminds me of new media and journalism: "I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

Roget's Thesaurus is another useful reference online. Similarly, the Wordsmith English Dictionary-Thesaurus is available online. The ARTFL (American and French Research on the Treasury of the French Language) Project publishes online the 1913 edition of Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary. The Merriam Webster dictionary is also online. The March 2000 online publication of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) marks the debut of another useful resource for journalists.15 Published in complete form since 1928, the twenty-three-volume OED is the premier source of information for wordsmiths. The online edition offers a number of important advantages to journalists, especially when on deadline, including the ability to conduct keyword searches of all twenty-three volumes, search on meanings in order to locate specific words, find quotations from a specific year or from a particular author or work, and gain unique online access to one thousand new and revised words every quarter. Of course, the OED online is not available for free, an individual license to use the site costs $550 a year, while a network license costs $795 a year.

New media developments are online as well.40

Professional Development

The Internet is a useful resource for professional development and continuing education for journalists. Among those resources are mailing lists, bulletin boards, and Web sites on broadcast journalism (subscribe to BRDCST-L at listserv@univm.unl.edu, or visit the Radio Television
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News Directors Association site at www.ntnda.org, copy editing (join COPYEDITING-L at listproc@cornell.edu, or visit the American Copy Editors Society site at www.copydesk.org), design (visit the Society of Newspaper Designers’ site at www.snd.org), and journalism education (subscribe to JOURNAL-L at listserv@american.edu, or visit the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication site at www.aejmc.sc.edu), journalism ethics (subscribe to SPI-ETHICS at majordomo@dworkm.wustl.edu), and online publishing (contact Steve Outing at www.planetarynews.com/). An increasing number of journalism courses are being offered online, including “Exploring New Media Online,” a summer course I taught in 1998.41

A variety of online journalism publications are worth occasional visits. Among those are the Columbia Journalism Review, whose Web site offers a searchable online database (called “paper finder”) of more than eleven thousand U.S. and Canadian newspapers, including contact information, mailing address, phone numbers, email addresses, Web sites, and other information. American Journalism Review maintains a similar set of links and other online resources Editor & Publisher also maintains a useful online presence.42 The Online Journalism Review (www.oj.org) is an exclusively online journalism review published by the Annenberg School of Journalism at the University of Southern California.

One growing source of continuing education and content for journalism is the Freedom Forum’s online publication Free! (http://freedomforum.org). Veteran news executive Adam Clayton Powell III, vice president of Technology for the Freedom Forum, regularly reports on developments in online journalism, freedom of expression, and new media technology. Frequent visits to the site are worthwhile. The Poynter Institute’s Web site is also a useful resource.43

Rich Meislin, editor-in-chief of the News York Times Electronic Media Company, has also developed a useful guide to Internet resources, with a special section on resources for journalists Meislin’s “cybernavigator” is available at the Times’s Web site.44

All the national minority journalism associations also maintain active online presences. Among those available online are the Asian American Journalism Association, National Association of Black Journalists, National Association of Hispanic Journalists, National Association of Minority Media Executives, National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, and Native American Journalists Association.45

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Privacy and Other Intellectual Property Considerations

Databases and online services raise a host of thorny questions about privacy and intellectual property rights. Among the most important issues from the point of view of journalism is where to draw the line between the public's right to know and the individual's right to privacy. In many cases, this is a balancing act that hinges on the importance of the story, whether public figures are involved, and whether there are reasonable alternatives to get the needed information without jeopardizing anyone's privacy.

Intellectual property rights involve not violating anyone's copyright, trademark, or other legally protected intellectual good, including a story, image, sound clip, or other content available on the Internet. As a rule, a journalist should rely exclusively on primary sources and original content that he or she creates for use in a story. If a reporter must use someone else's material, it should be done only with permission and proper credit. Under limited circumstances (such as fair use for a news story of importance to the public or for educational purposes) it is permissible to use a portion of a body of a copyrighted work (such as a quote or a thumbnail picture), but these are rare and represent something of a legal gray area, especially outside the United States, where "fair use" is a much less well established legal concept.

A growing number of companies and others are employing increasingly sophisticated techniques to uncover illegal uses (i.e., pirated or plagiarized copies) of their copyrighted or trademarked content on the Internet. For example, BMI, the not-for-profit organization representing more than two hundred thousand songwriters, composers, and music publishers, uses an intelligent agent (i.e., software robot) to scour the Internet twenty-four hours a day looking for pirated clips of copyrighted music.

A Caveat

Spending a great deal of time typing can be hazardous to your health, especially if your workspace has less than ideal ergonomics (i.e., your workspace posture isn't correct). One of the most frequent problems that can result from spending a great deal of time typing without adequate breaks is repetitive stress injury (RSI). Many journalists suffer from this complaint. For
details on RSI and how to prevent and treat it, see the Harvard RSI Action home page.45

The Internet is a valuable resource for reporting. It contains a wealth of information that may be helpful to journalists in identifying potential stories, leads, and sources. It provides instant access to vast databases that once were available only through on-site examination. Reporting for virtually every story can be enriched through online research. Online reporters should also look at how these databases can be integrated into their news reports, giving the audience access to primary source material as a supplement to a news report. Though not all readers will find value in this, many will at least occasionally want to dig deeper into the background of a story. In some cases, a user-friendly interface can be added to the story to permit the reader easy, customized analysis of the data, such as zip code entry to get data for a specific locality.

Most reporters regularly check certain sources (e.g., reporters covering crime regularly check police reports). These days, every reporter should also integrate the Internet and various online sources into her or his beat, developing a list of regularly checked online sources. No reporter covering terrorism should have been surprised when terrorists linked to Saudi multimillionaire Osama bin Laden attacked U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the United States conducted retaliatory strikes in Afghanistan and Sudan. A regular check of important online information sources would have revealed the likelihood of these developments. Weeks before the bombings took place half a world away, for example, the Emergency Response and Research Institute of Chicago, Illinois, posted the following report.

Exiled Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden remains hidden somewhere in the mountains of Afghanistan. He is wealthy, elusive and an Islamic extremist who is plotting against the United States. . . . Osama bin Laden has set his sights on and has sworn to bring an end to U.S. influence in his native Saudi Arabia and the Islamic world. It is said he has the money to do it. . . . Bin Laden reportedly made his militant contacts during the Afghan war. He then set up terrorist training camps in Sudan and financed attacks against the moderate governments of Algeria, Egypt, his native Saudi Arabia and Yemen.46

Despite its news-gathering benefits, however, the Internet is not a panacea.
for reporters. Much of the content available online is of dubious origin, and some may be intentionally misleading. Reporters must explore the Internet with a very cautious and skeptical eye. Moreover, reporters should not use the Internet as a replacement for good, old-fashioned shoe-leather reporting. Rather, the Internet should be an additional tool in the modern journalist's news-gathering and reporting toolkit.
Where Do Good Stories Come From?

It is hard news that catches readers. Features hold them.
Lord Northcliffe

Some of the best stories appear to come from nowhere – out-of-the-blue accidents, resignations, and catastrophes so startling that the essential facts alone are enough to make major headlines. Journalists can do nothing to influence whether such stories exist; all we can do is produce the best-researched and written versions of them. A lot of other good stories, however, depend on journalists for their very existence – stories which start life as lesser incidents but are transformed into the startling by the discovery of some hitherto hidden aspect; and true off-diary stories, unknown to the public until a journalist discovers and reports them.

There is nothing accidental about this process. Good stories like these do not come out of the blue; they come from successful journalists knowing where to look and doing certain things right – which is why they come up with far more of such stories than ordinary journalists. The apparent mystery of where good stories come from is not a riddle at all. It is a matter of having solid working practices, plus knowing where to look – and where not to.

The habits of successful reporters?

The best reporters get the best stories because they have sharp news instincts and they know where to look, who to talk to and what to ask. The details of these are covered in the next three chapters on sources, research and questioning. But there are other, perhaps less obvious but just as vital, reporters’ habits which consistently produce good stories.
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Exploring all avenues

Determination is perhaps the biggest difference between the ordinary and the good reporter. A classic example, all the more relevant for its everyday nature, is the story found by Derek Lambert then on a trial with the Daily Mirror. It seemed at first like a routine murder case: a Polish man had been found stabbed in the basement of a seedy lodging house in Manchester and Lambert was sent out to find out what he could. It did not look very promising. The neighbours knew (or were saying) nothing, the policeman guarding the murder scene would not speak and, when Lambert went to the police station, he was told they could not add to their earlier brief statement.

It is at this point that the ordinary reporter would have headed back to the office and reported there was nothing much in the story: and indeed that is what Lambert’s rivals did. He, however, was not an ordinary reporter. He hung around, determined to get more. Hoping to grab a few words with an off-duty policeman. After a while he saw detectives emerge and get into a car. Hoping they were working on the murder, he returned to the scene. There he saw two men in suits knocking on doors. He introduced himself to the detectives and got talking about the case. The dead man, they told him, was a police informer who had been rumbled over by a car and then stabbed. Lambert had his story and soon he was dictating it to his office. It began: ‘Police were last night investigating the mystery of the man who was murdered twice.’ It made front page lead and secured a job on the Mirror for Lambert.

Hanging around

The best reporters do not, unless they cannot possibly help it, arrive late and breathless to cover an event. They tend to arrive early and, if they have time, hang around afterwards. By doing this they get a feel for the event and its characters, hear things, observe useful detail, speak to people and ask questions. Whatever the event — whether it is a court case, public inquiry, political meeting, campaign launch, release of a report — the best stories are often found not in the public part of the event, but in the time spent before and after chatting to those involved. After all, most non-journalists have no idea what makes a good news story. It is only when they are talking informally before or after a meeting, interview or whatever, that they may mention something which is a far better story than the one you originally came for.

Making your own luck

To be lucky, you have to put yourself in the position where good fortune can occur. This is partly a matter of persistence, partly an instinct for
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where the happening part of the story is and, especially on the big stories, where there were many reporters on the same case, partly a matter of not following the mob. In 1981, the Pope was shot and journalists from all round the world were sent to Rome. Among them was John Edwards of the Daily Mail. Like quite a few others, he arrived in Rome at 11.30 p.m., but instead of going straight to his hotel like the herd, he wanted to get on the story straight away. But where to go? St. Peter’s Square was full of nuns praying for the Pope’s recovery. The police were not talking beyond a terse statement and so Edwards thought he would go to where the story was still developing – the hospital where the Pope was fighting for his life.

Amazingly, when Edwards arrived at the hospital at one in the morning, he found that he was the only reporter there. More to the point, there were no police to bar his way. So in he went and after walking around for a while he found a waiting room where he could sit and watch and judge the situation. He dozed a little and then, at around 6 a.m. there was the sound of doors opening, footsteps and voices. He saw six surgeons, their gowns covered in blood, walk into the waiting room and go on to a balcony. As they smoked and took in the early morning air, Edwards could see they were smiling. He approached them and got lucky. These people had saved the Pope’s life and several spoke good English. They were pleased with their night’s work and talked freely. They even drew pictures in his notebook of the incisions they made and described each step of the operation in detail. Not surprisingly, Edwards later described this as the best story he ever wrote.

Knowing what is the best the story can be

Some of what the inexperienced thinks of as the mysterious instincts of good reporters are, in fact, quite straightforward calculations. One of the key ones used by successful journalists is the train of thought that runs something like: what is the best this story can be? If I considered all the possible scenarios and facts, what would be the strongest intro I could write? This calculation is often just as useful in telling you which stories are not worth pursuing, as revealing the ones that are.

Building trust with sources

Good reporters keep up a regular relationship with contacts and do not just ring when they need them. They cultivate them by going to meetings they would otherwise not attend and occasionally pass information to them. The upshot is that the contacts remember them when they have a good story. Less regular contacts also remember the reporters whose work has proved fair and accurate. And a source that trusts a reporter can assist in all kinds of ways. A governing party politician whom I knew
was instrumental in smuggling into Iraq one of the Observer’s top foreign news experts so he could investigate reports the paper was receiving about atrocities committed against the Marsh Arabs by Saddam Hussein. Without my relationship with that politician, her trust in the sincerity of my paper, her contacts with rebel groups in Iraq and their bravery, we would not have been able to get inside southern Iraq and the world would not have heard about these atrocities. The reporter, Shyam Bhatia, won foreign correspondent of the year for his work.

*Showing interest in the subject, not just the immediate story*

People can sense, just as you can, when a journalist is merely interested in them for the sake of a one-off story. Good reporters have a sincere interest in issues and the people involved in them – and it shows. They profit from this. In 1968 after Soviet dissident Aleksandr Ginsberg was jailed following a closed trial, his wife Ludmilla called a press conference. The night before it was due to be held, all the nearly 100 Western correspondents in Moscow were contacted by the government press department and warned that ‘severe measures’ would be taken against those who attended. The following day only four had the courage to go to the Ginsberg apartment, among them Raymond Anderson of the New York Times. A few months later, in July 1968, Anderson was given a document by a friend, who had received it from Andrei Amelrik, a dissident historian. Inside the package was the now-famous essay challenging the Soviet system written by Dr. Andrei Sakharov. After a few more adventures and inquiries, Anderson established that the document was genuine and he sent it out secretly for it to make headlines around the world.

*Sensing which stories are not yet complete*

The phrase ‘follow-up’ is not a terribly glorious one to many reporters, carrying connotations of being asked to tidy up a few loose ends or dress up some hand-me-down story into something that appears fresh. As applied by a lot of papers, this is true. But there are also many stories which when followed up, bear richer fruit than the original. Good reporters sense these by thinking what is – or may be – missing from the whole story. An old lady, for example, once died unnoticed in her home in the north of England. The coroner, remarking on the contrast between the visible signs of this (milk bottles on the doorstep, etc.) and the indifference of her neighbours, said that the old lady might still be alive if neighbours had paid attention to her or taken the trouble to visit.

The Daily Mirror sent Derek Lambert to investigate for a possible piece on the woman who died ignored by her comfortable neighbours. He went from house to house, collecting a few scraps of information, but
mostly finding blank looks and shrugs of the shoulders. Finally he came
to one neighbour who talked a little. Just as Lambert was turning to go,
the man said: ‘Mind you, that coroner’s got a right cheek, hasn’t he?’
Lambert asked him what he meant (always a good question). ‘Well,’ said
the man, ‘the coroner only lived up the road.’ He had been one of the
woman’s neighbours he was criticising. Lambert knew then he had a
good story – the tale of the coroner who criticised himself in court. but
didn’t realise.

Looking at things another way

Comedians and good journalists have a lot in common. Both find
productive ideas by turning things on their head, by inverting a situation
(or a phrase) in order to examine it and so deliver the unexpected.
Successful reporters get a lot of good ideas by looking at things from an
unusual perspective. When John Tierney of the New York Times, for
example, was sent to do a piece on women who sign up for self-defence
classes (a pretty tired idea at best), he did an article not on the women,
but on the ‘model mugger’ – the pretend rapist in a padded suit who took
all the punches and kicks.

There are, however, limits to reporters’ inventiveness. There was, for
instance, once a reporter called Maurice Fagence on the Daily Mail.
Never the best timekeeper, he was so spectacularly late one day that
the newsdesk punished him by sending him to cover a story they
assumed would be a long trip for very little copy – a pigeon show in
Birmingham. Not to be outdone, Fagence smuggled into the show a cat
under his coat so he could write an intro about who put the cat among
the pigeons.

Making connections

Making connections is what good reporters do when they take a couple
of hitherto unassociated stories, or facts, and make a link. This is what
Willi Gutman, a newspaper librarian who fled Hitler’s Germany, called
‘scoop by interpretation’. It is one of the reasons why those who criticise
newspapers for ‘feeding off each other’ are wrong. Many good stories
come from a journalist spotting a small item in another newspaper,
investigating and finding there is a lot more to the subject or issue than
the first paper thought. And many important stories have only been fully
revealed because individual papers working on them independently
found different pieces of the jigsaw which collectively completed
the picture. The investigation of the Watergate scandal in America in
1973–74, which led to the resignation of President Nixon, was a classic
case of this.
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Not relying on the summaries of official reports

It is difficult to stifle a yawn when you see the cover of most official reports. But in some of them, perhaps buried away on page 94, is the real story. It may even have been put there deliberately, in the confident expectation that most journalists cannot be bothered to read that far, or that closely. Too many reporters, when confronted with a thick report, will look only at the summary pages. If you have time, read the whole report: if not, then look in the places most likely to produce good material — the submissions from criticised parties, the evidence given by the aggrieved and the case histories section.

Reading reports thoroughly can repay enormous dividends. In the early 1990s, Eileen Welsome, neighbourhood news reporter for the Albuquerque Tribune, was leafing through a declassified document about radiation experiments on animals towards the end of World War II. In an obscure footnote at the bottom of one page, she found a reference to 18 people who had been injected with doses of plutonium so that scientists could study the effects of radiation on the body. She began researching and in November 1993 published a three-part series. A month later the US government called a press conference and admitted all. President Clinton ordered an inquiry and lawsuits from victims families came in. The following year, Welsome won a Pulitzer Prize.

Not pre-judging people

The most successful intelligence agent I have ever met was a big, fat, jolly, apparently simple-minded soul whose cover was that of a professional wrestler. Large amounts of foreign travel aside, he was almost the last person you would expect to be a spy: which was why I had no idea of what he really did until after his death. I thought he had taken one too many sizable bangs on the head.

Successful journalists know that judging people by their appearances and occupations is a good way to make mistakes and miss stories. Some of the least reliable sources look the toniest, and some of the best ones look like bums. This does not mean you have to spend hours with the parade of lunatics, paranoids and obsessives who regularly plague newspapers with their tales of being followed, transported to outer space or persecuted by the government. But it does mean making a judgement based on what they say, rather than on how they look. After all, a journalist at the Daily Mail in the early 1930s once returned to the newsdesk from attending to a shabbily dressed visitor in the lobby. He said the man was an obvious lunatic who was muttering something about transmitting moving pictures. Three days later several rival papers reported the invention of television by a man called John Logie Baird — the name, of course, of the 'shabbily dressed lunatic' in the lobby.
Keeping an ideas file

This is hardly a devastating insight, but it is commonly overlooked. The quality and range of ideas is one of the things that makes the difference between news pages crackling with interest and those that are so limp and wet you could not use them to start a fire. You should therefore have a file where you can jot down ideas, plus cuttings from papers and magazines that might make a future story. If nothing else, it should encourage that other habit of successful journalists – reading a lot of newspapers and magazines. Apart from keeping them up to date and in touch with what the opposition is doing, it also maintains their general knowledge – something else they are conspicuous for.

Non-obvious sources

Most journalists think too narrowly when it comes to sources. But if you look at national quality newspapers, which have the pick of all that is available on any day, you find that the sources of their stories are not nearly as conventional as people imagine. The Independent, for instance, would have in a typical issue 33–38 domestic news stories, not including briefs or Parliamentary reports. An issue in December 1999 had 36 stories, sourced as follows:

- Government depts or agencies: 10
- Off-diary (contacts, observation): 5
- Courts, inquiries: 5
- Universities: 3
- Pressure groups, unions, etc.: 3
- Political sources: 3
- Specialist press: 2
- Commercial companies: 2
- Consumer magazines: 1
- International organisations: 1
- Police: 1

Other issues of the paper show slightly more police and political stories and fewer from courts, but otherwise these proportions do not vary markedly. This means that half the stories consistently come from unofficial sources. If the government stories include only those which are official announcements, as opposed to stories obtained by personal contacts, then unofficial sources regularly account for something like 60 per cent of stories. This shows the importance of building up contacts and, in particular, of opening up your mind to unconventional sources.
and subjects. Here are some suggestions of the less obvious places where good stories can be found.

Universities and research institutes

Whether it is pioneering medical research, a study of your region’s wildlife or an investigation into why men wear certain colour ties, academics undertake studies that no novelist would dare make up. Some of them are highly specialised, but a lot will have general interest. For example, a space research institute outside Moscow has been studying for years what personality types are truly compatible so that the people they put together in the Mir space station will not begin fighting as soon as they leave Earth. Written for the general reader and applied to how people get on inside homes and offices, rather than a space ship, you would have a story that should interest anyone.

Specialist and underground press

If you have the expertise to read specialist journals, they can be a lush hunting ground for off-diary stories. Your country’s underground press is also worth reading regularly. The reporting in such publications is often unbalanced, but it is often the product of contact with unconventional sources. Some of the best stories first surface in such papers.

Books

In 1998, Maciej Zaremba, a Polish-born journalist writing for Sweden’s largest paper Dagens Nyheter, uncovered the full story of how Sweden had forcibly sterilised more than 60,000 women between 1935 and 1976. Working with a researcher called Maija Runce, who had access to the archives of the State Medical Board, Zaremba discovered that, contrary to common belief in Sweden, the sterilisations had never been voluntary. Girls who fell behind at school, were labelled promiscuous or had otherwise fallen foul of authority, were defined as ‘undesirable’, removed from their homes by state officials, placed in institutions and were only released if they would be sterilised. The story was published all over the world and the Swedish Government set up an inquiry. And where did Zaremba first stumble upon this story? In an obscure book written by two Swedes but published only in the US.

Esoteric magazines

These are not magazines written for an academic audience, but for ordinary people with special interests. Reading such magazines allows you into worlds (like that of the treasure hunter or vegetable grower)
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which you would never normally enter. And in almost every issue you can be sure that there is a story which, properly handled, would be of interest to the newspaper reader. A computer magazine might have a story about a new computer virus that is threatening commercial data systems; a car magazine one about a new auto-theft racket; a sex newspaper might have an advertisement that leads you to investigate child pornography; a gardening magazine a story about how used bank notes are being pulped to make fertiliser.

International organisations

There are thousands and thousands of international organisations pumping out reports, statistics and data, holding conferences and seminars and staffed by experts – yet they never hear from a general newspaper reporter from one year to the next. This is a great shame. Organisations like these are one of the great untapped sources of stories. And not just stories about global problems. Much of their work involves studying or working on specific problems in particular countries. Go to a library, look up the organisations covering your area of interest and make contact or visit their website. The United Nations, for example, has bodies dealing with women, disasters, children’s welfare, health, disarmament, training, economic development, human settlement, the environment, oceans, trade, refugees, peace-keeping forces, population, food aid, food growing, atomic energy, civil aviation, labour, shipping, telecommunications, industry, copyright, meteorology – indeed almost every subject under the sun.

Classified advertisements

Journalists who do not read the classified advertisements in any paper they can get their hands on are missing one of the best sources of human interest stories there is. After all, this is where the parts of the human race that are not journalists often communicate with strangers. For instance, on 2 May 1962, the following ad was placed in the San Francisco Examiner’s classified columns by a Mrs Gladys Kidd:

I don’t want my husband to die in the gas chamber for a crime he did not commit. I will therefore offer my services for 10 years as a cook, maid or housekeeper to any leading attorney who will defend him and bring about his vindication.

One of the city’s most famous lawyers, Vincent Hallinan, saw the ad and contacted Mrs Kidd. Her husband was about to be tried for the murder of an old antique dealer after his fingerprints had been found on an ornate bloodstained sword in the victim’s shop. During the trial, Hallinan proved
that the dealer had not been killed by the sword. He also established that Kidd’s prints and blood found on the sword got there because he once fooled around with the sword while out shopping with a friend. The jury found Kidd not guilty and Hallinan refused Mrs Kidd’s offer of servitude. There are countless lesser examples of stories found in the classified sections: from the woman in Russia so poor that she was trying to sell her son to the exotic animal smuggling ring that was advertising rare pets, and so on.

Anniversaries

These are an endless source of stories. The anniversaries can be simple birthdays and deaths, major historic events or more unusual, social anniversaries like inventions of household objects, or other landmarks of everyday life. Nor do anniversary stories have to be light. Researching the five-year anniversary of a major news story for a background piece can often turn up some buried report, neglected group or something else that makes a good hard story.

Other productive areas are: specialist branches of police and other emergency services (especially those dealing with fraud, computer crime, art and antiques); obscure government bodies (such as ones dealing with public access to landed estates in return for lowered death duties, managing the assets of the mentally infirm, etc.); investments promising very high yields; any get-rich-quick or ‘can’t fail’ business scheme; loan companies (especially those which target the less well-off); newly released public documents; and pressure groups or self-help groups operating in unusual areas. You come across many more if you keep your eyes and ears open. Look for the incongruous, the things which don’t seem to add up, the things which need explanation. My first major story was about homeless people on the streets of the city in Britain where I lived. It was the result of noticing them late at night in doorways and parks and asking the basic reporter’s questions: who? why? etc. The series I wrote led to a great number of people approaching me with stories and to my news editor giving me better assignments.

Stories that good reporters avoid

If successful reporters have a trick, apart from hard work, it is knowing the stories that are unlikely to be good ones and staying well away from them. They know that good stories don’t. except in very rare circumstances, come from commercial press releases, routine press conferences, most of the mail that arrives at your news desk, or from people who call you up and say ‘Have I got a story for you?’ Neither do they come from surveys with small samples, surveys that dress the blindingly obvious in
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the language of science; surveys purporting to identify new social groups, stories that are purely about what people are saying, or from events concocted purely for the benefit of journalists, like photo-calls, press launches or stunts. And, above all, they know they don’t generally come from row stories.

Row stories

These have become the great contagion and con-trick of journalism. Legitimate when reporting serious criticisms of official action, genuine or sharp disagreements among those who can influence an outcome, row stories are more commonly seen in a form where the ‘row’ is nothing much more than a figment of the reporter’s desire for some phoney drama. Something happens, or something is said, and a reporter phones some known and convicted loudmouth who obliges by condemning, deplores or calling for an inquiry. This journalistic equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel is then topped off with a headline about ‘Row over…’, ‘Fury over…’, or even ‘Furore as…’. The result is stories that are blindingly predictable and have reality only within the pages of a newspaper.

Another common form is when a ‘row’ angle is written onto a story in an attempt to ‘freshen up’ something that has happened or been announced earlier in the news cycle. The predictably opposed are asked for a comment and their disapproval is then reported in the intro as ‘A furious row last night erupted over…’. This, quite apart from the hyped-up language of ‘erupted’ and ‘furious row’, is a complete non-argument. As an intro, it weakens the story rather than strengthens it.

The ultimate test of ‘row’ stories is, however, this: have you ever heard readers discussing a ‘row’ story in the terms as presented in the paper?

There are two kinds of journalism. There is the journalism that is trying to tell the truth and there’s the journalism that treats the news as showbusiness.

Max Hastings
Research

When the call comes in the middle of the night, a fireman only has to put on his pants and extinguish the flames. A correspondent must tell a million people who struck the match and why.

Mort Rosenblum of Associated Press

You don’t have to edit and judge news stories for very long before one thing becomes apparent: the most common reason why stories fail is not bad writing, duff quotes or poor construction. It is inadequate research. In reporting, no amount of fancy phrases will disguise that. You either have the raw material or you don’t.

If you do, then you have the means to write a clear account, free of any gaps, with a strong original angle, some lively examples or anecdotes and a sense of perspective. Your story can be tight and solid, with no loose writing because there is no need to pad it out.

If you don’t have the raw material, then your story will be fuzzy and uncertain, with some holes where information or explanations should be. It will be waffly, stale and lifeless. At best it will be what news executives call ‘a trot round the block’, meaning that it is a mere tour of the story’s more obvious and familiar points.

So what do you have to do to get that good material? First you have to know, broadly, what you are looking for. Second, you have to know where to get it, or at least where or who to ask.

What you should be looking for

You start with the basics of who, what, where, when, how and why – but you don’t stop there. What is needed above all is the detail and anecdote that illuminate the basics. This extra information is what generally makes the difference between an ordinary version of the story and a good one. Just take any big story on any given day and examine different accounts in different papers. It will be the richness of some compared with others that strikes you.
Collecting detail is crucial to good research. If you are reporting an incident you need to build up a detailed chronology of what happened so that you can run a ‘video’ of it in your head. It can never be as complete as frame-by-frame, but that should be your aim. You will not use all of these details, but until you come to write the story, you never know which are the telling ones. Almost no detail is too small to collect, for even the tiniest fragments can add worth to the story far beyond their nominal weight. An account of a murder, for example, can say that it was committed in the countryside and even name the date of 1 May. But if you report that it was committed at Sunnybank Farm on May Day, it immediately becomes more evocative and powerful. Better still, get to the scene and describe it – the cottage garden where the weapon was found (abandoned by the runner beans), the pink walls of the kitchen, the flowers in the jamjar by the backdoor, etc., etc. On many occasions, sections of the report, or even the whole thing, can be hung on even the smallest detail. And the details that are most valuable are the unexpected ones, either the apt or the particularly incongruous.

Detail is especially valuable when you are writing a report, or news feature, after the basic story has been around for a day or so. The great Bill Connor (‘Cassandra’ of the Daily Mirror) once based the opening of his piece about the death of Stalin, written several days after the event, on the detail that the old monster who had sent so many of his fellow-Russians to a premature death, died in his bed at the age of 73, ‘between the comfort of the sheets’.

Anecdote

The same applies to anecdotes and examples. They should not be long (otherwise they will overwhelm the main thrust of the story) and indeed the best kind of anecdotes in news reports are often incidents or episodes summarised in one or two sentences. A story about an eccentric decision by the council of a small town is going to be a lot more lively if you can include some tales from its past. They may be not much more than a brief incident or two from history, mention of a couple of the town’s most famous natives or even something as simple as an inscription on a grave in a local churchyard. But you can be sure they will be a lot more interesting and informative than the predictable quotations from one of the protagonists that would otherwise take their place.

Background

This is something you should collect for any story, even the briefest ones. You should be looking for the setting, context and relevant parts of the
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history of the subject or issue. It might be a paragraph or two of the story so far, or a potted history of the subject or issue. It might even be some wider analogy or comparison. A story about attempts by your country or city to limit car use in cities, for example, will be all the better for some idea of what policies have been adopted (and what worked and did not) in other places or countries. News stories are rarely unique eruptions of fate; they belong in a continuum.

Perspective

Context can sometimes be the vital part of the story, putting facts or developments into a proper, even far less dramatic, perspective. This is particularly vital where someone is issuing blood-curdling warnings about health or public safety. Stories about health risks in the environment, for example, can often be preposterously overstated unless some perspective is given. Would you think it a good story that a sample of sea water contained 6,000 molecules of poison? You might be thinking front page until you learnt that this is what would be produced if you took a pint of poison and tipped it evenly into the world's oceans. And many stories about the dangers of pesticides might be a little more intelligent and accurate if they also compared the risks to the amount of naturally occurring pesticidal chemicals found in basil, peanuts and mushrooms.

There are journalists who think it is our job to dramatise everything, but a little reflection will tell you this is a fairly dumb route to take. Think how we react to the people in our own lives who always put the most melodramatic construction on everything. In the end we regard them as gullible, unreliable and a pain in the butt. Why should readers think differently of us if we omit context and perspective to hammer up every story?

Where to get it

Research is about knowing where the bodies are — or might be — buried. You should therefore be as insatiable about collecting potential sources of information as you are about the information itself. These sources fall into three categories: online (which get their own chapter), human and printed.

Human sources

These are the most familiar sources, covering everything from the official spokespersons, officials and politicians contacted regularly to the person spoken to once and maybe never again. They also extend to people that the inexperienced would never dream of contacting. If there is a golden
RESEARCH

rule of successful research is: never be afraid to ask. The worst any one can say to you is no and you will often be amazed at the help you get. Other hints are:

Collect phone numbers obsessively
The most basic tool is obviously a well-maintained, detailed book of contacts, with their addresses, phone and fax numbers. When you are the only person in your office, it is late at night and you need some vital information, you will find out just how good your contacts book is. You should be ruthless at entering every name and number you are given or can get hold of and use every possible means of getting hold of more. Scrounge them from colleagues and rivals and when you read papers and magazines note down the names of useful-sounding experts and try to get their numbers. And don’t, like me on many occasions, fall into the trap of thinking you will not need that person’s number again and fail to transfer it from notebook to contacts book. You can be absolutely sure there will come a time when the lack of it will be a real problem.

An awful lot of people are paid to help you
There are more people than you might imagine who have been put on this planet to assist journalists. They may not know it, but they have been. How many lakes does the Lake District have? How deep is that ocean? How high is that mountain? There is someone in an embassy, tourist board or visitor centre who can give you an instant answer. If you want quick, uncontroversial, factual information, go first to those who are paid to promote, or help the public with, the subject in question. In a country like Britain there are literally tens of thousands of them. Make them earn their wages.

Whatever the subject, there’s an expert somewhere
There are a surprising number of people and places who can speedily put you in touch with experts on some of the more obscure aspects of life. Professional institutions, trade associations and specialist museums often have an in-house expert and if they don’t, they can refer you to one. For instance, suppose you want to speak to someone about marine salvage in a hurry. You can call the national maritime museum, a trade association for divers, a marine insurance company, navy press office, a journal of marine history, even the library of a local council on the coast – and that’s before you’ve gone online, or searched the cuttings for experts named in previous stories on the subject, etc. Certain organisations, such as local libraries and museums, maintain a database of experts on even the most arcane subjects.

When you have a choice, think before deciding who to call
A common mistake in research is to ask the wrong person. A lot of information that you want will be known to a variety of sources, but
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some are more likely to help you than others. If, for instance you want to
find out the sort of profit margin that shops charge on imported fashion
shoes, don’t ring a store’s press department. They will be nervous at the
very mention of the words ‘profit margin’, especially as it is theirs you
are investigating. Go instead to a wholesaler or manufacturer. Then go
to the stores for a comment.

Try other media
On one occasion in Moscow I heard of a Russian professor who was being
held by the immigration authorities in San Francisco in the United States,
pending deportation in unusual circumstances. It looked like a good
story. The problem was that I had no telephone numbers for her represen-
tatives or the American authorities: the US embassy in Moscow was
closed, there was nothing yet on the wires and the story was needed
within the hour. After a couple of false starts I got the number for the
Associated Press office in San Francisco, called it and immediately got
numbers for everyone I wanted, including that of the professor’s
American husband and, from him, those organising a campaign on her
behalf. Local newspapers are always worth a call in such circumstances.
You can offer to trade information, or free publication of your final piece.

Be cheeky
The most pathetic words a reporter can say are, ‘I can’t find out, I’ve tried
everywhere.’ Oh really? In 99 cases out of 100 you can be certain they
have not and that there are several more places they could try, for there
is nearly always somewhere where you can get the information you
want. Imagine this situation: you are in your office at 10 p.m. at night
and hear that one of your nationals has been arrested for armed robbery
or gun-running in Florida. What do you do? The US embassy in your city
is closed, your consulate in Miami is not answering the phone, the FBI
office in New York knows nothing about the case and neither does the
Associated Press office in the city. When that happened to me. I called
the American Express office in Miami, claimed to be a card holder (which
was true, but need not have been – they would never have checked) and
asked if they could give me numbers for the local police, district attorney’s
office and prison. I soon had my story.

Printed sources

There are two basic printed sources: books, and newspapers and their
cuttings.

Books and directories
Reporters can sometimes spend hours chasing down a fact which is
sitting innocently in a readily-available reference book just an arm’s
length away. As with human sources, the job is to know what is available and where it might be found. And that includes being aware of which librarians will know if you don’t. You will be surprised how often such people will look something up for you for the sheer pleasure of proving they can do it.

For journalists, books have four uses – to check spellings and dates, give you basic facts, supply names of potential sources from yearbooks, etc. and provide historical facts or brief anecdotes to enliven a story. The only precaution is, with the first three categories, to make sure you are consulting an up-to-date edition.

In practice, time pressure means that trips to libraries are not always possible and your use of printed sources normally depends on what is to hand at home or in the office. That, plus my natural appetite for trivia and so-called ‘useless information’ (which is often very useful) is why I have over the years assembled a good collection of books of odd facts. On the shelves above my head as I type these words are books of days, chronologies, books about wills, sex lives and obscure origins of the rich and famous. eccentric lives, origins of sayings and slogans, originals of famous characters in fiction, odd classified ads, firsts, inventions, encyclopaedias of crime, stories behind the songs. etc. All of them have supplied golden little paragraphs to stories and columns and have sometimes provided the entire piece.

*Other newspapers’ stories as sources*

It is common to be given a story from another paper and asked to stand it up. You should try to match it. not merely regurgitate it. If you are unable to get any new source of your own to substantiate it and your editor is insisting on a story, then quote it with attribution to the original paper. Better still, get an acceptable source to comment on the report.

The written source that should be treated with the most care is newspaper cuttings. Just because it has appeared in print does not mean it is correct. It may have been subsequently corrected or the subject of legal action – something that applies just as well to computerised press cuttings and other databases.

And beware the statement that ‘everyone else is reporting that, so it must be true’. It is often correct, but don’t rely on it. In the autumn of 1989, when then-Czechoslovakia was on the brink of what was to become the ‘velvet revolution’, a young woman told reporters that state police officers had beaten to death a student called Martin Smej. The story was reported locally and people began to visit the spot where Smid died, which soon began to acquire the aura and status of hallowed ground. Reuters wrote the story and Agence France Presse said that three young men had been killed.

The Associated Press failed to have the story. Its desk chiefs were not happy with their Prague bureau and demanded they catch up fast. Their
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local man was Ondrej Hejma, a guitarist who combined journalism with rock music at the expense of neither. Taking none of the earlier Smd reports at face value, he began investigating. He and his wife, a doctor, toured local hospitals and mortuaries trying to find someone who had treated Smd. dealt with his body – anything. He found not the slightest shred of evidence for the Smd story and several days later the rival agencies were forced to report that Smd, whoever and wherever he was, had not died on that Prague sidewalk.

*No intelligence system, no bureaucracy, can offer the information provided by competitive reporting: the cleverest secret agents of the police state are inferior to the plodding reporter of the democracy.*

Harold Evans
Online Research

It is part of the social mission of every great newspaper to provide a refuge and a home for the largest possible number of salaried eccentrics.


The world has known three revolutions in the keeping, presenting, communicating and accessing of information. One was the emergence of the written word thousands of years ago, the other was the invention of printing hundreds of years ago and the third is still going on. It is, of course, the Internet – the means for anyone on the planet to display information that can instantly be read by anyone else.

In 1990, if you wanted information it had to be on paper or on disk: if you needed to get information from a library, you had to go there; and written messages had to be sent by fax or post. Within a few years this was no longer the case. Anyone with access to a computer and a modem can now publish to the rest of the world; receive complex, graphic rich information almost instantly on screen; and, most important of all for research, instantly access most of the world’s accumulated (and rapidly growing) written output. You can now, for instance, sit in the middle of Russia and research and write a thoroughly up-to-date piece on Brazilian soccer. I know. I have done it.

The Internet has hooked up 70,000 computer networks all around the world, including libraries, databases, commercial companies, NGOs (non-governmental organisations), universities, etc. Using a computer and a modem, reporters can now, easily and quickly from the comforts of home or office, do the following:

- Access vast amounts of information not otherwise readily available.
- Check references in more dictionaries, encyclopaedias, gazetteers, almanacs and glossaries than they believed existed.
- Locate and contact sources and experts.
- Search archives of news stories.
And then, using their computer and standard software, they can also:

- Store this information.
- Speedily manipulate it.
- Load information onto a database.
- Search and analyse the database.

Only a fool would not take advantage of this. Indeed not to use the Internet for research is becoming akin to a reporter refusing to use the telephone. To take just one humdrum example, suppose two journalists are asked to prepare a feature on toxic shock syndrome. The condition some women have developed after using conventional tampons. This is how they might proceed:

**Offline reporter:** Uses telephone to find doctors and ask about their experiences. Finds experts, asks them for interview and asks for references in the non-specialist press. Seeks leads to campaigners on the subject, interviews them and hopefully gets led to sufferers. Interviews tampon makers.

**Online reporter:** All of the above, plus: searches subject on the web and finds sites for campaign groups, sites giving 'idiot's guide' to subject, sites listing major recent articles in journals, testimony of sufferers and sites for manufacturers disputing blame for the syndrome. From these sites, obtains email addresses for potential phone or email interview: searches subject on news story archive and finds all recent news and features published in major publications; goes to newsgroup and message boards run by self-help groups, finds good testimony posted on sites, plus further experts' names: contacts these by email asking permission to quote and posing supplementary questions. Also discovers a good news angle, giving a news story to front up the feature, plus a website of the world's only museum of menstruation, giving a light feature for the future.

Which reporter gets the next plum job?

In dealing with breaking news stories, the Net can be even more valuable. When reports of the 1999 Columbine school massacre first broke, reporters at my paper, 7,000 miles away, were able to find websites for the school giving pictures and details of the layout, sites for local TV, radio and press giving running reports and then found the site run by one of the two teenage gunmen. And in early 1999, when a clam boat went down off the coast of New Jersey, AP researchers went to databases to obtain the address of the company that owned the vessel. The date of her last inspection, the address history of a missing crew member and his neighbours' phone numbers — all within half an hour. As Robert J. Port, special assignment editor at Associated Press, says:

Using the Net, I can find out if a person has been sued, or divorced or whether he or she has a criminal record. I can locate within five
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minutes any person in the United States who uses a credit card or has a bank account, and I can probably locate his or her family members and address history in less than 30 minutes.

But – and it is a big but – the Internet has drawbacks as well. Its immense plus is the fantastic volume of available material, but this is also the Net’s biggest downside. In novice hands, the lack of practice at knowing both what to look for and where to find it speedily (plus the inevitable temptations to wander off down irrelevant byways), can make Net research a slow and overwhelming task. You don’t have to go far to find journalists who will talk about the ‘world wide wait’ and how their one attempt at searching for information on the Net resulted in 345,789 pages being returned by a search engine. Even those who search the Net regularly are probably doing it in ways which cause delays and frustrations.

For most of these problems (except the temptations of being sidetracked) there are techniques which solve or minimise them and this is what this chapter is about. It also covers the limits and pitfalls of the Net that journalists should watch out for.

The Web

The World Wide Web is the most conspicuous part of the Internet. The worst of it – child porn, silly homepages and sites which promise much but deliver little – is well publicised. The best of it is less well known: government sites giving immediate access to official data, reports, plans and contacts; academic resources giving guides, articles and data on even the most obscure topics; reference material ranging from Encyclopaedia Britannica to single-subject databases: news sites and their archives; and other research sites such as online telephone directories, diaries of forthcoming news events, people finders, lists of public records, databases of experts, address finders and FAQ finders. If you know where to look, within minutes you can find virtually any information: from databases of TV ads, lists of lawyers specialising in air accident claims and sites describing 2,000 hazardous substances, to archives of articles on organised crime, lists of the world’s most threatened species and legislators’ potted biographies.

As you build experience, you will find other, more specialised uses of the Web for research: finding sources and contacts, requesting experiences on a subject you are investigating, trading information with non-rival journalists and even finding new stories.

So where to start? In my experience, guides, rather than search engines, are the most directly productive place to begin.
Guides

These list the most useful sites on a subject, probably with some note on their content. The best guides have been compiled from the cream of what search engines offer, plus some out-of-the-way sites that engines may miss. While there are guides on the Net to almost everything, the most useful type for journalists is research resources. The following list of reliable ones is the merest tip of a global iceberg (URLs have not been given as these may change. To find the sites, see the searching tips later in the chapter):

American Library Association: Particularly good. Includes a guide to the best reference sites, plus many other useful places such as people finders, roadmaps, city guides, email addresses of the famous, telephone directories on the Net, history links, etc.

Awesome Lists: Still one of the best selections of good quality, vetted reference sites. Extensive but well-catalogued.

Beaucoup: Collection of approximately 1,000 search engines, directories, and indices from all over the world, organised into categories such as General Searchers, Reviewed Sites/What’s New, Software, Reference, Education, Art and Graphics, Social/Environmental/Political Concerns and Consumer Medicine.

CIA World Factbook: Whatever skullduggery they may get up to, the CIA also systematically collects data. This site gives country by country information on a grand scale – data, background information and the latest trends in each country.

FinderSeeker: This claims to be the search engine for search engines and is not far off that. You can search for a search engine by subject, keyword or country.

Infonation: The UN’s guide to detailed data for every member state. Includes everything from the basic economic figures to death rates, car ownership, etc.

InternationalAffairs.com: Extensive store of data, reports and a particularly good guide to the world’s media.

Internet Sleuth: Directory of search engines, with brief descriptions and search forms for more than 3,000 searchable sites on the Web.

Librarians’ Index To The Internet: A searchable directory of Web resources, organized into ‘best of’, directories, ‘directories’, ‘databases’ and ‘specific resources’.

Needle In A Cyberstack: Silly title it may have, but this is the best single online research site. Gives links to main reference sites, plus hundreds of others, such as all electronic journals, a FAQ Finder, worldwide phone books, world museum guide, the best people finder, etc.

North Harris College Library Online Guide To US Government Information: Access to a vast store of information, which has much reference material
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and new data useful for general, non-US research. Includes link to GOVBOT, the US government search engine, and a superb guide to data on countries worldwide.

researchbuzz.com: A constantly updating guide to what is available to researchers.

searchenginecolossus.com: Useful list of search engines by country.

The Ready Reference Page: A listing of great web resources based on the Dewey Classification system. Compiled by the reference librarians of Lakewood Public Library.

Expert Finders: Searchable database of contact details for large numbers of experts.

Experts.com: One of the best services. Has a search engine which leads you to a listing of experts, including full contact details and some indication of their credentials.

Pitso's Ask An Expert: One of the more famous expert resources online. Has website links, email addresses and descriptions of over 300 experts willing to answer questions.

JOURNALISM RESOURCES

If you have any doubts about the value of the Internet, spend an idle hour viewing some of what is below and be convinced. Even after six years of using them, I have still not explored anything like all the sites that can give you insights, tips and an edge, whatever kind of reporting or editing you do.

FACSNET: Includes background information on many issues, tools for taming the Net and other aids for researching stories and understanding public policy issues.

WWW Virtual Library: Journalism: Contains sections on all aspects of the industry, plus a link to discussion groups.

The Beat Page: Services for journalists via email or commercial services.

UN Foundation Wire: Excellent news alert service. Needs registration by the user.

Poynter Institute: Has one of the best lists of journalism sites, plus much else.

University of Miami Computer Assisted Reporting Site: An extraordinary resource giving detailed tutorials on many new skills.

Power Reporting: Thousands of free research resources for journalists, updated daily. Categories include people finders, search tools, email alerts, beat-by-beat, etc. There is also a superb section on computer assisted reporting sites.
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News sites

The best and quickest general news sites are:

BBC World Service

Not only an excellent online global news service, but also has a superbly detailed guide to upcoming stories, conferences, meetings, trials, elections, etc.

Drudge Report

This is the famous Net news site that broke several key stories in the Monica Lewinsky cycle. Its front page is a good selection of the best news wire services around. Not the most comprehensive, but the fastest and easiest to use.

Newscenter

A wonderfully complete world list of government, media and wire news sites.

To look for specific news stories, go first to a news site where you will find major breaking stories listed. Good ones are the above, plus BBC, CNN.com, Nando.net, Excite's Newstracker or Northern Light's News. For localised stories, search the regional media's websites. Yahoo has a quick guide to media in any area. The best news archive by far is newsindex.com. Search any topic and it lists hundreds of the most recent stories from wires and papers around the world.

Searching

There are two types of search assistance on the web:

Directories

These are hand-picked listings like Yahoo, where sites are submitted for consideration, manually reviewed and displayed in a deliberately manageable quantity. Their databases, however, contain a surprisingly small portion of the Web. Yahoo, for example, lists only about one 350th of all available sites. Its very limits, however, often make it a good starting place.

Search engines

These, such as HotBot, create their listings automatically. Programmes called spiders crawl the Web, copy the pages and then, when a search subject is entered, list them in what they think is the order of relevance.
But search engines are not totally comprehensive listings of all that is on the Net. They are databases and databases can only put out what someone has put into them. Given the vast size of the Web (which is rising by tens of millions of pages a year), it is no wonder that even the largest search engines cover only 16–17 per cent of available websites. Most of the best-known ones cover a mere ten per cent of the Web. Since search engines are the only way to know what is out there, we thus have the little-known truth that, for the person who only uses one search engine, between 85–90 per cent of the Web will be a closed book.

Different search engines work in different ways and only by using them will you find which suits you. An excellent guide to using search engines and their different features is at searchenginewatch.com. A firm general rule when searching is to be as specific as you can. A request for ‘East Timor militia’ will be a lot more efficient than one for just ‘militia’. You should also be aware of the different searches you can get. Here is a brief guide:

*Match Any:* Displays pages containing any of the terms you have asked for. Can produce very long results. Most of the big search engines will do this by default, listing first pages that have all your terms, then some of them, etc.

*Match All:* Searches for pages containing all your terms. rather than any of them. Use the + symbol to enter two or more terms. For example, +turkey +earthquake would search for pages mentioning only both of those things.

*Exclude:* Removes documents that contain certain words. For example, wanting information on Clinton and Waco, but knowing you will get a lot of references to the Lewinsky affair, you could eliminate those by using the – command: +Clinton +Waco –Lewinsky. That removes any pages on Monica Lewinsky.

*Phrase Searching:* Using the plus symbols tells a search engine to return all pages mentioning those words. A search for +Kenya +wildlife +vacations will return pages which carry all those words. But some may be pages mainly about vacations and have only a passing reference to wildlife and Kenya. Phrase searching is the solution. This finds documents that contain words in the exact order you specify. You can do this by enclosing your terms within quotation marks, as in “Kenya wildlife vacations”. This returns only sites which use those words, in that order.

*Title Searching:* Will find a word or phrase only when it is used in the title of web pages, thus eliminating pages where the search term is used only in passing in the body of the text. To do it, write in the search field:

title:the word(s) you want searched

Use the command t: instead of title: for Yahoo.
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Site Search: Searches only pages from a specific domain. Enter
domain: the name of the domain (i.e., bloggs.com)

Most search engines use the prefix domain: for these kinds of searches.
Alta Vista uses host:.
Combining: Any of the above refinements can be combined to give more
specific searches. This is called ‘nesting’ and allows you to build complex
queries by the use of brackets, like this:

impeachment AND (clinton OR johnson)

These strings can be as long as you like and nested queries can be used
in conjunction with + and -. To get even more specific searches, combine
any of the above refinements. So, for instance, to search only UN pages
for information about East Timor, enter:

domain:un.org “East Timor”

If a search for “East Timor” gets an overwhelming list of results from the
UN, try getting rid of UN pages by doing this:

“East Timor” -domain:un.org

If you want to restrict yourself to searching only university sites, then
enter:

“East Timor” +domain:edu

And if you want to search only British sites:

“East Timor” +host:uk

Wildcards (*): If you don’t know the spelling of a word, or want to
search for all roots of the word (i.e., walk, walking and walked) add the
* symbol to your search subject. Some engines do this automatically.

Natural Language: This is searching by asking a question “Where is the
source of the Nile?” Limited usefulness, except when all else has failed.

Advanced search features

Most services have advanced search pages that give more control over
your query, or let you create more complex ones. To know what they
offer, study the search engine’s help page. HotBot, for instance, has a
very detailed advanced search which allows you to specify phrases, language, a word filter, date, media exclusions (image, audio, Shockwave), domains, geographic origin, etc.

Specific features offered by most main search engines include:

Results Clustering: Results can be dominated by pages from one site. To avoid this, use the clustering feature. This allows only one page per site to be listed.

Find Similar: If one result seems the very one you need, use the “Find Similar” feature to find others like it. Excite, a search engine, is effective for such searches.

Sort By Date: Great idea in theory, but so many websites automatically carry the current date that what you are after – the date on which they were compiled – is not available. Same applies to ‘date range’ feature.

Search Within: Allows a search within the result you have just generated. Search “New York”, then enter “Buffalo” and select “search within” option; you then get only sites mentioning this city within your initial results.

Find the Person: This searches the Web and news groups for references to a specific person. HotBot has an excellent function for this.

Boolean Searching: These are the commands (AND/OR, etc.) that have long been used by computer professionals searching databases. The + and – commands serve much the same function. If you want to get very serious about Web searching, go to one of the many sites which offer a Boolean tutorial.

How to evaluate Web pages

The Internet is not an opportunity that has been wasted on the unhinged, exhibitionist and boring. Seeing credibility flaws in the websites of the slightly mad is not difficult. Nor is it hard to spot the hopelessly biased offerings from activists and single-issue obsessives. The problem comes with sites that look plausible but which aren’t. You have to develop the radar to detect these, asking all the usual questions when approaching any source (Who is behind this? Why are they putting this out? What’s included? What’s been left out?). Here is what to look out for beyond the fancy graphics.

Excessive design

A good rule of thumb is that if a site has ads, pretty little pictures, rotating gifs and other art-desk trickery, it will be less useful for serious research than a more prosaic-looking one.
Sites that lack a means of contact

If the site has no address, phone number or email, be suspicious. After all, why don’t they want you to get in touch?

No modification date

A date for when the site was updated is a good sign, providing it is an authentic one. But many sites are automatically programmed to bear the current day’s date. Browsers allow you to check this by viewing the source data, which should say when a site was created and last modified.

Watch URLs

Many domain suffixes give a good clue about the originating organisation: gov. means official, edu. or ac. means a university and com. and co.uk tells you this is the site of a commercial company. But domain suffixes like net. and org. can mean anything – and often do. If the URL is detailed, there can often be additional clues. A tilde (~) usually indicates a personal web directory, rather than part of the organisation’s official website.

Excessive page-turning

Sites that send you through a labyrinth of pages to get to where you want to go is a sign that the operators are more interested in clocking up a large amount of page views (and thus increasing their potential advertising take) than delivering information efficiently.

Other tips for surfers

Turn off graphics

It does not matter how fast your connection, images add hugely to download time. If you are interested in getting fast information, as opposed to viewing pretty pictures, turn off the images and the text will load almost instantaneously. You can also speed download by turning off Java.

Old computers prefer older browsers

Browsers are always being upgraded. While their new features might sound tempting, few, if any, improve the basic acquisition of text information. They also require more memory to execute. If you have an older computer, stick with the older browser. It will run far better.
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Virus check

Viruses get into your computer via disks and downloaded files. Scan everything you download, using up-to-date virus-checking software. Better still, run a utility that automatically scans all downloaded material, including email attachments.

Subscribe to email updates and digests

Many websites will send you email when they've been updated. Most will include URLs of the exact location plus description.

Newsgroups

These are the forums on the Internet, open to anyone. There are more than 17,000 of them, covering everything from classical music to previously unknown species of pornography. Many are frivolous but there are more serious newsgroups than you might imagine. Some, like alt.disasters.aviation, are occupied by conspiracy theorists. But there are enough groups with informative, sensible postings to make regular visits worthwhile. Many newsgroups are regularly used by academics and others with serious credentials. Generally, specialised newsgroups are more likely to have useful postings. Overall, it is worth half an hour of any journalist's time to download the full list of groups supplied by your ISP and go through it, noting any which cover your interests.

Newsgroups are classified by various prefixes: alt. (meaning general interests), comp. (for computer topics), rec. (sport and leisure), soc. (cultural and social matters) and country prefixes like uk., jap., de. (for Germany), etc. There are many sub-classifications, like alt.current-events (which has 36 groups), alt.activism for campaigning (e.g., alt.activism.deathpenalty) and alt.fan which is for groups dedicated to various celebrities – very often useful if you are writing a profile. In among the breathless messages of admiration will be, if nothing else, links to detailed biographical websites.

The value of newsgroups is threefold:

To give a general feel for the current issues in an area

Go to alt.environment.pollution, for instance, and five minutes reading will tell you what are the hot topics in this area.

To pick up stories

There are always postings which contain potential stories, particularly contributions from qualified experts. There are also a lot of groups likely
to have postings that come close to breaking the law. Newsgroups which are trading posts (in antiquities or rare birds and animals, for instance) often contain the starting point for a good investigation.

To find sources

If you are looking for sources or qualified experts in a field, go to a newsgroup that deals with the topic and you are sure to find postings from such people. You can then email them questions or a request to talk. I have never known such an approach fail to work. However, be tactful. Newsgroups attract obsessives who jealously guard what they see as the integrity of their group and can be hostile to clumsy approaches by journalists.

Newsgroups’ archives are one of the most useful areas of the Internet for research. These are services which catalogue all postings, typically for about a year. They have a search engine which lets you find postings on subjects across all newsgroups. To take an example from my experience: a new tram system was being built in a town. I searched the archive for postings about this and related schemes and up came messages about how the firm behind the scheme had performed in other areas. A good newsgroup archive is dejanews.com.

Message boards

These are noticeboards run off a website. They can deliver all the benefits of newsgroups, with the added value of someone weeding out the irrelevant or mad postings. Message boards will only rarely be archived and there is no systematic way to find them. The most fruitful hunting ground for the more seriously useful ones is a guide site on the subject.

Lists

These are mailing lists which specialise in a subject. You subscribe to the list and are then sent, as emails, messages which people contribute to the list. Lists generally cover more serious subjects than message boards and the postings tend to be far more useful than those in newsgroups or message boards. Lists are normally moderated by an academic, or a serious enthusiast. A good example is the Computer Assisted Reporting list.

Some lists tend to be brief notifications of developments (plus maybe links to sites which give conference papers, reports, etc.). Other lists are mainly discussions. However, some lists can be very active and generate up to a dozen or more emails a day. Unsubscribing, though, is never a
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problem. The best way to find lists is via academic sites which give resources for a subject. Malkovich's journalism resources site has a page citing a good number of journalism lists. A search engine for all lists is at lists.com.

The first duty of the press is to obtain the earliest and most correct intelligence of events of the time and instantly, by disclosing them, to make them the common property of the nation.

Editor of The Times. London 1852
Handling Sources, Not Them Handling You

The fact that a man is a newspaper reporter is evidence of some flaw of character.


Twenty years ago the normal source in the average city dealt with maybe a couple of papers, a radio and a TV station. Today news outlets have proliferated to the point where any local official source deals with perhaps two cover-price papers, several freesheets, a specialist local business magazine or two, maybe two radio stations, a TV station, three cable channels and a rapidly rising number of news or community websites.

This growth has hugely accelerated the tendency for official organisations to hand press relations over to dedicated professionals. It has also meant that there are a lot more journalists hunting for information where once only a few roamed. These days you are far more likely to be one of many and will find yourself dealing not with the person with the expertise, but with their mouthpiece. All the more reason, then, to know how to deal professionally with sources and how to make the best of, and occasionally subvert, the channels down which officialdom would prefer you to go. For although most dealings with sources are routine, straightforward transactions where both sides gain, there are times when you are in a highly competitive game of wits with sources to make sure that the strongest and most complete version of the story hits the streets and not the self-serving one they would prefer.

Guidelines for dealing with any source

Before considering the specifics of dealing with official sources, news management techniques, contentious sources and some of the other perils, here are a few key guidelines for dealing with any source:
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Always make your identity as a reporter plain

To do otherwise is to trick people into giving information which is not only dishonest but also unsafe. People are often very free with talk until they realize you are a journalist. Then they become a lot more guarded and start to qualify their information. This is because instead of merely shooting the breeze, they now have to take some responsibility for the quality of these facts. Not telling them you are a reporter is a good way to get them to exaggerate in a way people often do in informal conversation. The chapter on investigative journalism (Chapter 10) deals with the very rare times when concealing your identity is justified.

Be fair with sources

Believe it or not, journalism is quite a lot like real life. From this flows the devastating truth that if you want sources to help you, then being friendly, honest and treating them fairly works a lot better than bullying, trickery or intimidation. Being fair is especially vital. If they are being criticized or accused of wrongdoing you should not only put these claims to them, but also give them time to reply. Ten minutes before deadline is not good enough.

Copy approval

Showing a source the finished article before publication is soliciting censorship. The usual reason given is that this is a chance for factual errors to be corrected – and if you believe that is the real motive, you will probably believe anything. Showing someone what will inevitably be described as ‘the draft’ of a story encourages the idea that it is being given to them for approval and, hence, possible alteration. It is the journalists’ job to produce accurate copy, not something that is the basis for negotiations with the subject.

Retraction

Many times a source or subject will say something to a reporter that they subsequently regret. There is not a lot of point in journalists training themselves to question good information out of people if they then offer them a subsequent opportunity to withdraw it. However, if sources want to correct what they told you, then you must let them, unless you have very good grounds for thinking some subterfuge is afoot – in which case, report both their earlier and later statements. Sources’ appeals for a retraction on the grounds that they will be fired are another matter. Handle these by questioning them closely, then passing the matter on to an executive. It is not a reporter’s job to play God; leave that to editors.
Payment

This is another issue reporters can kick upstairs to editors. It is the executives’ decision whether they can afford – financially or morally – to pay for information. The dangers of the practice are obvious. First, it establishes a market and encourages people caught up in stories to demand payment. Second, paid informants have an unimpressive record of reliability. They know that the stronger the story, the higher the fee and so have a direct inducement to invent or embroider. A few years ago the Sun, Britain’s most popular newspaper, had to pay out £1 million libel damages to Elton John because they believed, and printed, a fictitious story sold to them by a gay male prostitute. It is not a lone example. Neither, however, are the instances of cheating public figures exposed solely through a paid-for story. If you are a mass-market tabloid, the temptations to pay for stories are understandable.

Official sources

These are ones authorised to give you information – from the owner of the corner store commenting on how trade is, to the chief press spokesperson for the head of government making a statement about why she has resigned. They span the full range of human helpfulness, cussedness, expertise and idiocy. Most, if approached in the right way, are helpful.

When it comes to dealing with PR and press departments, authorised does not always mean well-informed. Some have good knowledge of their organisations and can answer detailed questions. Others are mere go-betweens, transporting your questions to the official concerned and ferrying back the answers, with an inevitable loss of freshness – and no opportunity to ask follow-up questions. For this reason, try to cultivate officials who will give you information directly, rather than it being filtered through their PR person.

In recent years, there have been big changes in the way large commercial, political and government organisations handle the media. There has been much bleating from journalists about the iniquities of ‘news management’ and ‘spin doctors’. All that has happened is that these bodies have started to employ press spokespersons who are rather more of an intellectual match for journalists than hitherto. The result is a more sophisticated, although rarely subtle, approach to handling the media, the chief feature of which is to be proactive, rather than merely reactive. The following should be borne in mind.

Spin doctors

Often applied wrongly to all PR people, this term originally described people working on a political campaign whose job it was to shmooze
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journalists after new polls-candidate debates, etc. and give an interpretation that was favourable to their party. It has gradually been applied wrongly, to almost anyone in the PR or image business. A true spin doctor is someone in the political trade who is a chief press spokesman or senior aide. Apart from routine statements and press conferences, they interpret events to the press on behalf of their boss. They try to anticipate bad news (and divert attention from it) and also attempt to manage expectations in a way that helps their cause.

This last situation is where most journalists are led astray by spin doctors. Fearing, for instance, that bad news is in the offing, they brief journalists that results verging on the disastrous are expected so that when the real outcome is known they can smugly report a veritable triumph. The frequency with which this ploy is tried on journalists does not seem to impede its success.

True spin doctors do, however, have one great advantage over lesser fry in their trade. They are close, often very close, to their boss and anything they say on the record has serious authority. They also spend much of their lives dealing fairly straightforwardly with routine questions and the best of them are invaluable sources. Just make sure you protect yourself by constantly asking: why are they telling me this?

News management

Organisations, be they public or private, commercial or political, routinely have a great many reports and statements that they wish, or are obliged to, release. The idea that they should choose the most advantageous way and time to do this is not particularly shocking. Indeed often this ‘news management’ is helpful, making sure journalists have enough time to write for their editions, or avoiding a clash between a report’s release and a major event.

Skullduggery, however, there is. It comes mainly in three forms and is nearly always connected to information that the organisation fears will play negatively. First is the dodge of timing the release of the information to coincide with the least convenient moment in the news cycle – say late at night, or towards the end of a Friday afternoon. The chances of it being ignored or meekly treated are then fairly high. Second is to leak the main angle of the story to a sympathetic news outlet in the hope that by the time the others have caught up or received the information through the official channels, the story will either be stale or its ‘agenda’ already set. The third trick is to sugar the pill with some fragment of good news which is then spun as the main angle.

The British government in 1999, for instance, was scheduled to release new hospital waiting list figures. Knowing that these were not good and seeking to avoid adverse headlines, the figures were released on the same day as the annual school exam results (confident that this
rare story would overshadow the hospital data). The government also
tacked news of the hospital figures on to a release about a grant of £30
million to help the situation. It worked. All papers ran the story small,
and my paper gave it just three paragraphs in early editions. When we
rumbled what was going on (the figures showed waiting lists had risen
by 64 per cent in two years) we elevated the story to a page two lead.
Your only protection against this and other forms of news management
is to use your wits.

Withholding access

Sometimes organisations are so displeased by press coverage that they
simply cut off access to their information. Crude, and rare, this practice
is generally only seen in arts journalism, where an unfavourable review
so irks a theatre or gallery that they simply ban the critic concerned. The
film industry seems especially prone to this branch of censorship. In the
US, according to a study by the University of Southern California,
journalists have been banned from screenings or blackballed by a studio
for the tone of their coverage or for breaking embargos. Judy Gerstel, for
instance, wrote a report about poor audience response to Hook for the
Detroit Free Press. was promptly ex-communicated by the studio and
soon found that two other studios (Warner and Universal) had dropped
her as well. Ultimately there is no solution. It is the studio’s information
and they have a legal, if not a moral, right to do with it what they want.
The response should be to tell readers of the attempted manipulation and
to encourage ‘if she goes, then so do we’ support from other papers. After
all, it might be them next time.

Handling unauthorised sources

These are sources not authorised to give you the information they are
passing on. They may be whistleblowers well-placed in an organisation,
or someone with no official connection to the information. They could
be passing on documents, or a mere suggestion to go digging in a certain
area. Invariably their information will be contested, at least initially, and
almost always they will not wish to be quoted in the story. It is from such
sources that some of the best stories come – and the most trouble if they
are wrong. In dealing with these sources, you should bear the following
in mind.

Ask yourself what their motives are

People are rarely helpful to newspapers because they are saintly. They
want to damage political, commercial or personal opponents, advance
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some cause (or harm a rival) one, take revenge or simply cause trouble. While someone else's revenge mission can be useful, it is best to know what they are about from the start. So ask yourself (and occasionally them) what their motives might be. Their unattractive calculations may not disqualify the story, but they are a good reason to tread carefully.

Ask yourself, and them, what the other side to the story might be

The stories given to you by contentious sources are rarely as black and white as they would have you believe. Save time by asking them if there is another side to the story, or if there is any qualifying information you should know. Crazy, horrendous, absurd things do happen; but not as often as most sources claim. Under the front-page headline 'Shame On The City – Shocking Story of New York At its Worst', The New York Post once carried a story of a man who raped a three-year-old girl on a grass verge by a busy Manhattan highway while passing motorists parked and watched. Does that sound likely? What actually happened was that three motorists saw a man attacking a girl, leapt from their cars to give chase and other drivers were then caught in the resulting jam. A clear case of a single-source story that was not checked.

Are they in a position to know what they claim to know?

A lot of named sources frequently claim to be 'in the know' when they are in fact only marginally so. The classic case of this is the coverage by the Western press of the Soviet Union in the two years following the 1917 revolution. Western correspondents were barred from Russian soil and so papers sent them to Riga where, 300 miles from Petrograd, their only sources were former Tsarist generals and officials and deposed politicians. All claimed to be 'in the know'. Virtually none of them was. The results for the New York Times were, according to the famous study conducted by Walter Lippmann and Charles Merz, surreal. Between 1917 and 1919 the paper reported: the Bolshevik government had fallen or was about to fall (91 times); Lenin and Trotsky were preparing to flee (four times); Lenin and Trotsky had fled Russia (three times); Lenin had been imprisoned (three times); Lenin had been killed (once).

Insist on documents where possible

Always ask sources if there is any documentation to support what they are telling you. If they will not let you have it, ask for a photocopy; if they refuse that then ask if you can at least read it in their presence. If they still refuse, forget the story. And if you do get documents, be suspicious until you are satisfied they are genuine. Chapter 12 on mistakes and hoaxes describes what can happen when documents are false. Sometimes
Handling sources: not them handling you

even photographs are suspect. Ed Behr tells a cautionary tale in his book *Anyone Here Been Raped and Speaks English?* of the agency given photographic evidence of atrocities by one side in an African civil war. The pictures are of a woman being raped by soldiers. All very convincing until the local bureau chief had the sense to ask for the contact strip. They showed the harrowing rape scenes and then, in the final frame, the ‘victim’ with her arms round her ‘attackers’, smiling and posing for a group photograph.

*The more passionate the source, the less they should be trusted*

Passion does not guarantee unreliability, but it helps. The more strongly someone feels about something, the less good they tend to be as a witness. Question such sources very carefully. They often fit facts to their theories and are blinded by those attitudes into ignoring key information. Beware especially the committed activist, fired employee, ex-wife, former husband and spurned lover. Ask them if anyone can confirm what they are telling you. An instant modification of their original account will often follow.

Unattributable sources

The sensible motto is: use ‘off the record’ as sparingly as you can. If you don’t, you will end up with a lot of sources you cannot name. And if you are discussing some species of unattributable information, get it absolutely clear with your source what you have agreed. That way there will be no subsequent argument. Are they, for instance, giving you material which you will have to confirm and source with another party (background)? Or are they giving you the information on an unattributable basis, in which case you can use it, but not their name? Make sure that when an interview subject uses a phrase like ‘off the record’ it means the same to them as it does to you.

Above all, do not accept their reluctance to be quoted without a fight. Keep on at them to go on the record. Argue that the importance of the story depends on verification from named sources. If they persist in wanting to talk ‘on background’, continue the interview and then, at the end, try to find something they might be happy to be quoted on and then edge them towards attribution. Negotiate. And do not let people say to you at the end of the interview: ‘Oh, by the way, that was all off the record.’ The rule is: it is only off the record if you have both agreed that. And once you have an agreement, don’t go back on your word. Do not name them in the story and, if they wish to be on deep background, tell no one except your editor who they are. Ever.
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One of the main problems with ‘off the record’ is the way it has been picked up by politicians and their advisers and used for their own, sometimes shady, purposes. To illustrate this, here is an example given at a Harvard University seminar on journalism in Moscow:

You have been called in for a rare personal interview with a senior government adviser. He tells you that everything he will say is off the record. During the interview he tells you about a major change in economic policy. You are excited by the story and rush back to your office and write it, quoting ‘well-placed government sources’.

Well, it turns out that the government intends no such change, that the adviser knew that when he spoke to you and was feeding you the story to deflect attention from some other problems the government had. More common is for politicians to use off-the-record briefings to float an idea, which, if attacked, will be denied. In both cases you look a fool. If you suspect you are being set up, get a second source.

Getting too close to sources

Finally, here is a story that illustrates the dangers – to reporter and paper – of a specialist getting too closely involved with sources. It concerns one Alfred ‘Jake’ Lingle, who was a police reporter for the Chicago Tribune in the 1920s. Lingle was highly regarded at his paper. A lot of well-informed stories about organised crime in that city came from him and his contacts and he built a legendary reputation with readers and colleagues. Lingle prospered and, thanks to what he said was a bequest of $50,000 from his father, the $65-a-week reporter dressed well and maintained several homes. His fertile supply of crime stories, however, was suddenly stopped on 9 June 1930. As he entered a train station on Randolph Avenue, Lingle was gunned down in the street in broad daylight by a man dressed as a priest.

The killing had all the marks of a gangland professional hit. Lingle’s paper was outraged.

The meaning of the murder is plain. It was committed in reprisal and in an attempt at intimidation. Mr Lingle was a police reporter and an exceptionally well-informed one. ... To the list of those who were killed in the St Valentine’s Day Massacre [when seven died in a gangland feud], the name is added of a man whose business was to expose the work of the killers. The Tribune accepts this challenge. It is war.

The Tribune backed these fine words with a $25,000 reward for information about the killers, other papers followed suit and Lingle was
accorded a civic funeral, complete with military bands and guards of honour. Tens of thousands of Chicago citizens lined the streets and bowed their heads in respect as the cortège passed.

But not long afterwards, some hitherto unknown details of Lingle began to emerge. It turned out his father only left him a few hundred dollars, not $50,000. When Lingle was shot he had over $1,000 in cash in his wallet and was wearing a belt-buckle encrusted with diamonds. It was, apparently, a gift from Al Capone, the most notorious of the city’s organised crime bosses. Moreover, his bank account showed deposits of more than $60,000 in the previous 18 months.

One of his joint accounts was with City Police Commissioner, William F. Russell, who resigned in disgrace immediately. He and Lingle had been friends since their youth and the crime reporter had been selling his influence over Russell to other policemen wanting transfers and promotion to politicians, hoodlums and major gangsters like Capone.

He was a frequent guest at Capone’s retreat on Palm Island, Florida and had day and night access to this, the most feared man in the United States at that time.

But Lingle liked to gamble and gambled heavily. Despite several successful attempts to fix dog races, he was soon losing $1,000 a week at the tracks and at Capone’s illicit casinos. By the summer of 1930, his gambling debts with the organised crime boss totalled more than $100,000—worth more than $1 million at current values. His attempt to extort money from members of Capone’s own gang was, for the crime boss, the final liberty that Jake Lingle was ever going to take. The killer in priest’s clothing was hired.

Three weeks to the day after Lingle was shot, his paper was forced to admit:

Alfred Lingle now takes on a different character, one in which he was unknown to the management of the Tribune when he was alive... He was not and could not have been a great reporter.

All day long, Hollywood reporters lie in the sun, and when the sun goes down, they lie some more.

Frank Sinatra

Unit 3
Pengaruh Sumber dalam Proses Pengumpulan Berita

Objektif Pembelajaran;

Pada akhir pembelajaran unit ini para pelajar akan dapat;

1. Menerangkan faktor kenapa sumber mendedahkan berita.
2. Menerangkan kemahiran menyol yang perlu dimiliki oleh seseorang wartawan.
4. Menerangkan teknik menemubual untuk media cetak.
5. Menerangkan teknik menemubual radio dan televisyen.

Topik Perbincangan Tutorial dan Latihan

1. Senarai dan terangkan faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan sumber mendedahkan sesuatu maklumat kepada wartawan.
2. Kenapa sumber ingin membina kredibiliti dengan pihak media.
3. Kenapa sumber menggunakan teknik perhubungan awam untuk mendedahkan maklumat kepada pihak media?
4. Bincangkan panduan-panduan asas dalam proses pengumpulan berita, khususnya semasa menanyakan soalan kepada sumber.
5. Bincangkan fokus soalan yang ditanyakan kepada sumber di kalangan personaliti.
7. Senaraikan persediaan untuk pengendalian sesi temubual.
8. Terangkan cabaran atau masalah yang biasa dialami semasa sesi temubual dijalankan.
10. Bincangkan panduan pengendalian temubual secara langsung untuk siaran radio dan/atau televisyen.
11. Bagaimana pengurusan temubual studio dikendalikan?
Sumber Bahan Pembelajaran Modul

Rujukan yang digunakan sebagai bahan pembelajaran pada modul Unit 3 ini adalah sebagai berikut:

1. Source Strategies (m.s.141)
   Sumber:

2. Questioning (m.s.153)
   Sumber:

3. Interviewing for Print (m.s.167)
   Interviewing for Radio and TV (m.s.177)
   Sumber:
Source Strategies

In the preceding pages we have seen the extent to which and the ways in which journalists are dependent upon sources, as well as the ways in which the encounters between them are mediated by news values. We now view the situation from another angle: the reasons that sources have for entering into contact with journalists. We have already seen some examples of source motives, but we can go somewhat further than anecdotal examples in formulating the factors that structure the encounter from the source point of view.

The moment of the news encounter is commonly preceded by another where the decision is taken to enter it, and how to behave while there. Analytically, we can distinguish two elements in source situations: the sources' purposes in entering the news encounter and the techniques used by sources for realizing their purposes.

Source purposes are not easily susceptible to generalization, since they derive from the detail of the situations, and in a sense can be summarized in the pithy words of a journalist: 'Detective chief inspectors tell journalists things in the same way City upters tell journalists things. For a reason.' (John Sweeney, Observer Supplement, 5 12 93) However, recent literature on source behaviour allows some measure of generalization from the case studies involved.

The main themes which emerge from this literature are:

- the public right to know (which includes mandatory disclosure)
- the attempt to modify or improve the profile of an organization
- the desire to build credibility with the media
- policy development
- faction fighting
- damage limitation
Public right to know

Although constitutional guarantees of the public right to know are not homogeneous internationally, and are usually balanced by countervailing legislation protecting commercial and other professional confidentiality, state security, etc., there is a general presumption in democratic societies that some degree of practical recognition of the right to know is an integral part of the political order. Even in a state of war such considerations apply, albeit balanced by military considerations of secrecy and the desire to confuse the enemy through mis- or disinformation. At the beginning of the Falklands crisis, it appears that the Royal Navy Task Force which mounted the campaign to re-take the islands tried to exclude journalists entirely, and only agreed to do so at the insistence of the No. 10 Press Office. Its head, Bernard Ingham (1991: 286), argued that "in the national and Government interest, the war should be reported from the front". We should note that here the policy is not only dictated by the public right to know, but by desire to gain political credit; none the less the right to know was a potent argument against those who wanted to cut off information flows. The Gulf War also was reported from close to the front, albeit under conditions dictated primarily by US information strategy (Macarthur, 1992: 30-36). The same argument applies to events such as disasters, where the public right to information is acknowledged. Since an information black-out is out of the question under such circumstances, the relevant organizations need a mode of operation which is capable of handling the potentially conflicting demands of news media, rescue organizations and those affected by the disaster. In other words, the public right to know has a profound impact upon the nature of such organizations (Deppa, 1993: 208) Schlesinger and Tumber report similar concerns on the part of senior police personnel who stress openness and accountability in police policy (1994: 112-13, 120-3). Mandatory revelation is clearly central to the public reporting of business activities: under UK legislation companies must publish their accounts at least once a year, and this obligation creates a framework in which decisions about what to reveal publicly are partly out of company control.

Although this principle may be clear, its applications are often the subject of uncertainty and controversy. For example, it was revealed on 9 July 1995 that the British Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture had been warned about the dangers of listeria infection in certain types of food two years before it had made these warnings public. Indeed, the Ministers had signed orders preventing disclosure of relevant documentation (Public Interest Immunity certificates) to people trying to establish Government
Source Strategies

negligence in court. The then Secretary of State for Health argued that Government had to balance the need to avoid unnecessary alarm among the public with the need for disclosure of relevant information (Sunday Times, 9.7.95; Guardian, 10.7.95). The regulations which control mandatory public disclosure of activities are far from homogeneous between countries, and, within countries, between different organizations and categories of activity.

Profile modification

For many organizations, news media publicity is a way of producing a particular profile. Under these circumstances 'information subsidy' may well be a relatively cheap way of buying access to something that could not be acquired in any other resource-efficient way. Fishman (1980: 4-10) discusses the example of a reported 'crime wave' in New York in 1976, in which the focus was on black youths 'mugging' elderly white victims. The sequence of thematically linked reports began because a reporter had received a lot of help on a particular story from a particular police unit set up to deal with crimes with elderly victims, and which wanted more attention and resources. Despite reporters seeing police statistics indicating a reduction in such crimes, and despite many individual reporters having misgivings about the reality of the supposed 'crime wave', reports of individual incidents which fitted the common pattern continued because 'the crime wave was a force weighing heavily on [reporters'] judgments about what was news, and it simply could not be ignored' (1980: 5). The reporting pattern set up a symbiotic relationship, in which a report of one spectacular incident led to political attention to the event, which led to instructions for special monitoring of the actions of the specialist police unit and increased staffing, which led to an increased number of arrests for this category of offences, which produced more reporting and more political attention.

A frequent tactic on the part of Government and voluntary organizations is 'flying a kite'. Here the news is leaked - or otherwise unofficially issued - that Government intends to introduce policy X, in such a way that the nature of the information flow makes it deniable. Frequently, policy X is in fact one from a range of options, and the purpose of the unofficial deniable announcement is to 'test the water', to see what public reaction will be. If it is excessively unfavourable, the option can be denied or quietly dropped; if favourable or only marginally unfavourable, other possibilities remain open. The purpose may even be to attract negative comment in advance so that the policy can be modified in a way that was already planned, and calculated to
Building credibility with the media

The release of information is often motivated by a desire to obtain or maintain credibility in the eyes of the media, or of particular news organizations. Credibility means conformity with media criteria of usefulness, which are essentially au thority and productivity; the capacity to produce information that is reliable, interesting, timely, and in a form that can be used. Organizations have an interest in ensuring the flow of information to news media which is analytically distinct from an interest in the actual information in question, because the reputation for reliability is useful in organizing their relationship with the media (or particular news organizations) in the long term, this reputation may be spectacularly useful at moments of crisis management.

In their analysis of relationships between news media and penal reform pressure groups, Schlesinger and Tumber found that building credibility with the media was a frequent focus of activity in pressure groups. Credibility derived from the accuracy and authority of the information they disseminated, the volume of information and the speed of their response to government initiatives (because journalists would approach them for comments on government proposals). Journalists often approach penal reform pressure groups to identify individuals involved in contentious legal proceedings (for example, deportation procedures for illegal immigrants) in order to personalize an abstract issue. In interviews with charities’ press officers, I found the same process to be commonplace (Palmer, 1999). Willingness to cooperate helps to build the media credibility of the organization, but may be counter-productive for the individuals involved, therefore such decisions may involve complicated calculations, balancing different factors (Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994: 99-101). By the same token, journalists may be willing to publicize something non-newsworthy that a fruitful source wants published in order to gain credit with the source, in the hope that this may produce even better information in the future (Sigal, 1973: 53-6).
Source Strategies

Policy development and faction fighting

The previous literature abounds with examples of sources entering the news encounter in order to use publicity to pursue a particular line of policy or to gain advantage in a policy dispute. As Sigal says:

most news from official sources emerges from policy change or dispute, and interpreting it requires:

- determining what the change or dispute is about,
- making inferences about the source of the information and his position in public life,
- making inferences about the face of the issue under consideration as he would see it,
- identifying the target of his words,
- identifying his possible reasons for uttering them (1973: 188, 44-5).2

Princess Diana's famous interview with the BBC is subject to the same considerations: the key point is that her choice to confirm publicly what was already widely suspected, if not known, was clearly related to her intention to seek a legal separation. In this sense, we can say that the interview had two audiences—a mass audience and a fine-tuned target audience of one, her husband; her impact on the second depended upon her impact upon the first.

Damage limitation

All of these themes have a common element: the news encounter is the result of an initiative by the source, intended to open up communicative possibilities for the source's reasons. But another common reason for entering the news encounter is damage limitation, where the source's activities are already in the news, and in a way that is unfavourable to their purposes. This situation is fundamentally different from the preceding ones in that the initiative has been taken by someone else, and this has resulted in an initial definition of the situation which is not what was wanted.

Cockerell et al. (1984: 130-4) give an example of the first Thatcher government's reaction to an unplanned leak about a policy review document which discussed the possibility of wholesale commercialization and privatization of large segments of the welfare state. The policy review had been commissioned by the prime minister, and in her absence (on a state visit abroad) the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Leon Brittan, confirmed the accuracy of the leak. Subsequently other ministers confirmed its accuracy, and yet others denied a
policy revision was under consideration. Some two weeks later, the Downing Street Press Office was denying that the policy review document had ever been discussed in Cabinet, and confirming that there was no intention of proceeding with any policy along the lines suggested. These denials found their way directly into headlines, and constituted an 'impressive damage-limitation exercise' (1984: 130–4).8

Source techniques

In this discussion we have seen some indications, from previous literature on news, of the range of motives which lead sources into the news encounter. We now turn to the techniques which are available to sources to maximize the chances of their intentions being realized.

Relevant personnel

In general, in the last fifty years, the growth of journalism as a profession has been matched by the growth in information officers and public relations personnel. But at least in the UK this hides significant differences. The recent growth in media has not been matched by an increase in government information officers, but the growth in private sector public relations personnel has been rapid.9

The parliamentary lobby system both brings journalists into contact with professional intermediaries between Government and the media, and places controls on what use journalists can make of the information they acquire (Negrine, 1989: 155–62; Cockerell et al., 1984: 49–74).10 Most public companies or corporations have departments responsible for external communication, and there has been a growing tendency for their importance within company structures to be upgraded over the last two decades, an upgrading marked by seats on the board of directors for the heads of such departments; since the late 1950s in the UK, an increasing number of companies have also used the services of specialist financial PR companies as intermediaries with the press and the public (Newman, 1984: 87–9, 211–14, 237–49).11

Public relations techniques

Apart from limiting physical access, the basis of source control over information flows through the news media is based in the standard techniques of public relations: drafting press releases and ensuring that they are written in a form that is relevant to the journalist; sending
them out at a time appropriate for media deadlines; targeting news organizations, and individual journalists, who are likely to have an interest in the material and to deal with the topic in a way that is not incompatible with the purposes of the information release; organizing press conferences and receptions, and contacting journalists to encourage them to use particular material. Close knowledge of media routines, and especially deadlines, is a central professional skill (MacShane, 1979, Schudson, 1986: 81). More recently, video news releases (VNR) - in other words, publicity material prepared to be indistinguishable from television news footage - have been made widely available to television news. In general, such 'information subsidies' place resource-rich groups in society at a competitive advantage in gaining access to media because they can afford to create the subsidies and distribute them to news media; 'resource-poor' groups regularly lack both the professional personnel and even the knowledge necessary to make advantageous contacts with news media (Gandy, 1982, Goldenberg, 1975). Such commonplace information flows are probably mostly used as starting points for reporting rather than the endpoint; writing in the early 1970s, Tunstell (1971, 179) asked specialist journalists how often they used FR material and the replies indicated a high take-up rate, but with the proviso that often it was only as the first stage of an investigation.

If the news encounter is to be more extended, a range of techniques is available. Press releases may have bullet-point summaries attached to catch attention and indicate a preferred interpretation; journalists whose initial attention is caught may be further briefed, attributably or otherwise depending on circumstances, in order to maximize the possibility of journalistic attention special events may be organized in such a way as to make them especially attractive in news terms - many years ago Daniel Boorstin (1961: 22-3) coined the term 'pseudo-events' to cover those events created especially to attract media attention (Negrine, 1989: 145). These standard techniques have more sophisticated counterparts: Sigal (1973: 110) gives the example of planting questions at a press conference by indicating to a journalist that a question on a particular topic will elicit newsworthy information.

More interesting, from our point of view, is the range of techniques available to sources to direct journalists' attention towards particular interpretations of stories that are likely to be considered newsworthy. The main techniques identified in the literature are:

- absorbing the journalist into the culture of the source organizations;
- appealing to journalists' conscience and asking for cooperation;
- timing and placing information release in such a way as to pre-empt coverage;
• tailoring information release to particular news values.

Absorption

Specialist reporters need to have an insider’s understanding of the range of activities they are reporting on. A political reporter needs to understand the details of how a political system works and to have good contacts with relevant individuals; a science reporter needs some knowledge of scientific processes and a good knowledge of the scientific community. Insiders’ knowledge is a two-edged sword, in the sense that it enables reporters to probe matters which might be impenetrable to someone without it, yet at the same time it may make them vulnerable to seeing the world through their sources’ eyes. For example, police sources in the UK and Canada want to be sure that sensitive information given to crime reporters will not be published in a form that may jeopardize the outcome of trials, since if it is prejudicial it may be alleged to prevent a fair trial (Ericson et al., 1989: 126–36; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994: 160–6); this leads them to choose journalists who share their understanding of the situation. Clearly, the ‘reliability’, from a source point of view, of particular journalists or indeed a whole news organization, is a measure of their absorption into the culture of the source organization and its usual environment. Indeed, sources may deny journalists’ requests for information on the grounds that they do not trust them, or simply from distaste at their procedures: several people who faced journalists in the aftermath of the Lockerbie bombing refused to give information because they condemned their behaviour on ethical grounds (Deppa et al., 21–2, 28, 54, 171–5).

Such absorption is almost inevitable to some extent because of the reporters’ dependence upon sources, a dependence which is only mitigated by the fact that there are always other sources, and sources need journalists. In this equation, most studies have concluded that journalists’ dependence on sources outweighs the reverse (Sigal, 1973: 55; Gans, 1980: 132–6; Negrine, 1993; Chibnall, 1977: 105; Golding and Middleton, 1982). Journalists may be unwilling to write stories likely to antagonize their regular sources and unwilling to refuse routine information from an official source because they may jeopardize their capacity for getting non-routine information at a later date (Gans, 1980: 132–6; Goldenberg, 1975: 96); even similar behaviour by another member of the same news organization may have this effect (Ericson et al., 1989: 128). In the Observer (24.10.99) Andrew Ransley lamented the ease with which the Labour Government found ‘friendly’ journalists.
Source Strategies

Appealing to journalists' conscience

Previous studies reveal three main grounds upon which successful appeals to journalists' conscience are made: national security, taste, and help in apprehending criminals to avoid danger to members of the public from criminal activity.

The British system of government control of public information flows is in part based upon appeals to journalistic conscience, in that the system of D-Notices (under which a government committee warns editors that publication of a particular item of information is (in its opinion) not in the public interest, and might breach theOfficial Secrets Act) is based upon negotiation with editors who compose part of the committee and therefore are privy to the items under discussion. When conflict over its interpretation arises, it is clear that voluntary cooperation is part of the system. The police ask for media cooperation over the reporting of sensitive operations, such as dealing with kidnappings, cooperation which often involves self-censorship by media organizations in the interests of police efficiency and usually in return for guarantees of extensive cooperation after the case is over (Chibnall, 1977: 186–8; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994: 166; see also Leapman, 1992: 262)

Timing and placing of information release

The timing of information release to the news media is carefully calculated and frequently subject to a form of restriction usually called an 'embargo': the media are given information before it is made public in the wider sense, but are instructed not to make it publicly available until a specified time. The placing of information is also crucial. Media channels compete with each other for access to information, and releasing information to one channel (or even one individual) gives an advantage. Of course, journalists will be likely to publish that information as soon as possible unless they suspect that they are being unjustifiably used; of course, by the same token, giving a competitive advantage to one individual or channel places their competitors at a disadvantage, which may lead to a reduction in the esteem in which they hold the source in question if it happens too frequently (Goldenberg, 1975: 106; Jones, 1999: 84–6). Organizations with well-defined public responsibilities (such as Government departments) tend to treat media channels in an even-handed fashion, or at least go to some lengths to hide lack of even-handedness. Earlier examples given in Chapter 1 suggest that this is often ignored for locally profitable reasons (cf. Jones, 1999: 11–12, 42, 84–6, 157–8).
In Britain, police operations are an example of an activity which is extremely sensitive to the timing and placing of information release, because of the risk that publicity may affect the outcome of a criminal prosecution. As a result, police officers are extremely careful what they say to whom; however, restricting information to anodyne statements devoid of detail does not win the police any favours among journalists, and police information policy about operational matters must constantly negotiate the difficulties created by these opposing imperatives (Ericson, 1989: 126–8, 136; Schlesinger and Tumber, 1994: 160–6).

Timing may also produce other effects on news flows, for example using the dominance of news by a particular story to hide other stories by releasing relevant information at a time when they will attract little attention. On the day following the announcement of the trial verdict in the Louise Woodward case, which totally dominated news agendas, the government chose to release the information that it was not going to make extra cold weather payments to old age pensioners (Guardian, 1.11.97). The dramatic death of John Kennedy Jr. in the summer of 1999 served to disguise further welfare reforms.

**Tailoring information release to particular news values**

Channels and titles have different identities, and as a result potentially different news values. In the earlier discussion (see p. 35–46) of tabloid and broadsheet news values, we saw that the balance of emphasis between photographs and text is often very different in the two cases. It is well known that television news has a voracious appetite for video footage, in order to reduce the number of ‘talking heads’. ‘Tailoring’ information to the news values of particular news organizations – for example, by making visual materials available, or by including details likely to be useful for the construction of a story typical of the channel in question – is likely (all other things being equal) to increase the chances of the channel in question accepting the story. This technique may be very fine-tuned, for example to target individual titles or journalists by appealing to their known priorities (Palmer, 2000; cf. an example in Jones, 1999: 178–9).

**Source strategies**

We are now in a position to clarify what is meant by ‘source strategies’. Sources act in the context of a particular situation, and use a particular technique to try to persuade journalists that their information is appropriate and useful for the journalist’s purposes. The combination
Source Strategies

of motives and techniques is strategy. More exactly, a communication strategy is usually defined as the set of communication plans and the means for their implementation which enable an organization to proceed, through time, to realize a specified set of communicative goals. These are usually part of some wider strategy for the realization of a set of goals such as commercial purposes or policy implementation. Within 'strategy' defined in this wider manner the combination of motives and techniques outlined above is perhaps better categorized as 'tactics', since what occurs in any individual news encounter is likely to be aimed at the realization of only one among a number of small-scale goals. This is due to the nature of news agendas: since news is predominantly what has happened in the last twenty-four hours, it is inevitable that source behaviour in the news encounter will be subject to short-term considerations, and it is likely that on many occasions the longer-term strategic calculations within which these short-term objectives are framed will not be immediately visible. For example, charity press officers have said that they target individual journalists rather than entire news organizations in their ongoing attempts to build credibility with the media, offering, for instance, background briefings on relevant government and voluntary sector activities which may not in themselves realize any organizational goal, but which cumulatively may create trust and goodwill, a precious asset which can subsequently be used to realize particular organizational goals.18 Charities rarely have large-scale advertising budgets and rarely have the means to exercise any influence over news organizations, except under exceptional circumstances such as disasters in remote areas, where they may control access. Building influence with the media must therefore largely take the form of building credibility, and given the scarcity of internal resources, choosing a limited number of relevant subject-specialist journalists is a plausible way of doing this. Whether individual journalists who are targeted in this manner are aware of source motives is a secondary matter.

Conclusion

The first three chapters have demonstrated the existence of a systematic process in which events acquire media profiles. In this process the news encounter is central. Here journalists meet sources and a negotiation is conducted, using the 'currency', metaphorically speaking, of news values. These values are not in themselves observable: what is observable are the results of their application to particular events, participants' understandings of their application may also be observable through interviews.
news values can be understood as a set of 'universal' criteria, of the
variety often quoted in journalism textbooks and analysed in academic
writing. However, these values are so general as to have a low
information content about any given set of events, and we have seen
that they always require the addition of an understanding of the event
context, which gives rise to a set of 'local' news values, in other words
the features of individual events or sequences of events which lead
journalists to conclude that the events are newsworthy. New values are
thus the combination of the 'universal' values which are the
fundamental guiding principles of news judgement and the 'local'
values constituted by the set of events in question.

Source motives derive from the position that they occupy in the
world, and are amenable to some generalizations; however, these –
like 'universal' news values – tell us little about the actual motives of
actual sources in any given event. To understand the latter, we need to
study particular events or event sequences and observe what sources
actually do in these contexts. At the same time, there are a limited
number of techniques available to sources to achieve their intentions,
which are also amenable to generalization. The combination of
motives and techniques constitutes a strategy (provided we include
under the heading of 'motive' the overall situation of the source). In
particular, sources attempt to use access to the news media in order to
achieve event profiles that are in accordance with their purposes – and
this may include, paradoxically, avoidance of contact with the media in
order to achieve silence, or indeed any other technique which
produces silence.
Questioning

Newspapermen ask you dumb questions. They look up at the sun and ask you if it is shining.

Sonny Liston

Asking someone questions for a newspaper story is a special skill. It may at times resemble a conversation, but it is not one: it may at times be entertaining to overhear or participate in, but that is not its point. Questioning people for newspapers has one purpose: to collect information.

Interviews, whether in person or over the telephone, are not scripted and you should be prepared for unexpected answers. to follow their implications and ask follow-up questions. They will often be long, pedantic affairs, as you persist with a question you want answered or something you want to understand. They are not opportunities for you to tell that official what you think of him. show off your knowledge or engage your subject in heated debate.

A lot of interviewing is perfectly straightforward. But there are two particular situations that give trouble: questioning those who are uneasy and reluctant to talk, and questioning those who are positively evasive or even hostile. These situations are looked at later, but first, here are some guidelines that apply to asking questions of any source.

General guidelines

Know what you want from an interview before you start

You should always have a good idea of the basic information you want from a source before you start asking questions. Think of the final shape that the story might take and therefore the information you will need. During the interview you should continue to think of your report and how the new information you are getting is changing it. Above all, be
aware of where the information gaps are in your story, and try at all times to fill these holes. This may sound very complicated but in fact becomes second nature after a while. And do not be afraid to write one-word reminders to yourself on the flap of your notebook. This helps to avoid having to contact the person again for things you forgot to ask in the interview. That is sometimes not possible and you may have to try to write the story without this information.

*Do as much research as you can before the interview*

You should never be afraid to show ignorance, but that is not the same as being proud of not knowing. Before interviewing someone, find out as much as you can about them, the subject and any other relevant thing. Apart from anything else, this helps to prevent you being hoodwinked or blinded by science.

*The simple questions are the best*

There is not a single example in journalism where so-called trick or clever questions produced results. Asking questions like that is normally the sign of inexperience or someone more concerned with making an impression than getting the best story. Normally the simple questions are: Who? What? Where? When? How? Why? If you have satisfactory answers to those questions you will be well on the way to having completed your basic research.

*In stories about events, build up a chronology of what happened*

With sources who know in detail what happened, take them back to the beginning of the event(s), or before, and ask them about each stage, step by step. Don’t be afraid to keep asking: “And then what happened?” Get the sequence of events totally clear in your mind. This is vital for incident-type stories, like crashes. At the end of your research, you should be able to run in your head a minute-by-minute video of what happened. If you can’t, your story has holes.

*Take them through parts of the story in slow motion*

On a lot of incident stories you will be questioning people who have actually been part of the event, or witnessed it. Few will be used to giving a coherent account of such things and they may be excited, shocked or distressed. So when you get to the core action, slow them down and get every detail that you can. Ask them what happened at every moment, what they saw, the colours, smells and noises. Ask them where they were
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standing. what people were wearing, what they shouted, what the weather was like, etc.

Check names and positions

Obvious, boring to do, but essential. Ask sources to spell out names, titles, ages and addresses if you need them. Sometimes, if it is an awkward or foreign name, get them to write it in your notebook. You may think that makes you look silly – but not half as silly as you will when you get back to your office and find you do not know how to spell their name.

Get as many telephone numbers as you can

This is as basic as getting your subject’s name right. Get the phone number for their office, home, mobile, bleep – whatever they will give you. If their office number is printed on the phone, discreetly help yourself. If not, then ask.

Get too much information rather than too little

Most of the time you get only one chance to interview an important source. Take full advantage and ask every question you can. The answer to that extra question is often what makes the story. And remember that it is often details that lift a story out of the ordinary. Ask about them.

Do not be afraid to look stupid

We have all been in that situation where someone is talking to us and we sit there nodding and agreeing, even though we do not have the faintest idea what they are talking about. We are afraid that if we ask them to explain we will look stupid. And then we come to write the story and realise that we don’t understand what we have spent the last few hours pretending we knew.

Never, ever, be afraid to look silly by asking basic questions. First of all, people, even in press conferences, will rarely be so rude as to snigger at your ignorance. And, if they do, so what? Who is the most stupid; someone who pretends to know, or the person who does not know and admits it? Nearly every source is prepared to explain specialist concepts to reporters and most will be flattered that someone is interested in their subject.

If in doubt, describe your understanding of a situation

If you do not understand an answer, or if the situation you are reporting on is confusing, then describe your understanding to those you are
questioning. Never be afraid to say: ‘Can I just go over this. It all began, when ...’ or ‘Can I just see if I understand you correctly ...’, or even ‘If I wrote that ... would I be right?’ This is a standard technique. It does not imply that you are slow-witted. And even if it did, so what? Better that than an ambiguous, or wrong, report. The same applies to motives. Do not assume motives. If someone does something and their motive appears to be relevant, ask them, don’t assume it. Reporting is not a parlour game.

Ask questions to get information, not opinions or reactions

You are talking to sources to get facts and each question should be designed to do that. It is very easy to start asking questions about their reactions to something. But reactions are rarely surprising and so you will not have collected anything that is useful to your story. The knowledge, for instance, that a right-wing politician disapproves of liberal reforms is hardly news. The only exception to this, of course, is when the story is about opinions.

Try to avoid asking clichéd questions

To ask someone who has just been involved in a tragedy ‘How do you feel?’ is to invite a clichéd answer at best, or a flat refusal to answer any more questions at worst. If they have just lost their only son in an air crash how do you expect them to feel? Thrilled? Yet every day you can see in news stories the most predictable emotions (‘I was excited to win this money’. ‘We are very upset to be sacked without compensation’) paraded as if they were devastating insights.

Probe for anecdotes

Good anecdotes can add a tremendous amount of life to stories. Collect them at every opportunity from the people you are questioning. But remember that getting people to discharge amusing, ironic, telling anecdotes is a matter of chatting in a relaxed way, not sitting bolt upright opposite them and saying, ‘Now tell me the funniest thing you ever saw/experienced.’ They won’t. Their mind will go blank. Instead try to get some feel for the areas of their life/work/activity which are likely to provide humour. For instance, if you are interviewing airline cabin crew for a story about a new service and you want a couple of yarns about passengers’ crazy behaviour, then don’t say, ‘Tell me the silly things travellers do.’ Instead, naturally edge the conversation around to drunkenness, fear of flying, luggage, complaints about food, kids, strange requests and so forth.
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Don’t let them bullshit you

You should obviously ask for all jargon to be explained. But a lot of phrases that sound like technical talk are, in fact, euphemisms. Each industry, company or bureaucracy evolves phrases to camouflage reality. An airline will talk about ‘passenger underflow’, when what it really means is that not many people want to fly with them. An investment fund might issue a statement about a ‘net liquidity export situation’, when what they mean is that their investors have finally rumbled them and are taking all their money out.

Institutions which deal with dangerous materials, like the nuclear industry and the military, are especially adept at developing this kind of bullshit. In America, following a famous accident at Three Mile Island in 1979, the nuclear power industry came up with a potentially bewildering series of euphemisms to describe bad things. Statements talked of an ‘abnormal evolution’ at a plant which had led to an ‘energetic disassembly’ and then a ‘rapid oxidation’, perhaps followed by ‘plutonium taking up residence’. What this meant was that there had been an accident at a plant which led to an explosion and then a fire, followed by plutonium contamination – all of which straightforward words and phrases were banned. Unban them. Ask what they mean.

Listen to the answers

It is easy to be so concerned with rattling off the next question, or taking down the answer, that you fail to appreciate the significance of what is being said. Ten minutes after questioning someone is often too late to realise the importance – or absurdity – of what they have said. This is especially true when people make extraordinary claims in interviews.

The French novelist Georges Simenon once told a reporter from the Swiss newspaper Die Tat: ‘I have made love to 10,000 women.’ The paper duly reported the claim without comment. However, even the least numerate of brains should be able to calculate that, to reach this total, Simenon would have had to have made a new conquest every other day for about 65 years – no mean feat for a man of 73 who also found time to write nearly 100 books. The real total, according to his tolerant wife in a subsequent interview, was nearer 1,200.

Review the answers at the end

If at all possible, go back over your notes with people and double-check figures and anything of which you are still unsure. Apart from these overt purposes, this process has two covert ones. First, to see if you can discover any holes or ‘information gaps’ that have escaped you, and second, to see if you can squeeze a bit more information from the person.
**QUESTIONING**

Ask them at this stage if there is anyone who can support their contentions.

*Never make promises to sources about how stories will be treated*

Only the editor is in a position to know how a story will be treated and appear in the paper. A lot of the people that you question will ask this question, but you do not need to answer it. Tell them you are ‘just a reporter’ and give them your editor’s name and number.

**Questioning uneasy sources**

A lot of people are rather intimidated by journalists. This is not because they find them frightening as people (although some are), but because they are not used to dealing with the press. Even if they are, they may be reluctant to talk because they fear losing their jobs or some other repercussion. As one who has several times been involved in a news story, I know that it can be unsettling to be interviewed. You worry about what you might say, or be quoted as saying.

Often the reporter’s first job with people who are uneasy is to persuade them to talk at all. When doing this, you can be friendly, light-hearted, talk about the public’s right to know, etc.: in fact, whatever you may think will work. Often, however, you do not have the chance to negotiate first. You are ‘cold calling’, that is, visiting them without any preliminary telephone call. In these circumstances, just getting past their front door is a problem. The important thing here, as the following quotation illustrates, is to get inside their living room or office. Once you are there, it will be a lot more tricky for the subject to refuse to answer any of your questions. Once inside, the trick is to find ways of staying as long as possible.

This story comes from the book *All The President’s Men*, written by Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the Washington Post to describe an investigation they mounted which led, eventually, to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Their reporting, and the story behind it, is looked at more closely in the next chapter. Here, Carl Bernstein is convinced that the woman he is trying to interview is a potentially important source of the activities of her employers. This, and her anticipated reluctance to talk, is why he visited her in her home and did not telephone her first:

A woman opened the door and let Bernstein in. ‘You don’t want me, you want my sister,’ she said. Her sister came into the room. He had expected a woman in her fifties, probably grey; it was his image of a bookkeeper, which is what she was. But she was much younger.
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‘Oh, my God,’ the Bookkeeper said, ‘you’re from the Washington Post. You’ll have to go. I’m sorry.’

Bernstein started figuring ways to hold his ground. The sister was smoking and he noticed a pack of cigarettes on the dinette table. He asked for one. ‘I’ll get it,’ he said as the sister moved to get the pack. ‘don’t bother,’ That got him 10 feet into the house. He bluffed, telling the Bookkeeper that he understood her being afraid; there were a lot of people like her at the committee who wanted to tell the truth, but some people didn’t want to listen. He knew that certain people had gone back to the FBI and the prosecutors to give more information ... He hesitated.

‘Where do you reporters get all your information from anyhow?’, she asked. ‘That’s what nobody at the committee can figure out.’

Bernstein asked if he could sit down and finish his cigarette.

‘Yes, but then you’ll have to go. I really have nothing to say.’ She was drinking coffee, and her sister asked if Bernstein would like some. The Bookkeeper winced, but it was too late. Bernstein started sipping slowly.

The woman talked, gave Bernstein some very useful leads, later spoke again to both reporters and proved to be a valuable contact. This may have had something to do with the fact that Bernstein did not immediately pull out his notebook and begin taking down every word the Bookkeeper said, while pulling faces of delight and amusement. He waited, maybe ten minutes, before slipping the notebook out of his pocket and starting casually to make notes.

If, however, people have agreed to talk, the next thing to think about is how to make them feel at ease. This will help you to get the most information from them. Here are some tips.

Think carefully about where and how to speak to them

Will it be on the phone or face to face? What will be best for them? If it is face to face, where will it be? In a bar? In their office? At your office? Over a meal? In their home? In other words, in which environment are they least likely to feel threatened and, will therefore, be most co-operative?

Adapt to them

Your aim when interviewing someone is to make them feel relaxed and helpful. This means not intimidating or annoying them. You may have to adapt your behaviour and appearance a little. You do not have to undergo a personality change for each interview, but you should consider your subject. For example, if you are going to interview homeless people on the streets, you would not wear your best suit or
dressing. That would make your subjects feel uncomfortable. Similarly, if you were going to interview the Prime Minister, you would not wear jeans and a T-shirt. They would probably be offended and think you were more concerned with making a statement about yourself than in getting a good interview – and they would probably be right. With people with whom you would have no natural rapport, you may even have to act a little to feign interest in them or adapt to them. If they are a formal sort of person, be more formal than your usual self: if they are very easy-going, then you can be too.

*Make a judgement about them*

What will get them on your side? Flattery? Friendliness? Jokes? Serious talk? Whatever it is, if they are an important source, do it. What interests them? Whatever it is, take an interest in that too. This is always easier if you are meeting them, especially in their home or office. People surround themselves with what is important to them – pictures of their family, paintings of their favourite places, ornaments and mementos. Use these things, ask them about them. Make the person want to help you. Try to find something you have in common with them, even if it just owning a dog or being a parent.

*If you have time, try the ‘life story’ play*

If your subject is shy, or antagonistic towards you, but seems to have time, try asking questions about their life story. These are basic résumé questions – where they were raised, educated, trained, where they first worked, success, achievements, overseas experiences, etc. It may give you some promising avenues for questioning. If not, it will almost certainly put that person more at ease and more on your side. Almost everyone warms to someone who seems interested in them.

*If the interview is in person, don’t get out your notebook immediately*

There is nothing that will unsettle the uneasy interview subject more than a reporter marching into the room, notebook open, pen poised over it, ready to take down every word they say. Instead, gradually slide it out of your pocket or handbag when they are relaxed. You can even say something like, ‘Do you know, I have a terrible memory, do you mind if I make a few notes?’ Occasionally your judgement is that any appearance of the notebook will immediately stop them talking. In this situation, commit the important things they say to memory and make an excuse to leave the room (such as to go to the toilet or wash your hands). As soon as you are out of their sight, you can write down the highlights of what they have said.
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Be honest about your intentions – but don’t tell people everything

You should never fail to declare yourself as a reporter. Neither should you misrepresent your interest in talking to someone. However, you do not always have to explain precisely why you are calling them. If you have a controversial issue or question in mind, you would often be wise not to spell this out when you start talking. Just say: ‘I am just making some general inquiries about this subject.’

Do not come straight out with your main question

Ask some general questions first. These could be questions to which you already know the answer. If nothing else, the subject’s answers will tell you what they know and how honest they are. Only when you think they are ready should you ask what you are burning to know. When you do, it may be better to feign indifference to the answer. Dropping your notebook in amazement and exclaiming ‘My God! Do you realise what you are saying?’ is not the way to react. The thought that they have just given you the story of the decade is liable to produce an almost immediate retraction.

Use the pregnant pause

If the person you are questioning does not fully answer the question, try a pregnant pause, accompanied by an expectant look. Sometimes they will respond by adding the extra information you need. There is, of course, a limit to the length of time you can try to out-wait them. Delays of more than a few seconds are liable to be construed as idiocy or the onset of some serious disorder of the nervous system.

If all else fails, throw yourself on their mercy

Tell them that you will be in trouble with your editor if you do not get this information. Ask for their help. It often works.

Keep the conversation rolling

When faced with ‘I can’t comment’ don’t attempt to deal head on with their anxieties. In almost every case you will lose that argument because their reasons are to do with their position or organisation and they obviously know more about that than you do. Instead, keep the conversation going and try several other tacks. First, reassure them that talking to you is no shocking departure. Many other people have spoken to you. Then, without pausing, say, ‘What puzzles me is ... Can I ask you if ...’
Questioning evasive and hostile sources

Some ways of dealing with uneasy subjects also apply to dealing with the evasive or hostile subject. But, more often, a different approach has to be taken with the potential source who is avoiding you.

Be persistent

Getting hold of such subjects is sometimes extremely difficult. Never give up. Keep calling them. Visit their offices. Make them realise that the only way to get you off their backs is to agree to talk.

If telephoning. do not be fobbed off with. ‘He will call you back’

Many people have no intention of doing so, despite what they or their secretaries or colleagues say. Do not accept this. Say you will hang on, say you will ring them back or, in a few cases, agree to be rung back – but fix a time for them to ring you back. If they do not do so, ring them back. Better still, ring them back an hour before the set time. Many people will say they will ring you back at 4 p.m. because they know they leave their office at 3.30 p.m.

If someone is stonewalling over a factual answer, put options to them

If, for instance, you need to know how much the government paid for a certain contract and the person who knows is refusing to give you the answer, try putting sums of money to them: ‘Is it $6 million?’ ‘Is it as much as $12 million?’ Such questioning often produces results, or good hints. Yet be careful with this technique, make sure people understand what it is they are being asked. It, and similar verbal games, can lead to confusion.

The most notorious occasion of this was during the Washington Post’s Watergate investigation referred to earlier. The reporters had a very good story, but only one source for it. Their editor insisted on two before he would publish. So, late at night, one of the reporters rang the only other person who might be able to support the story. He would not do so directly; so the reporter said:

‘I am going to count to ten. If the story is wrong, hang up. If it is correct stay on the line.’ He then began counting. ‘One, two, three, four, five ...’ His voice was now getting excited. ‘... Six, seven, eight, nine ... ten.’

He put the phone down and excitedly told his waiting colleague and the editor that they had confirmation and the story ran. The only problem was, it was not true. The late-night contact had misunderstood
the instructions from the reporter and thought if he stayed on the line, he was letting him know the story was not right.

Occasionally, try pretending that you know more than you do

If you strongly believe something to be true, but cannot get confirmation of it, ring a source and say you are just calling for a comment. For instance, try asking the official why something happened, rather than whether it happened. He or she will often then start explaining rather than denying. This, however, is something only experienced reporters should do.

Watch out for non-denial denials

A non-denial denial occurs when an accusation is put to someone and, instead of denying it, they make a statement which insults the person who is making it, or the reporter, or both. Asked, for instance, if the government contract has been unsupervised and millions of dollars overspent, the subject would reply: "Your sources do not know what they are talking about." That is not a denial of the claim. It is often the classic ploy of the person with something to hide — but don't rely on that.

Watch out for uninvited denials

Unlike the situation described above, people with something to hide can sometimes go further than your question requires them to go. When asked for a comment, for instance, they deny things you never put to them. Be alert to this; it sometimes comes out of the blue and is the first indication that they have something to hide.

Do not use 'set-up' questions

These are the questions that try to trap someone, not with information, but with a verbal trick. The fact that the trick is not very original does not stop it being used. It is a variant on the old 'have you stopped beating your wife?' question, to which the unvarying might answer 'yes', implying they used to beat their wife but have now seen the light, or 'no', meaning that they still beat her.

One of the occasions when this was used most flagrantly was when rumours were flying around Britain's national papers that Prince Edward, the Queen's fourth child, was gay. The Daily Mirror pursued him to New York and, at a public event, shouted out the question: "Are you gay?" The Prince was naive enough to say 'No', and the next day's Mirror appeared with the huge front-page headline: 'I'm Not Gay Says Edward'.
The impression readers were left with was that Edward was indeed gay, but was now strenuously denying it. Nasty reporting.

*Ask them to imagine how ‘no comment’ will look in the paper*

If an official is refusing to comment, ask him or her to visualise how this will look in the paper. But don’t make it sound like a threat. Make it sound like you are trying to save them from a public relations disaster: ‘You know the readers will see ‘X declined to comment’ and they will think you have something to hide. Now I know that isn’t the case, so can I just get your answer to …’

Finally, remember that a person may refuse to talk to you one day but be more amenable a few days later. If they are an important source, try again.

**Press conferences**

Press conferences are obviously a special case when it comes to questioning. You are not alone, you are not face to face and you often have little time. If that is the case, and you have to file a story immediately after the conference ends, make sure you or other people ask the questions you need answered. That can sometimes mean being aggressive, shouting your question so that you are sure it is heard, or standing up to ask it.

A lot of people who call press conferences seem to imagine that the event is one where they can hold court before a group of docile note-takers. No reporter should ever let that idea take root. These events may be organised solely for the purpose of generating publicity, but that does not mean you have to play their game. You decide what the story is, not them. Never mind what they think is the significant message, is there another, better story?

If the person giving the press conference is not too grand, and you have some time, you can save your own questions for after the event. In that case, do not let the person who can answer them leave the room until you have cornered them. That can sometimes mean standing between them and the door. Don’t be shy of doing that. Any person who regularly gives press conferences will be used to this. You are not there to make friends but to get a story.

Another tip is to watch and try to note if there is another reporter there who seems to know a lot more about the subject. After the conference, engage them in conversation. Most reporters cannot resist showing off what they know: who they know and thereby passing on some valuable leads. Don’t take other people’s reporting on trust, but you will often pick up some good ideas to follow up from such conversations. This is a
The bigger the personality, often the less time you will have. Don’t waste it by asking questions that can easily be verified by a little pre- or post-interview research. Very big stars often have press agents in attendance, who try to set limits to the subjects you can ask about. It is your job to evade such controls where possible, and, if you can’t, to tell readers about them. You are a reporter, not a courtier. Don’t allow yourself to be flattered that this big star is talking to you: alternatively, don’t allow your dislike of them or resentment of their wealth, beauty, brains or success to tempt you to write what you think will be a definitive demolition job. When printed, it will invariably say more about you than it does about them.

Instead, keep it simple. Describe them as precisely as possible and concentrate on questions that will enable you to compare their personality with their public image. As leading British interviewer Lynn Barber says, ‘All you have to do is be punctual, be polite and ask questions.’ She recommends, and most would agree, that the questions should be as short as possible. The following are often useful probes for unexpected answers, or areas of life that the subject may be willing to open up about. They are based on a list filed by Jeremy Martin to the CompuServe Journalism Forum.

- What is your first memory?
- What was your mother’s/father’s best advice?
- Who has had the most impact on your life?
- What was your first job?
- What was your worst job?
- What was your first car?
- Who was your first love?
- What do you do when you are nervous?
- What are you compulsive about?
- Have you got a bad temper?
- What do you eat/not eat?
- Who is your best friend?
- What is your worst habit?
- What makes you angry?
- What do you study?
- How often do you read?
- How many hours a night do you sleep?
- What do you do if you wake in the night and can’t get back to sleep?
QUESTIONING

- What is your ideal day off?
- When do you plan to quit?
- Who would be your favourite party guests?
- Do you like Christmas?
- What is your favourite song/book/film/singer/artist?
- Who do you admire most?
- What is your favourite drink?
- What will you not eat?
- Where is your favourite vacation place?
- Where would you live if you had total freedom of choice?

_The most useful among the reporters are those who appear friendly and smile and seem to be supportive. They are the ones who will seek to get you on every occasion._

Ed Koch, Mayor of New York
Interviewing for print

Interviewing is the only way to get quotes. All stories need quotes; therefore, all stories need interviewing skills. Before you interview someone you need to do as much background research as possible. First, decide what it is you want to know from the interview:

- do you need a particular fact?
- do you want a date?
- do you need a phone number?
- do you need an expert name?
- do you want background?
- what statistics do you need?

Make a list of the research you need to carry out, then decide why you want to know this information:

- is it critical to your story?
- is it secondary?
- is it interesting but optional?

Rank your list of research items, least to most important, then work out how you will use the information:

- will you quote the information, the source or both?
- must you include the statistic or the date to make your story complete?
- will you use the information to frame interview questions?

Reporters usually don’t have the luxury of much time to do the research. For a quick deadline, use the phone. With more time, you might be able to go in person. Set a realistic deadline to start the story. Sometimes you get so involved in trying to get exactly the right people to interview, or to answer the questions you’ve decided need answering, that the story deadline gets close without anything actually being done. This is a fatal flaw. Set a realistic deadline after which you stop researching and gather the facts for the story, or change stories if the research is proving the story angle you’ve adopted to be too difficult. When you have done your research it is time to create the
questions, remembering that every question will depend on the answer
given to the previous question when you are doing the interview itself. However, it is still wise precaution to create your own list of
possible questions before you go to the interview; and indeed before
you actually ring people to ask them to be interviewed.

Put the subject's name in the middle of a piece of paper, and all
around it put points learned through research plus every other source
you can think of. All the facts. Put these into a kind of logical order.
Start with easy questions, where the subject doesn't need to think too
deeply and can relax. Then work up to more substantial questions
when there is a warm rapport. Circle each fact and link it separately
with a line of thought, so you've got trains of thought. Ask the
questions in your head. Note down, in as few words as possible, every
query you have connected with the topic. Include solutions. When you
ask a particular person to be interviewed, it is sometimes difficult to
get their agreement. You have to convince the person to agree to an
interview. Always be prepared for a 'no', but use psychology and
charm and hope for a 'yes'.

THE INTERVIEWEE

You have to decide who initially will be your best interview and why.
You may want to interview someone because:

- their job is important
- they do something important
- they are charged with a big crime
- they know something or someone important
- they have watched something important happen
- something important has happened to them (accident victim etc.)
- they represent an important national trend (traveller caught at airport
during typhoon; working couple who can't buy a house because
prices are too expensive etc.).

The type of person you will be looking for may be ordinary (a member
of the general public), a specialist or a celebrity.

A good interviewee needs to be accessible, reliable, accountable and
quotable. However, you need to be careful about the rent-a-quote
politician who will say something about anything at the drop of a hat.
If a particular interviewee you really want won’t talk, you can still do the story; you just have to do it differently. You can write the story anyway without the quotes. You can write the story saying that you tried but couldn’t get a quote. You can convince the interviewee to talk. People refuse to be interviewed because of:

- time
- guilt
- anxiety
- protection (shielding someone)
- ignorance (doesn’t want to admit they don’t know)
- embarrassment
- privacy (doesn’t want to share a personal catastrophe with the public).

Obtaining the interview

You can sometimes be lucky and simply be in the right place for an interview at the right time. Sometimes you get the interview you want by focusing on what people want to talk about, rather than what they won’t discuss. Sometimes you get the person you want not by going through the Public Relations department but by managing to contact the newsmaker by yourself, perhaps at a place other than their work. People decide to be interviewed for various reasons. Sometimes it is out of a sense of pride and fairness. Others feel they must speak out because of something they feel is unjust. Others just like the attention, or feel they want to represent a particular point of view. Further reasons include a sense of professional or personal prestige, or a desire for community good. All of these can be used in an attempt to get someone to say something.

Meeting the interviewee

Arrive on time. In fact, try to arrive a few minutes early. There is nothing worse than arriving late and flustered, and not being cool, calm and collected.

Be in control. This is very important. You are the professional; expect the interviewee to realize that (even if this is your very first interview).
Act like a professional. This requires self-confidence. Self-confidence is a state of mind; it is also the product of being adequately prepared for the encounter and looking and feeling well. The first few minutes of any interview situation are vital; it is then that rapport can be achieved. Spend a few minutes warming up the interviewee – that’s not wasting time, but saving it. Get the interviewee calm and chatting to you in a relaxed manner before you start the interview proper. Be careful of body language and don’t appear to act in a threatening way. Friendliness is what achieves best results and opens up the thoughts of the interviewee.

**INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES**

Interviews are an exchange of information, opinion or experience from one person to another. Interviewing is different to a conversation; in an interview, the interviewer keeps control. First define exactly what you need, then plan the questions to get that information. Use open-ended questions that can’t be answered by a simple yes or no. Getting the interviewee to say yes can sometimes be difficult. Be warm, friendly, quiet. You’ll get your answer if you’re charming, and if you make the interviewee think he or she is the expert. Questions can range from cordial to antagonistic (sometimes all within the one interview). The type and approach you adopt depends on the information you want and the circumstances of the interview. Remember: the best interviewer gets the best quotes and the best story. There are two basic types of question:

- those from your research
- those that come up in the course of the interview by listening to answers.

Both are very important, and both will be used during the course of the interview.

1. Don’t write out your questions; listen and respond to the answers. You can, however, have trigger words (for example, photos – where?).
2. Don’t ask predictable questions; they give predictable answers (e.g. ‘How do you feel?’).
3. Avoid general questions; don’t ask ‘What’s the meaning of life?’ or ‘How would you solve the world’s problems?’ Be specific.
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4 Don’t be shy to ask questions. That’s why you are there, so ask whatever you want to know.

Interviewers must

- listen
- observe
- enquire
- respond
- record.

During the interview, be in charge. Never let your subject take over. Demeanour and appearance are both important, because they determine the way your interviewee will react to you. The interviewee is probably feeling nervous; put him or her at ease.

Achieve a rapport, a sympathy, with interviewees so they will think of you as a listening friend to whom they can talk. Be a good listener. Give them time to think after you’ve asked a question. Listen for important and meaningful pauses when interviewees are merely considering the next words. Be able to differentiate between this kind of important pause in the conversation and a full stop. Be casual and chatty at the start; don’t get down to business straightaway. Set an agenda (but don’t give away the questions). Under no circumstances tell interviewees what precise questions you are going to ask, even though they will almost certainly want to know. Give them general guidelines, but not precise questions. That is your editorial right; don’t allow it to be taken away.

Good questions make the interviewee want to answer them. Ask a question that is clear and cannot be misinterpreted and asks precisely what you want the interviewee to answer. Focus on ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions. Remember:

- define terms
- consider the interviewee’s viewpoint
- ask questions the interviewee is qualified to answer
- separate yourself from criticism of the interviewee
- ask questions to which you know the answers
- if you don’t ask, you won’t get an answer
- ask follow-up questions to clarify
- restate the answer (if you aren’t sure, say something like are you saying that . . . )
Interviewing for PNNI

- Clarify generalizations (ask what evidence there is for calling two robberies a crime wave)
- Translate jargon (ask for a definition or explanation)
- Verify statistics and dates (ask after the interview where you can find a record of the statistical information given; you should check)
- Determine sequence (did you get married before or after you became a politician?)
- Ask for specific sources (if the interviewee can’t answer, ask who might know)
- Follow up questions that expand
- Try not to ask questions to which the answer is ‘yes’ or ‘no’.
- Ask why do you say that?
- Ask for specific examples
- Ask for a chronology (what happened after that?)
- Display your ignorance (then the interviewee will explain and give new information)
- Repeat the question if it isn’t answered, either deliberately or unintentionally
- Be critical and suspicious of what is said; don’t just believe everything.

THE INTERVIEW

During the interview:
- Ask the easy questions first and save the difficult ones for later
- Relax
- Let the interviewee talk and don’t interrupt unless you have to
- Display empathy and concentration
- Listen
- Be willing to show your ignorance
- Avoid arrogance
- Be selectively silent (an unfilled silence lets the interviewee collect new thoughts or expand on an idea).

The interviewee will expect you, the professional, to end the interview. Put away your notebook, but keep listening. Deny requests to preview the story. You keep editorial control. Say thank you.
Interviewing checklist

1. Know the subject:
   - seek specific information
   - research the subject
   - list the question areas.

2. Know the person:
   - know relevant biographical information
   - know the person's expertise regarding the subject matter.

3. Set up the interview:
   - set the time (at the interviewee's convenience), the length of time needed and possible return visits
   - set the place (interviewee's or neutral, whichever is more comfortable).

4. Discuss arrangements:
   - will you bring a tape recorder or just a notebook?
   - will you bring a photographer or just a camera?
   - will you let the interviewee check the accuracy of quotes?

5. When you arrive:
   - control the seating arrangement if possible
   - place the recorder at the best spot
   - warm up the person briefly with small talk
   - set the ground rules (put everything on-the-record and make everything attributable)
   - use good interview techniques
   - ask open-ended questions
   - allow the person to think and to speak in his or her own time
   - don't be threatening in voice or manner
   - control the flow but be flexible
   - take good notes
   - be unobtrusive
   - be thorough
   - use a tape recorder (check that it works, and note digital counter for important bits).
6 Before you leave:
- ask if there's anything the interviewee wants to add
- check facts – spellings, dates, statistics, quotes
- say you may ring again to recheck possible facts
- let interviewee know approximate publication date.

7 After the interview:
- organize your notes – immediately
- work out a proper lead
- write a coherent story
- then sub your story into better writing.

COMMON INTERVIEWING TRAPS

1 The source agrees to an interview but keeps postponing. It could be just a busy diary, but if it continues you should recognize that the source has no real intention of coming to the interview. Confront your source; be persistent without being unpleasant. Use charm to get what you want.

2 The source keeps wandering off the topic during the interview. Try putting your pen down. If that doesn't work, wait for a pause and ask another question. If the source is giving you non-pertinent information and doing so in a long-winded manner, you may have to interrupt and steer the interview back onto the topic. Recognize that some sources try to tell you what they want you to know, not what they know you want. Your backgrounding should alert you to this.

3 During the interview the source says: Now this is off-the-record. Immediately hold up your hand like a stop sign and reply: if it's off-the-record, don't tell me. If you allow a source to tell you something off-the-record, you can't publish it. The source is probably relying on that. Giving a source off-the-record privileges compromises journalists and the free flow of news. Your first response should be no. You may find that the source willingly tells you the information anyway, on-the-record. If not, at the end of the interview ask your source if they want to tell you now, on-the-record.

4 After telling you something, the source says, 'now that was off-the-record. You say, sorry, no it wasn't. Then explain that when
you set up an interview, all your sources are told that they are speaking for publication. Once the interview begins you must give your permission before a source can go off-the-record, and you never give it.

5 After the interview the source asks to see the story before you publish it. This is always a definite no. You don’t have time to show stories to sources, and you don’t need the hassle of being edited by a source (you have enough hassle being edited by an editor). Simply explain that your editor doesn’t allow you to do that (get your editor to make it a policy for you — it always is). However, if the story is highly complex or technical it is acceptable to ask the source to review your finished piece for accuracy before you publish it. This is your decision and is being done under your control. Sometimes you may say you’ll ring to just double-check a fact or quote. That’s different to giving them the whole story to change as they wish. You must always keep editorial control.

6 The source asks for a list of the questions that will be asked. The answer is always no. There are several reasons you can give: I don’t prepare questions in advance . . . I ask questions arising out of what you say in your answers (which should always be true); It is not editorial policy to give a list of questions in advance. Sometimes the source will say: No questions, no interview. In this case, find someone else. It is, however, perfectly acceptable to give them a general idea of the kinds of questions that you might ask about a topic. That’s a pre-interview briefing, which is fine. Never give the actual questions. Apart from anything else, if you do, and then don’t ask a question at the interview or ask different ones, you’ll be accused of not telling the interviewee beforehand.

7 The source asks for money. The answer to that is sorry, we don’t do that kind of journalism. Never get into the situation where you have to pay for interviews. If someone wants to be paid for doing a story, you will always mistrust the motives behind speaking to you (if doing it simply for profit, interviewees might not be truthful).

Remember, in most cases you are giving them free publicity, which is good for them, so you are doing them a favour by interviewing them. They should always do it for free.

8 You can’t break the minder barrier. Often you are trying to get to a particular person for a quote for some facts, and you can’t get past the secretary/PR person/personal assistant/spouse etc. You know that, if only you could get to speak to the person, you’d get your
Interviewing for print

quotes. It’s breaking through the minder barrier that’s the problem. Public figures can avoid an interviewer or journalist simply because someone else answers their phone. Some suggestions:

• Be charming. Cultivate the person shielding the source. Try to remember their first name, and treat them like a friend. Your aim is to get the buffer person to like you and say so to the boss, then you’ll get your story.
• Try to find a reason for the person to let you through. ‘I know everyone is calling you and you’re about to go out/go crazy/go into a meeting’ . . . I’m very sorry, but I promise if you give me two minutes of your time I won’t bother you again . . . I promise it really will only be two minutes.
• Call after normal working hours. Sometimes you can be lucky and the person, working late, will answer the phone.
• Ask for the person by name, or by a familiar nickname: Can I speak to James please? (they’ll think you’re a friend).
• Say: It’s a personal call. Only tell the person who you are when you get through.
• Call the person at home. In casual conversation or through research, find out where the interviewee lives. A surprising number of important people are in the phone book.
• Find the interviewee in an informal situation (in a lift, at a car park, in the pub, in a restaurant) and ask for a short chat.
• Ask someone who knows the person to ask for you.

Finally, convince the interviewee that he or she is the most important person in the world, and you want to tell the world about how good he or she is.

FURTHER READING

Interviewing for radio and TV

Broadcast reporters don’t have much time to prepare and research their interviews for radio or television. The interview itself is also shorter than it would be in print. A good broadcast reporter must be able to interview not only people prepared to be interviewed, but also people who have never been near a microphone or television camera. A good broadcast reporter must have something worthwhile to put on air and want the interview to be interesting to watch. The worst sin in TV news is to be dull; the worst sin for a TV reporter is to do a dull interview. If you are dull, it doesn’t matter how responsible, accurate or unbiased you are. If no one is listening, what is the point?

All news comes from an interview of one kind or another, whether a chat, an informal phone call or a formal recorded interview. The appeal of radio and TV interviews is that the listener or viewer can hear and see the facts straight from the source. The speaker’s own words give greater authority than print quotes.

The aim of the interview is to provide, in the interviewee’s own words, facts, reasons, opinions on a particular topic so that the listeners or viewers can form their own conclusion as to the truth of what’s being said. The interviewer has to:

- match the goods on offer with the customer’s needs
- tease out the story in the teller’s own words
- report so that listeners can make up their own mind
- expose viewpoints to public debate.

An interview is a conversation between two people to get as much information as possible, and a performance in its own right, a mini-programme with a beginning, a middle and an end. It is made up of questions and answers and information.

Questions must sparkle, be lively, interesting and sound enthusiastic.
The interviewer:

- must sound spontaneous
- must be interested in what is being said
- must be a good listener
- must be a watchdog for the listener/viewer
- represents the listener and should ask the kind of questions the listener would like to ask
- is the bridge between non-expert and expert; between the person in the street and the official
- never turns into a public relations officer or stenographer.

A good interview tests the truth of an argument by exploring its points of tension or controversy.

**TYPES OF INTERVIEWS**

An interview may be:

1. **Informational** (to give the listener or viewer information); these are the short, hard fact news type, or the longer current affairs type
2. **Interpretative** (the interviewee comments on facts supplied by the interviewer)
3. **Emotional** (provide an insight into the interviewee's state of mind).

Within these three types are the various categories of interview:

- **hard news** (short, to the point, dealing only with important facts; for major stories)
- **information** (not restricted to major stories; can be about events or provide background, and explain the facts – the how and why)
- **adversarial** (a kind of 'cross-examination'; don’t clash head-on with the interviewee)
- **interpretative** (can be a reaction or explanation)
- **vox pops** (short gathering of answers to one question)
- **personal** (revealing a personality and motivation, a profile; intimate and penetrating, can make fascinating listening)
TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Telephone interviews are only used when the event happens so close to airtime that pictures or actuality aren’t available. In radio, telephone interviews are very common. It’s an easy way to get a comment from an expert or eyewitness. Telephone interviews, either live or on tape, also give an interviewer access to a world of experts and issues outside the local community. A taped interview gives more freedom because you can edit later. A live interview is sudden and unchangeable.

When doing telephone interviews, develop familiarity as appropriate and smile through the phone; seem interested and appear to be listening. Interviewees can’t see your interest, so they must hear your interest. Your voice must sound enthusiastic and interested. Explain the process: you should always tell interviewees that what is being said might appear on air. If you are doing it live explain that you will need short, sharp, interesting answers, and that you may have to interrupt occasionally. Tell them not to worry; reassure interviewees and tell them not to be nervous. Explain the way the interview will go beforehand; explain the focus but don’t tell them the questions.
Interviewing for radio and TV

Remember:

- watch the *uh-huhs*
- vary the sequence of questions: one question–answer after another is
  not as interesting to the listener or viewer as a question–answer
  followed by something different, like *what do you mean?*
- listen: in a telephone conversation especially you can easily ask a
  question that has no relationship to the comment the person just made
  because you are preoccupied. Take notes to help maintain your interest.

FIELD INTERVIEWS

Most broadcast reporters spend a lot of time out of the office doing
interviews in the field. You should look for the following kinds of
interviewee when doing a story:

- established experts
- lower level, less official people who make the system work; they won’t
  be in positions of authority, but understand or live in the circumstances
  you are looking at
- the person who is different; not part of the system, not an authority, but
  a fluent, interesting observer whose view is a bit more informed than
  the ordinary person in the street.

The interviewee

Getting someone to agree to an interview can be very difficult. Telephone
ahead if possible to organize a time and place (unless you are doing a
telephone interview, when you can do it on the spot). If someone says no,
ask again before getting someone else. However, if you really need that
particular person, then wait. Find out where he or she will be when it is
convenient for you and catch them unexpectedly (door stopping). Be
persistent, but not pushy. Whenever possible, try to visit the potential
interviewee without the camera crew to set the interview up.

Remember:

1 Talk with the person for a while to assess what he or she knows and
feels; look for someone who is a fluent, clear speaker, outspoken and
willing to say something controversial.
2 Focus the topic and prepare the interviewee quickly; remember to explain how the equipment works and put the interviewee at ease.

3 Talk the interview through in a general, not specific way. Don’t ask too many questions before the interview starts because the on-air interview will then seem rehearsed and the person might say, ‘as I told you before’. Even worse, you might forget to ask a question because you think you’ve already asked it.

4 Phrase the questions carefully so that you will be able to use the answer with a voiceover introduction.

5 Anticipate the answer to your question. Don’t make it a leading question, putting words into the interviewee’s mouth so that all you get is ‘I agree’. Phrase the question with the possible answer in mind so that the interviewee will respond with the answer taken from the hint in your question.

6 If you have to ask the interviewee to repeat an answer, try to ask the question differently the second or third time, or you will lose the interviewee’s spontaneity. Responses have to be fresh.

Live interviews

Your interview in the field can either be live or recorded and edited for later use. A live interview in a breaking news story has some special problems. You can make mistakes, respond to rumour rather than facts, make libellous comments unwittingly and react too quickly to your own emotions. Once you’ve said something in a live interview, there is no escape.

‘Live’ is once only.

Remember:

1 Try to do your report in a location away from background noise. Some noise is great – and necessary (otherwise you will sound as though you’re doing it in the studio). However, the background noise should not compete with your interview. Avoid a spot where onlookers can stand behind you and wave or make faces.

2 Attribute official comments to their official sources so that you are not reporting unattributed rumour. If possible, interview a qualified official for comments rather than summarize the situation and editorialize yourself.
3 Remember the laws of libel, contempt and those relating to giving names of victims. There will be laws and station rules; know what they are.
4 Avoid a ‘teaser’ that might inflame or increase the size of the crowd. Reports of fires and other tragedies done live will gather people to watch, and they can hamper the rescue operation. Take care.
5 Beware of emotion-charged verbs and nouns.
6 Avoid overstated, unconfirmed guesses about the number of people affected or the amount of property damage (it will almost always be a guess at the start, so make it clear that you are reporting unconfirmed and say that there are various figures rather than stating one as a specific).
7 Double check facts and statistics before you go on air.
8 Take a deep breath. You are the detached observer, not the involved participant. If you are wheezing anxiety, your audience will infer a holocaust from your statements, even if you’re reporting a simple two-car accident.

The interview

Pre-chat
The reporter and subject establish rapport, and the reporter sounds out the interview direction and puts the interviewee at ease. Use a pleasant greeting with a firm handshake and lots of eye contact. Never rehearse an interview; just discuss it. Agree to a run-through only if there is no other way, and make sure your tape/camera is rolling; if the rehearsal goes well, you’re fine anyway. The best punches are delivered when your opponent’s guard is down.

The questions
Good questions give good answers, so think ahead to the answer you think you’ll get before you ask the question. Use notes, but don’t write out your questions. Listen to the answer and ask what you want to know. Construct questions so that there has to be a proper answer: not just ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

Remember:
who, what, when, where, why, how:
who = a name or response
what = a description

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when = the timing of the event
where = the place
why = explanation
how = opinion or interpretation.

Questions beginning with such words give the interview a forward pace and direction:

- who was hurt?
- what caused it?
- when did it happen?
- where did it happen?
- why did it happen?
- how did you save them?

General rules concerning questions include:

1. Avoid yes/no questions. Sometimes they can be useful, but normally don’t ask them. For example, ‘Do you think the shares are good?’ will get a one-word answer. If this is the importance of the story it’s fine, but if you want the person to say more, ask the question differently.

2. Avoid questions that will lead to a monologue. Questions need a broad scope. Make the question too narrow and your interview keeps on stalling; open it too wide and it will run away from you.

3. Use short, single-idea questions. If a question is to be understood by listener and interviewee, it must be clear, simple and straightforward.

4. Progress logically from point to point. Maintain logical flow so each question naturally follows the previous one (you do this by listening to the answer, not thinking of the next question).

5. Avoid multiple questions. Ask one question at a time (otherwise the interviewee will choose one, the easiest, and forget to answer the rest).

6. Keep questions relevant. Any examples you give should be concrete and real. Don’t ask abstract questions.

Question fluency

An interview is a contrived social conversation, the purpose of which is to elicit factual, analytical, informational or human details. The interviewer should know the purpose of the interview, background
Interviewing for radio and TV

about the subject and about the person being interviewed. However, the interviewer must never give the impression of talking down to the audience from a level of knowledge that makes the whole interview appear patronizing. Asking TV questions is a habit that requires confidence and thought, but mainly confidence. Like all habits, good interviewing technique improves with practice. With practice comes the art of sounding informal and conversational in a situation that is contrived, unnatural and formal.

Question formulation

The style of language you use is important. It has got to sound spoken and conversational, not literary and stilted. Interviewers are often worried about how they are saying something when their major concern should be about what they're saying. Leave the actual speech process alone; it'll work normally if you don't worry about it. Just let the words come out naturally as you would if you were listening to someone and wanted to ask them a question. Be yourself.

You and the interviewee are talking not to each other but to the listener. Any chatting or gigging together, any 'in jokes' that exclude the listener, are no good. Questions are important because they refocus the listener's attention; one voice is difficult to listen to for any length of time. Questions in an interview break the flow and make the listener concentrate once again. Questions are part of the total sound of the interview. Never be afraid to ask embarrassing or potentially embarrassing questions. Don't think you have to be too respectful to the interviewee and ask only the kind of questions that won't offend or embarrass.

The silent question

During an interview, learn to communicate silently with the interviewee—with your eyes, with expressions of interest. Nod enthusiastically if you want more from the interviewee; look a bit bored if you want the answers to liven up; make a silent sign such as opening your mouth or lifting your hand if you want the interviewee to stop. Never say such acknowledgements out loud; 'Oh yes', 'how interesting', 'really' etc. 'I see' is a favourite with beginners. Just keep quiet and formulate your next questions. If you are commenting, you aren't thinking of what to say next. Make use of the silent nod; it really works. Nodding silently at
interviewees spurs them on to further revelations; it encourages them and
means you don’t have to waste time with a question that will sound
forced. The nod can also be effective when you are trying to get
interviewees to say something and a question might put them on guard
and make them suspicious or cautious.

**Differences between broadcast and print interviews**

Broadcast reporters are part of the interview in a way that print journalists
never are. The listener or viewer will hear or see the questions being
asked; newspaper interviews are never like that. Sometimes an
interviewee will talk easily to a print journalist but not to a broadcast
journalist, so the broadcaster must be able to get the subject to speak
naturally, and coherently. Interviewees might be self-conscious about
looks or how they sound when answering questions. They might stutter or
need a haircut. The broadcast interview is normally on-the-record, for
everyone to hear and see. There are exceptions such as the no-name,
faceless anonymous interview for specific reasons, but it isn’t usual.

In a TV interview, the interview shows more than it tells. The audience
hears or sees unfiltered reactions from the interviewee, so description
of the interviewee or of the interviewee’s reaction is unnecessary. The
first shock of a tragedy or the first response to a pointed question is
instantly available. Broadcast interviews give an immediate personal
emotion. Reporters in radio and television are looking for and giving
the living quote. Broadcast offers immediacy and access; print gives
reflection and review. Broadcast compresses; print expands. Broadcast
offers information; print adds explanation. A newspaper reader can
read a print story several times; broadcast gives the listener or viewer
less time to think and to absorb because the stories move quickly and
so do the pictures on TV. Broadcast interviewers use sounds and
pictures as shorthand to enhance a story; print reporters only have the
words to convey sights and sounds.

**Get a focus**

Ask yourself, what is the one topic to discuss? What is the one issue to
explore? It’s also a good idea to practise to yourself beforehand, on the
way to the interview or the previous night.
Interviewing for radio and TV

Develop a question sequence. This is helpful to yourself and also for the interviewee, to order their thoughts. However, never tie yourself to a list. The biggest mistake is coming with a list of 10 questions and then not listening. Always, always listen. The questions should logically follow the previous answer and their own line of thinking as well.

Interviewing tips

1. Don’t wear patterned or fussy clothes on television. Some small patterns can cause a weird effect called strobing. Black and white are not TV colours. Plain, happy colours are best (pinks are particularly good psychologically on television).

2. Whether in the studio or on location, always sit forward rather than lean back. Stick your bottom right back into the corner of the chair.

3. On location, brief the crew properly as soon as you arrive. Television is a team effort. Don’t just tell them what shots you want; tell them how the story is to go together with other shots from elsewhere. Do the interview in a place relevant to what your guest is saying. The desk with the purple curtain behind doesn’t make good television. Offices are often small and have noisy phones.

4. If you’re going to do a stand-up, remember it should be in a relevant place (otherwise, why bother?). The interview might well be the next sequence, so make sure the edit will work. In the case of a new sculpture, for example, you certainly couldn’t get away with a shot of the presenter in front of the statue, then go directly to a shot of the sculptor in front of it. At least a close-up of the statue is needed. If in doubt, do a storyboard. It will almost completely eliminate jump cuts and awkward joins.

5. Remember the sound person. Their problems are often forgotten, especially on location. An interview in traffic will be difficult to cut, unless the traffic is constant and distant. A camera is selective about what it sees. It can concentrate on the beautiful river scene, and completely miss the motorway just out of shot. A microphone is far less particular. In fact it will hear things that we miss. If in doubt about the sound, listen to the sound recordist’s headphones and close your eyes.

6. Try never to use a hand-held mike with trailing cable.

7. Always do cutaways, even when you’re absolutely certain you won’t need them. You probably will.
Using the interview in a story

Editing a taped interview is easy; throw away the bad quotes and keep the good ones. Use the same criteria you would use when choosing quotes for a print story. It will probably be shorter and more to the point than a print quote.

When writing the story to use the quotes, remember:

1. When you incorporate your interview into your live copy, you don’t need to use quote marks.
2. Use attribution before, rather than after, the person says something, otherwise the listener or viewer will not know who is talking until the person finishes.
3. Remember that broadcast quotes for on-air copy rarely run more than two sentences because your viewer cannot grasp more than two sentences at a time.
4. You can introduce a quote that you read verbatim by saying ‘in her own words’ to help listeners understand that you are quoting someone’s words, but don’t say ‘quote . . . unquote’.
5. Be careful to use someone’s exact words in your copy or in an interview if the quoted words could be at all libellous.
6. On television, to emphasize a quote from an official source that you don’t have on tape, you can superimpose the words on the screen for impact. You can also use superimposed quotes if the sound is somehow garbled, but you want the audience to hear the person’s voice. Use this approach very selectively, however, because an audience can grasp only a sentence or two at a time. Whenever possible, your interview should stand by itself.
7. Read the copy aloud before you broadcast. Remember, the language of radio and TV is spoken.

STUDIO INTERVIEWS

With these you lose the impact and excitement of being at the scene, but you gain time and preparation can therefore be better. You can be briefed better. They are fairly short if they are part of the news programme (they can, of course, be much longer if in the current affairs programme). The choice of interviewee is crucial. Studio interviews can be less spontaneous than those in the field, because the
All the advice given for interviews on TV also applies to radio interviews. A studio guest has more time to consider what is to be said but much of the field interview section still applies. Celebrities and stars are used to being interviewed and need to be carefully controlled. Public figures want to take control; also to say what they want to say. Guests have their own reasons for being interviewed. You have to make sure your motives are the ones they follow, not your own. The guests should appear, and be, relaxed, and sound and look spontaneous.

The interview

Before the programme:

- prepare the interviewee
- outline the programme
- make sure you have the names and titles absolutely correct
- stop a guest who starts to tell you a good story before the programme; save it for the real thing (a programme can die in the pre-interview stage)
- advise guests to keep answers short and to the point.

During the programme, remember:

1. Pay attention to the interviewee and listen. Maintain eye contact.
2. Begin with easy questions that put the guest at ease.
3. Succinct questions are best, delivered in a logical sequence.
4. Be conversational but not too familiar. Always be polite. If you are interviewing a friend, forget it during the interview.
5. Don’t pretend. Don’t try to pretend you’ve done research if you haven’t. Don’t pretend you’ve read the book if you haven’t. You should have!
6. Clarify on the spot. Give background when someone mentions something new to the audience. Ask the interviewee to define or explain jargon or abbreviations. Avoid too many numbers, because your audience can’t absorb them fast enough.
7. Ask the interviewee for the point rather than the statistics.
8. Rephrase a rambling answer. Ask the interviewee, ‘Are you saying that. . .’. This gives the audience time to pause with you to understand the answer.
9. Interrupt. The danger in live interviewing is a guest who won’t stop talking. The result can be a boring monologue with only a few questions. You must interrupt and get the interview back on track.
10. Pursue difficult questions. If someone says, ‘I don’t want to answer that’, you have two choices: accept, or get them to talk about it. Rephrase the question or come back to it later in the interview. If someone is giving yes–no answers, then rephrase the questions.

11. Use the immediacy to your benefit. Someone on a live interview can’t turn back and you can expand or capture the spontaneous slip of the tongue.

12. Use silence; never fear a pause in an interview, particularly a TV interview. A pause can indicate you have asked a very good question that someone can’t answer easily. Don’t talk too much.

13. Don’t be rude. Be careful how hard you push the guest.

14. Ask questions without apologies, and in a matter-of-fact way. Avoid starting a question with ‘Sorry to have to ask you this’.

15. If something goes wrong, acknowledge you’ve got a problem. Tell the audience.

16. Remember to conclude with some kind of summary or signal that you are finished. If you have to interrupt and say ‘we’re out of time’, then at least give a quick thanks to everyone for taking part.

All interviewers on radio and TV are looking for the quote or look that is special, the moment when the purpose of the interview seems clear and valuable. On TV, viewers are not only listening to the words. There is also the picture to show emotion. If you see someone grappling with a particular thought or emotion, let it happen and don’t interrupt. Let it evolve. Don’t follow your format, follow the moment.

Remember the equipment

Broadcast reporters never work alone. There is always the equipment and, in TV, a crew. You must adjust to the equipment. A TV reporter has to manage the equipment and the people as well as be a reporter.

In the studio interview there is makeup, a set, hot lights, Teleprompter, the crew etc. Always be sensitive to the interviewee’s possible fears and hesitations. Explain how it all works and how long the two of you will talk, and that will reassure the interviewee and show that you care. Never rush the interview or yourself. There’s a lot of hanging around while others do things in television.
Interviewing for radio and TV

Remember your goal

The interview is an artificial conversation, but your aim is always to capture the interviewee’s attention so well that the person forgets the equipment and the audience and talks just to you.

FINAL TIPS

Remember:

- don’t get drawn into answering a question from the person you are interviewing
- never provide the questions in advance
- always keep control of the interview; you are the broadcasting expert
- decide beforehand on the key questions you are going to ask, but always be ready to discard them if the answers take a surprising or more interesting turn
- don’t be afraid to put the opposing view, even though you don’t believe it, to test the case of the person you are interviewing.
- the art of interviewing is listening.

FURTHER READING

Unit 4

Pengumpulan dan Penulisan Berita untuk Media Cetak dan Elektronik

Objektif Pembelajaran;

Pada akhir pembelajaran unit ini para pelajar akan dapat;
1. Menerangkan persediaan yang perlu dilakukan oleh seseorang wartawan dalam proses pengumpulan berita.
2. Menerangkan sumber maklumat di mana berita diperolehi.
3. Menerangkan perbezaan antara penulisan berita rencana dan dokumentari.
4. Menerangkan struktur penulisan dan penyiaran berita rencana atau dokumentari.
5. Menerangkan punca atau faktor yang menyebabkan berlakunya kesalahan dalam pengumpulan berita.

Topik Perbincangan Tutorial dan Latihan

1. Bincangkan peranan dan bidang kerja seorang wartawan.
2. Kenapa "contacts" dianggap penting bagi seorang wartawan?
3. Bagaimana untuk mewujudkan hubungan dengan "contacts"?
4. Selain temubual, apakah kaedah-kaedah pengumpulan berita yang lain yang biasa dilakukan oleh wartawan?
5. Apakah perbezaan antara penulisan rencana dan penulisan dokumentari.
7. Bincangkan kategori kesalahan yang boleh berlaku ke atas penulisan berita akhbar.
8. Bincangkan punca-punca kenapa kesalahan berlaku dalam penulisan dan penyiaran berita dalam media cetak atau media elektronik.
9. Terangkan apakah kaedah yang sewajarnya boleh dilakukan oleh media untuk bertindakbalas terhadap kesalahan berita yang dilakukan?
Sumber Bahan Pembelajaran Modul

Rujukan yang digunakan sebagai bahan pembelajaran pada modul Unit 4 ini adalah sebagai berikut:

1. **News Reporting (m.s.194)**
   Sumber:

2. **Feature and Documentary Production for Radio and TV (m.s.218)**
   Sumber:

3. **Mistakes, Corrections and Hoaxes (m.s.229)**
   Sumber:
News reporting

The job of the news reporter is the front line role in any news organization. As a reporter you are first to uncover the news of the day, gathering the relevant details and writing up a story. In the next chapter we shall deal with how to write a news story, but first, let us look at the news gatherer.

Your role as a reporter is twofold. First, you are required to 'react' to the news of the day, sometimes providing a fresh lead to an event or happening. But you should also be 'proactive'. This means initiating ideas from your own analysis and interpretation of the news of the day or from your own sources. If you are to become a successful reporter, most of your stories will come from the latter. They will be what are known as 'scoops', i.e. no other newspaper is known to have the story.

Why are 'proactive' stories so important? Most journalism deals with events that have happened and are already public. Because of this, other newspapers are likely to be privy to exactly the same information as your title. Many publications draw their news from the same sources, the same news and picture agencies, the same press conferences, the same publicists, even the same public relations companies whose role it is to feed journalists with stories. This is why when a big news story is covered by every paper, the use of pictures and facts will not differ greatly. These are the bread and butter stories of journalism – reporters write them up daily but they will not make your editor sit up and listen.

This is why you need to become 'proactive' and unearth something new. If you want to succeed as a reporter, you will need to tell your editor something that he is not expecting to hear, a story to grab his interest immediately. Often this may be just a different slant
News reporting

or angle on a story that has already been covered by the paper. Let us say, for instance, that you have been sent to cover a sentencing in a court, a common assignment for a reporter. After the sentence has been handed down by the judge and you have taken down all the relevant details, you notice in the courtroom a member of the family of the victim, who appears to be quite angry with the judgement.

Outside the court, you speak with this person discreetly and discover that he thinks the sentence has been wholly inadequate. You notice that no other reporter has spoken to your interviewee, who then jumps in a taxi and leaves the court. Welcome to your first scoop. You can tell your editor that here is a story which you believe no other publication will have the following morning. There is the possibility that your interviewee could be tracked down by another newspaper, but other reporters do not seem to have noticed the pained expression on the family member’s face in the courtroom.

Once back in the office, you contact the legal team involved to see if an appeal will be made against the ‘leniency’ of the sentence. You discover that indeed there is going to be an appeal; by this stage you have a good story, which has taken an ordinary sentencing story a step further. You might then contact the Crown Prosecution Service, which brings criminal prosecutions to court on behalf of the police, to obtain their point of view.

Here you can see how keeping alert in the courtroom and spotting a chance reaction on someone’s face can lead to an exclusive. Our example may be fiction but this sort of story has happened many times to court correspondents. It is a perfect example of a ‘reactive’ story, covered by many newspapers, that has become ‘proactive’ because of the initiative of the reporter. It is always down to you, and you only, to take a story one step further. If you wait for it to fall into your lap, it will have fallen into several other reporters’ laps also.

The working life of a reporter

A reporter’s life is busy and unpredictable. A reporter rarely arrives for work in the morning with a preconceived notion of how the day will go, unless he was assigned to a story overnight. If you are to
How to succeed in newspaper journalism

achieve a National Vocational Qualification in periodical or regional newspaper journalism, here is a rundown of the type of tasks that you will be called on to carry out. In a sense, this is the reporter’s job description.

• Generate story leads ('proactive') by making and maintaining contacts.
• Gather information by arranging activities, carrying out research, covering events, carrying out interviews and identifying and following up other story opportunities.
• Decide on the content of stories and the writing style.
• Write news accurately and to a brief.
• Prepare the copy for transmission to the publication.
• Establish and maintain professional relations with colleagues and with members of the public.
• Deal with contributors, including news agencies and other publications
• Appreciate the importance of pictures.

In addition you will have a knowledge and understanding of:

• defamation, contempt, copyright, breach of confidence;
• ethical and professional issues, such as independence from advertisers and commercial interests; protecting sources; discrimination on the grounds of race, religious belief or sexual orientation.

Contacts

Contacts are vital for the journalist. Whether you are reporting the proceedings of the local council or the House of Commons, the names you keep in your contacts book will shape the success of everything you write. Why are they so important? The reason that journalists keep a close eye on their contacts books is that most take years to develop. They do not suddenly appear overnight with the home phone numbers of politicians and celebrities; they are accumulated over time, often with great difficulty.

Understandably, many people in the news are reluctant to have
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their numbers given out – especially to a tabloid journalist. There is also the ethical question of whether it is right to disturb someone on their private home number. On this matter you should take your lead from the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) Code of Conduct, which states that ‘intrusions and enquiries into an individual’s private life without his or her consent… are not generally acceptable… and can only be justified in the public interest.’

Once you and your editor are satisfied with the validity of your enquiry, the use of a home phone number at a reasonable hour is acceptable, as long as you approach the person politely, apologizing for any inconvenience you may have caused. You will also discover that most people ‘in the news’ are used to having journalists call them at home.

What sort of people should go in a contacts book? When I started my first reporter’s job as a ‘stringer’ or freelance for a local radio station, I immediately started such a book. Not only did it help me to track down the most relevant interviewee, but it allowed me to do it quickly if every time you need a phone number, you call directory information, you will soon discover that the competition already has the story.

The best way to start a book is to reach for the telephone directory, making sure it is the most recent that is available. If, for example, you have started a job as a reporter on the local paper, turn to the local borough council listing and make a note of the numbers for the education department, social services, even waste management – you never know when the next strike by refuse collectors will happen. Then make your way through the local emergency services (police, ambulance, fire department) and hospitals (private, too). These numbers will give you the backbone of a contacts book but will not obviously give you the scoops that will lift you from the world of the general reporter.

The next step is to make calls to many of the numbers you have collected from the phone book and tell people who you are and ask who would be the best person to contact if a story breaks. Don’t be afraid to ask for out-of-office hours numbers in case stories develop and you need to contact your source. Don’t be shy: if you are going to be a good reporter your ability to be able to win people’s trust over the telephone will be very important. A good way to gain trust – and elicit a home number from a contact – is to offer your contact
How to succeed in newspaper journalism

don’t hesitate to call if you hear of a story for me. Don’t forget: many of the ‘contacts’ with whom you speak are not obliged to tell you anything, unless of course they are involved in media public relations or a press office and it is their job (even then you may come across reticence). Because of this, it is up to you to use any charm you have to make people feel at ease. Most importantly, don’t try to trick people by posing as somebody else. Be straight: it’s the best policy (it is also against the PCC Code of Practice to obtain information through misrepresentation, unless it is in the public interest).

There is another reason for making actual contact with these ‘potential stories’. It is the hope that in having talked to them and developed some rapport, these people may call you unsolicited one day to say, perhaps in the case of the hospital, that a patient happened to die overnight after being left on a trolley outside ward 13. This may sound unlikely but the truth is that people do contact the media for many reasons and they are more likely to do so if they know a name and have already dealt with the journalist.

In the case of the man who died on the trolley, your contact may in fact be trying to highlight a very serious problem at the hospital. It should be pointed out that it is highly unlikely that any public relations or press office staff would volunteer such information easily. These people tend to follow the line of the management. However, it may be a junior doctor, whom you contacted two months ago over a completely different story but who now wants to expose the inadequacies of the present hospital funding or management. Be cautious, too, about stories offered in this way. Ask yourself if the informant is using you to fulfil another agenda. Even if this is the case you could still have a good story but you should be aware of all sides of an issue.

Getting to know contacts

Establishing good contacts will not take forever, but it will be some time before you can be satisfied with the numbers you have. Copy down every number that you ring, however unimportant it may seem at the time, as this may just be the phone call that means you beat the opposition to a story. One of the more tedious jobs for a
News reporting

journalist is 'making calls' to your contacts to find out 'if there is anything happening'. As a crime reporter, most of my time, not surprisingly, was spent on the phone talking to police, trying to find out if there was a story on their particular patch. And if you are working on a specialist ground, such as crime or business, you will rely on good contacts even more than you do as a general reporter.

Try to develop a relationship with your contacts. Once you have spoken to a contact several times over a period of months, perhaps invite them for a drink or even lunch. This may sound a little too forward or familiar but you will discover that many people open up over a pint. Don't forget that many of your contacts may work in an open plan office where it is difficult to offer confidential information over the telephone. Many workplaces also record employees' telephone conversations, especially in the case of stockbroking houses where the leak of information by an analyst to a business correspondent could be construed as insider dealing. This is an extreme case but most employees will find it difficult to 'gossip' about their field of work over the telephone.

Utilize the expenses that are offered by your employers. In national newspapers and magazines, expenses are offered to journalists who wish to lunch or dine a contact. This may seem odd: why should a journalist be paid to take someone out to lunch? The reason is that it is simply good business to maintain good relations with those who can potentially provide you with a story. Newspapers are careful about costs, so it is in your interests only to lunch or dine those people who are genuine contacts, not your mum and dad.

Covering a general news story

When you begin your career as a news reporter, it is likely that your first assignments will be of a general nature: accidents, press conferences, meetings. When dealing with such stories you should try to cover all the angles that you can. Don't just deal with the immediate story; everybody else will be dealing with that angle. To succeed as a reporter you need to dig a little deeper, as in the earlier court example in which a relative was interviewed.

One type of story that you may be asked to cover as a general reporter is an accident. Let us say you have been sent to the scene
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of a small rail crash in the South-east on a line that has been newly privatized. The scene of such an accident will probably be chaotic, but try to keep a cool head. It is unlikely that you will be able to get very close to the scene as the emergency services will probably have the area cordoned off. In some cases a special area will be designated for the press, so simply show your press pass, which will be issued by your employer, and you will find yourself with other hacks.

One of the real pitfalls in covering this type of story is that you end up 'following the pack'. It is understandable how this happens. Often there is little information and journalists tend to share any leads that they come across. While this is acceptable to an extent, do not be drawn into sharing everything – they may be your new-found friends but they are also the competition. There is nothing worse than discovering that a colleague at the scene of the same story has scooped you at a rival paper. It is a delicate balance to strike but do not be drawn into sharing every scrap of information you receive.

So, there you are in the compound. What do you do? The first thing to do is to try to get out. Obviously, if it is not permitted do not try, but under all other circumstances see if you can make your own way. See if you can search out a policeman who has been near the damaged carriages. You need to find out the number of casualties, their injuries, who they are. Try to find an ambulance man or paramedic, someone who was the first on the scene. A prime target in these circumstances is an eyewitness, so look beyond the cordoned off area for members of the public. You will often find eyewitnesses still near the scene and keen to talk to members of the press. It is surprising just how co-operative people will be if they know their names will appear in a newspaper. It is your job to exploit this – again, do not be shy.

Another good source at this stage is a member of the train crew. You may spot them being interviewed by police or rail investigators. It is important not to hamper police enquiries so tread carefully. You will often find that a press officer from the rail company or the local police has been assigned to the crash. If this is the case, that person will be issuing statements from any press compound that has been set up. It is here that you will glean the basic information for your story. If it is an accident of some magnitude, a politician may arrive to inspect the scene. Make sure you get some
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quotes from this person.

You will file your story to the office in a series of ‘takes’ (several pieces of copy) that will either be transmitted directly through a laptop computer or simply read down the telephone line to a copy-taker who will key the story into the system. Always call the newsroom when you have something further to add to the story because they may have picked up leads from their own sources in the office.

Once you have gathered everything you can from the scene of the crash and filed it, you will need to follow up the story in the newsroom. Larger organizations will have other reporters to cover different angles but let us assume that it is your sole responsibility to write the final piece. It is at this stage of covering such a story that you must use your instincts as a journalist by thinking of all the possible angles that might arise. All events, such as this, have consequences and it is your job to explore them.

Here is a rail crash where someone has been injured, possibly even died. The immediate question, therefore, is how or why did the accident happen? In many ways your approach to covering a news story is similar to writing it in that you need to assemble certain facts: who, what, when, where, why, how. We will deal with these in greater detail in the next chapter but these ‘news questions’ are the framework for your final story. They must all be answered factually and without any of your own opinions. Do not forget that a news story is simply an assembly of facts that you have gathered.

So, how do you discover the cause of this accident? You will need to speak with the train-operating company, the police investigators, the transport department, perhaps a local MP, even a local rail enthusiast who may have a particular knowledge of the line. It will not be easy to uncover any new facts as most accidents become the subject of an immediate enquiry and official spokespeople will not release any information in the meantime. However, keep digging as someone is bound to know something and it is worth establishing good contact with these people at this early stage.

**Exercise 1: News sources**

Here is part of a column written by the former editor of the *Sunday Express*, Brian Hitchen. List the people you would contact to follow up this story.
How to succeed in newspaper journalism

Steam up over power

Technically minded people will scoff and say it is a figment of my imagination. But I'm sure that my kettle is taking longer to boil and that my toaster isn't popping up quite as fast as it used to do. The electric kettle element is not scaled with limestone deposit and there are no loose wires or crumbs in the toaster. But the people at the Electricity Board insist that power hasn't changed, so what can the matter be?

(See page 135 for answers.)

Handouts and agency copy

As a news reporter you will be required to deal with not only the information you gather yourself, but also unsolicited handouts that will arrive on your desk with monotonous regularity. These pieces of information come in an ever increasing variety of forms. It used to be that ordinary letters formed the bulk of communications to journalists, but these now run a long way behind faxes and e-mail.

While technology has helped enormously in the gathering of news, it has also increased the volume of information that a journalist is expected to sift through. Companies selling or publicizing their products will not hesitate to fire off a round of faxes to various news organizations if they feel they have an 'interesting story'. Almost without fail, these 'interesting stories' turn out to be incredibly uninteresting, usually some gimmick aimed at generating publicity. It is your job when receiving such communications to discard everything that might have a whiff of publicity about it. It is not the job of a newspaper to provide free advertising to consumers (plenty of magazines do the job much better), unless, of course, the information deals directly with the availability of a product, such as a Teletubby, in the run-up to Christmas, for example.

You should therefore not feel very guilty in filing most of these faxes in the rubbish bin. It does occasionally happen though that a particular gimmick is newsworthy in itself, in which case you should consider doing a story. One example that caught the public's imagination was the advertising campaign for a certain coffee,
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where each television ad break was a further chapter in an unfolding love story. Had you received a press release about this, you would have been right to have suggested a story to your editor.

The reality is that this type of originality is rare. The bulk of press releases that you receive will be of a much more mundane nature, from government departments of all descriptions, the police, politicians and PR consultants hired by various companies.

Most of these press releases are penned by press officers employed by their company to give information to the public. While many have had training in writing, most tend to bury any news story deep within the release. This is because the angle of the story is secondary to promoting the company itself. In the case of a communication from the Government Information Unit, this is the government of the day. While they are not so obviously in the business of selling something, the department will be trying to show itself in a positive light.

In a case involving an electricity company, newspapers were sent a press release informing them that there would be an increase in meter reading. Further down the fax however, the actual story was that the company had been forced to do so because it had carried out an increasing number of inaccurate estimates. You must decide, therefore, which is ‘news’ and which is ‘sell’ or ‘puff’. It was not an act of deception by the electricity company, but the company was definitely trying to put a ‘positive spin’ on a negative story, so it had made a mistake.

When you believe that you have unlocked the real story behind the release (if indeed there is one), you must corroborate each fact. This is not as easy as it sounds because most of the facts will be known only to that particular company so you will need to call other similar companies or an industry-wide body or association to verify the information. Do not accept any information on face value. In the case of the electricity company, you could contact the regulator, where you could expect to receive an objective response. Do not forget, however, that even the regulator must be seen to be carrying out its job properly and thoroughly, so it is unlikely to say that in the past it has failed to keep a close eye on this particular company. Always look beyond the obvious. Be suspicious, ever sceptical.

When you are satisfied that you have all the necessary informa-
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tion write up your story, but not before. If it is agency copy you will need to rewrite it considerably because it won't be written in the style of your newspaper. Agency copy, from a company such as the Press Association or a local wire service, is a good source of information but the facts should always be verified. As a rule, treat agency copy and handouts as a good source of news, not news in itself. It is your job to discover the news behind the release. Get other quotes from your sources to broaden the story - make it more interesting. You should also never take on face value the word of one agency. Always verify the facts because any mistake can be costly, both to your career and possibly to the newspaper.

Interviewing

To gather any news, you must first interview someone. Obviously you could rewrite your handout or piece of agency copy, but this would leave your story without any breadth or integrity. At the heart of every good piece of journalism is the interview, whether it is face-to-face, over the telephone or even by e-mail. There may also be cases where you need to write a list of your questions and post or fax them to your interviewee. This is rare but many celebrities, under the control of agents, like to have the questions vetted beforehand to avoid any potential embarrassment.

Telephone interviewing is the most common form of news gathering and is central to your role as a news reporter. Politeness is the key to a good interview style, though often you may have to push a little harder if your interviewee is evasive or failing to understand the point you are making.

Make it clear to the interviewee at the start of the telephone interview exactly why the quotes are required, the nature of the story you are doing. Often you will have to deal with a PR consultant before being able to interview your source. Tell them which publication you're working for, when you expect it to be published, in which section the story will be published and that they will be speaking 'on the record'.

This is a journalistic expression which has lost a lot of value over the years because it has been abused by unethical journalists. 'On the record' means that both parties have an agreement that anything
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that is said between them can be used as a quote in the final story. If this is not the case, make it plain to the source that it is a strictly ‘off the record’ chat and that none of it will be used. It is then understood that such a conversation could be used as background to help your understanding of the story but nothing else. This is not to say that some of the ‘information’ you have gathered during this informal chat cannot become the basis of several paragraphs, but it should not be attributable to the interviewee.

Some interviewees, especially politicians, are in the habit of asking, ‘Unattributable? Off the record?’ If you answer yes, you have entered into an agreement of trust with your source. If you break this agreement by publishing everything they say, it is likely that this will be the last time you are given an audience. Establish your integrity as a journalist and maintain it under all circumstances because word will quickly spread if you are unscrupulous in your dealings with people. Unattributable, off the record conversations are imperative as often these dialogues are the starting point for a story and, in many instances, begin as an informal chat over the telephone.

So, now you have established the ‘status’ of the interview. If you do not make it plain to the interviewee that the conversation is off or on the record it is normally assumed that the interview is on the record. There are times when this ‘off the record’ relationship is abused by the interviewee. This happens when a source wants to reveal something to a journalist but not be ‘quoted’ in the final story. The best way to avoid this situation is to clarify the position before you start the interview.

If you are recording the conversation, make this known to the source. Again, you are placed in a position of trust: don’t abuse it. Most reporters will use a notebook or even key the information directly on to the newspaper computer system to save time. The latter is a little disconcerting for the interviewee, waiting for you to type every response on the keyboard. If possible, key in the quotes from your notebook after the interview. Should the quotes be taken down word for word? The answer is a firm yes. You are making a journalistic record of this conversation and it should be as accurate as possible. Most newspapers will require you to undertake a shorthand course, probably in your own time, but ordinarily this is a skill you should have brought to the job. It cannot be avoided and will
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into the subject and prepare a few questions. One way of making more of the story is to confront the interviewee with an unexpected question. Jot down at least four bullet points, which you would like to be covered. In other words, try to set your own agenda for the conference rather than being led by other journalists or those who have arranged the event.

Make sure you arrive early and get a seat at the front. If you do turn up late, do not sit at the back of the room; instead stand towards the front but at the side. The reason is that you need to be heard and interviewees are more likely to take questions from the front, rather than the back of the room.

Decide which is the most important of the four or five points that you have scribbled in your notebook and try to memorize a question along these lines. Because of the 'all-in' nature of press conferences, television and radio journalists tend to dominate the proceedings. They have the nearest deadlines so newspaper journalists often allow them the courtesy of getting their questions in first. Another reason is that experienced media performers, such as politicians, will search out television cameras at such events because the small screen is regarded as the most powerful news medium. Many would regard a 90-second spot on the Nine O'clock News infinitely superior to a page two news story in a high-circulation tabloid newspaper.

A press conference also presents the television reporter with an opportunity to film some pictures, while the newspaper reporter does not have to consider the visual impact of the story.

At many press conferences, there will be a master of ceremonies, a sort of media minder who conducts the event. This person would be irrelevant apart from one important fact: they tend to choose which journalist is to ask the next question. You need to catch this person's eye before diving in with your question. If you are chosen, preface your first question with your name and newspaper as this may or may not make the interviewee sit up and notice.

Don't make your question too long. Asking a question in front of your peers can be potentially embarrassing but don't make matters worse by embarking on a long preamble setting out your pet theories on a particular subject. One short sentence is often enough. At a police news conference, you might ask: 'Are you confident of making an early arrest in this case?'; 'Do you have any strong leads?'; or 'How can the public help?'. And don't forget to speak loudly and clearly,
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as it will only irritate others if you need to repeat your question.

If you happen to mine a rich seam of newsworthy quotes, there
is a convention which allows you to continue your line of ques-
tioning. This is a rarity, however, as every other journalist will also
be keen to get their question in. When you first go to a news con-
ference you may find it an intimidating event. There may be bright
television lights, a large press corps and faces you might recognize.
Try not to be put off by this and get your question in early. It will
make you feel a lot more relaxed and allow you to concentrate on
what is being said.

If you don’t wish to ask your question/s during the actual confer-
ence, arrange with the PR/minder to interview the person after the
presser is over in what is known as a ‘separate’. This privilege is usu-
ally reserved for the broadcast media, but it can be the only way that
you can guarantee that your angle on the story won’t be reported by
someone else. The disadvantage of revealing your great angle during
the press conference is that everybody else will have the benefit of
your analysis.

Take a small tape recorder with you to the press conference. Even
if you are happy to take shorthand notes, a tape recorder is handy as
a back-up and means you won’t always be taking notes during what
could be an hour-long conference. If you have arrived at the confer-
ence early, place the tape recorder on the desk or table at the front
of the room where the questions will be answered. Some recorders
now have an excellent range and this is not always necessary. But do
not take any risks; you don’t want to miss a single quote, as that
could be the story of the day. Having a tape recorder also allows you
to take a note of the mood of the conference, which can be written
into your story later as ‘colour’ or description to break up a long
string of quotes. This helps the reader understand how the intervie-
wee may be regarded by the press. For example, ‘At a light-hearted
press conference, so and so joked with the assembled media throng,
showing a completely different side to his personality’.

Do not leave the conference before you are sure that you have
everything you need to write your story. It will often happen that
you are in a hurry to return to the newsroom, but before you do so
glance back over your notes to make sure that you have all the per-
tinent news facts, such as who, what, where, when, why and how,
that are crucial to the writing of any news story. If you haven’t,
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approach the PR in charge of the news conference and ask for some details to be clarified. In most cases, once you have sat down to write the story back in the newsroom it will be too late to go over any points with the interviewee.

If you feel that you have completely missed the angle of the story at the news conference, chat to your fellow journalists afterwards. To many, this may seem unethical, clubbing together with other journalists to write up the same story. But really, all you are doing is standing up your view of what transpired at the conference. You do not have to reveal all that you think or what you feel the intro should be; simply share a few thoughts with the other writers and it could make the story perfectly clear to you. It is also helpful to hear what others have to say and how they intend to run the story. If a journalist from a rival paper intends to write it one way, you can simply do the opposite.

If it is possible, write your story immediately. It is often a good idea to think over a few different intros in your mind as you sit through some of the more uninteresting answers. Do not forget: you have the tape recorder as a back-up. If you have an opportunity, scribble down your first thoughts on an intro on the way back to the office, because the sooner you start to write your story the fresher it will be. There will be cases when you are simply providing quotes, which will be used in a story written by another journalist. If this is the case, you will need to file directly to copytakers down the phone by reading out your quotes from the notebook. This is where the tape recorder becomes a little useless. One of the other disadvantages of relying completely on a Dictaphone is that it is impossible to find quickly a quote that may have been made 20 minutes into the news conference.

The important factor to remember when writing up your story is that all your rivals have the same quotes to choose from (unless, of course, you organized a separate interview). Because of this, make sure you think of an angle that is original, not necessarily the most obvious, but one that takes a slightly different approach to the subject. Try to recall an answer that seemed to provoke the most interest at the conference itself, using the other journalists as your members of the public. Also, have a thought about what your readers would have asked the interviewee as this can often make you think of a more interesting intro.
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Exercise 2: The press conference

You are the football reporter on *Mayfair and Kensington News*. You have been invited to a press conference by the Mayfair Football Club at their ground. It has been called to preempt a story that will appear in tomorrow morning’s paper, connected with Mayfair manager Ronnie Campbell. A source tells you that the story is about a bribe paid to the manager before last year’s FA Cup semi-final, which Mayfair lost. Prepare five questions to ask at the news conference.

(see page 135 for answers.)

Speeches

The second ‘set piece’ that you will find yourself covering as a reporter is the speech. In many ways, the motivation behind inviting the media to a speech is similar to that at a press conference: to control the message put across to the public. For many, the occasion itself is a very formal one, such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s address at the Mansion House in the City. This ‘event’ is guaranteed to have press coverage and politicians will certainly have an eye to the calendar of set speeches whenever they decide it is appropriate to make a certain announcement.

One of the other advantages for the speechmaker is the sense of drama that an address can create. This is particularly relevant to television coverage, where speeches may be timed to coincide with news bulletins. As a newspaper reporter, your ability to create a sense of drama from the event will come from your descriptive abilities, by detailing how the speech was received by the audience.

Who makes speeches? Politicians mostly (on what is called the ‘rubber chicken circuit’, named after the delicious food served), but also business leaders and personalities (sporting and show business) on the ‘after-dinner’ circuit. The latter has become extremely popular and a far more lively proposition than being entertained by a junior minister outlining the latest plans for set-aside farming in the West Country.

Preparing to cover a speech involves a similar procedure to the news conference. Try to get there early, unless you have a reserved
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place at a table for a rubber chicken, in which case arrive a little later. If you do not have a reserved place, you will have a scramble for a seat with other journalists, but do try to get close to the podium if you wish to make a recording. The same equipment is required: notebook, a small tape recorder (not so essential as you should have a copy of a speech) and an iron-clad constitution.

One of the first things to do on arrival is speak to the PR people in charge of the event and make sure it is known who you are and which organization you represent. On most occasions you will be accosted as you come through the door, so eager are many PRs to pin one of those attractive plastic name tags on your jacket. Do not resist this attention: these tags often help to break the ice as you mingle among the guests after the speech to gauge reaction. As the name tag goes on, ask for the press pack that should include a copy of the speech and any accompanying press release. (Follow all previous instructions for handouts and bin it unless it looks vaguely interesting. It is normally how 'they' would like the speech to be written up. It can, however, point you towards an angle.)

Very considerate PRs might also refer you to specific passages in the speech that they feel contain the 'juicy bits'. In fact, some of the best PRs are ex-journalists. It's in their interest to get a good relationship with you – pointing to possible angles is a help. This 'direction' is often not far off the mark because most of the speech will be pitched at those present in the auditorium rather than a wider public. It also helps in structuring your story afterwards. You might think, having received such useful information before the speech has even been made, that there seems little reason to sit through the event itself. Apart from getting a free lunch or dinner, there often isn't. The danger of this, however, is that most speakers will depart from the written text at various points, leaving even the minders confused.

Listen carefully for the 'news' in the text. Try to think about what your readers might find interesting, as often what you find boring will also be of no consequence to anyone reading the piece. Ask yourself: why is the speaker saying this now and not simply issuing a press release next week? Try to pick out key words in the text that can point you towards a possible story. For example, phrases like 'The point I want to make', 'Let me make it quite clear', 'I urge you to' and 'Firstly, let me emphasize' should awaken you from your after-
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dinner/lunch slumber and be scribbled in your notebook.

It is advisable though to take only selective notes during speeches as you do not want to be forced to trawl through a mass of notes when compiling your story. Simply indicate the passages in the text that you may use later and make a further note yourself. Also, keep one eye on the advance copy of the speech so that you can identify whether the speaker has gone into a world of ad lib. Be ready to pounce on these: the shortest aside or throwaway line can often make a reasonable story. In particular, seize on any jokes as these can often mask a serious truth and make good copy in themselves. As most speakers will use an autocue together with a written speech, you will be able to see instantly when the speaker's eyes are trained directly on the audience. This is an especially good technique used by politicians for capturing the attention of a restless audience.

As with a press conference, observe how the audience is reacting to the speaker. Are they warming to the address? Is the speaker being heard in respectful silence? If you are sitting at a table, how are those sitting next to you receiving the message from the top table? And of course, talk to people afterwards. Was this the type of speech they were expecting to hear? Which parts of the address did they find the most interesting?

If you feel that the speaker has mentioned something very controversial and newsworthy, approach the PR about a quick post-speech interview to clarify any points. Often the PR can deal with these areas, but it can be helpful to get the speaker himself to explain in his own words what he was trying to say. And talk to other journalists to see if your view corresponds in any way with theirs; if it doesn't, go with your instincts and write up your own angle.

And a quick note on writing your story. Try to avoid a long string of quotes in your piece because this often reads like the speech itself. Break up the copy with plenty of references to the speaker, background to the story and any audience reaction. Given the nature of the event, you may even be entitled to a little analysis of the speech itself and the context in which it was delivered. When you are making these points, however, qualify any statements by using words such as 'seems', 'apparent', 'looks like', 'signalled'. These will make your judgements a little less definitive.
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The vox pop

This is the English way of saying *vox populi*, which is Latin for the voice of the people. It is also known as a straw poll, so called because of the use of a piece of straw to show which way the wind was blowing. It was first coined in nineteenth century America, when journalists were sent to interview ‘townsfolk’ about how they intended to vote in a local election. It is a very effective way of keeping you and your readers in touch with what people are thinking about broader issues, such as sex, politics, social and moral questions. The vox pop is often used by local newspapers to give a national issue a local focus, but it is also used by national papers to take a snapshot of public opinion on a particular question. Vox pops also make for very entertaining copy as the general public are much more direct in their use of language than those more accustomed to making public statements.

The vox pop can take two forms, the structured or unstructured poll. In the first, you should list up to six questions on the main points of an issue. The advantage of this form of questionnaire is that the results can be compared with those from other reporters and a more conclusive analysis made. It is also possible to make certain predictions based on these results. Let us say the topic is the decriminalization of cannabis after a report from a leading politician saying decriminalization would benefit society. This is a perennial vox pop favourite.

First, prepare an opening statement. This is simply a sentence or two pointing out the reason for the survey. In this case, it may be ‘In view of the widespread use of cannabis, its tacit acceptance by the police, possible medical benefits and calls for referenda on its use, should cannabis be legalized?’ Read this statement to each respondent before asking the survey questions so that they have a clear picture of the context.

Second, frame the questions so that the respondents are forced to answer ‘yes/no/don’t know’. Avoid open-ended questions demanding more complex answers because these are more difficult to compare with other responses. In the case of cannabis, your six questions could be: ‘Have you taken cannabis?’ ‘Should cannabis be available on prescription?’ ‘Do you think the use of cannabis leads to hard drugs?’ 'Do you think possession of small quantities of
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cannabis for personal use is acceptable?"; 'Should cannabis be legalized?"; 'Why?'.

The final question, 'Why', is what is known as a 'bucket question', where the aim is to receive a general response and a quote or two that you can use in your story. Do not rely too much on this type of question to give you an angle to your story because many members of the public will have to be pumped to express an opinion on many matters. They are also likely to be interviewed on the street where they might be in a hurry, so any response is unlikely to draw any wide-ranging conclusions.

If you are operating as a 'one-reporter' survey, the more people you question the better, but if you are one of a team agree a sample size at the start. Twenty should be about the minimum number of respondents to give a reasonable sample. Depending on the issue being canvassed, you may want to know other factors such as gender, salary and age, which can help to explain any conclusion that you make. For example, if you discover that the majority of people in favour of legalizing cannabis are women over 65 on a pension, this would be something of a revelation. Try not to be too fussy in your selection of respondents and approach people at random.

The unstructured survey is far less considered and normally involves an individual reporter being asked by the editor to interview a few people outside the office on a particular issue. It is obviously much less scientific. The aim is to find a few good quotes which represent the thinking of the man or woman 'on the Clapham omnibus' (traditionally seen as Mr and Mrs Average). Before you 'hit the pavement', frame a simple question that encapsulates the story, e.g. 'What is your view on the legalization of cannabis?' Approach as many people as you can - using a small tape recorder if you have one - and listen carefully to each response. If it begs another question, ask one but keep the interviews short. The aim is to provide the editor with a quick snapshot of public opinion, not an in-depth interview.

Exercise 3: The vox pop

Devise six questions, including a bucket question, based on the following topic about telethons.

Today is Comic Relief Day. We are doing a survey to find out people's
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Attitudes towards televised fund raising telethons are becoming less effective in the ways they raise funds for charities.

Which six questions would you ask, remembering that they should not, excepting the last, result in an 'open' answer? (see page 135 for answers.)

Doorstops, all-ins and death knocks

Depending on your approach to journalism, these three confrontations are often necessary but not the most enjoyable. A doorstop interview is a very common tactic in which you plant yourself outside a building, from which you hope your interviewee will emerge. This can be their house or place of work, it doesn't matter. A doorstop often involves a long wait so be prepared to sit tight for some time and discuss the ills of the world with other journalists until your quarry appears. (It is always wise in these circumstances to refer to the PCC Code of Practice on Privacy which says that 'intrusions into an individual's private life are not generally acceptable unless it is in the public interest.') Have a clear idea in your mind exactly what you would like the person to reveal as most doorstop interviews are comparatively brief affairs. Try to get your interviewee to answer this question and, if they won't do this, keep plugging away until they disappear into their car, which is often the case. Do not expect them to break away to offer you a separate interview because you represent a highly reputable national newspaper - it won't happen.

Given that the media tend to travel in packs, most doorstop interviews lead to an 'all-in' where several journalists converge on the interviewee in the manner of a rugby scrum. This is not intentional in most cases, but can become very uncomfortable if you find yourself caught in the middle (to say nothing for how the interviewee feels). For a newspaper reporter, the secret is to lay back slightly and allow your television and radio friends, because of their technological demands, to make the initial surge. If you are only using a notebook (not very advisable) you will also need space to scribble something down, unless of course 'No comment' is the answer you receive - a quite common result. Staying at the back of the pack also
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gives you the advantage of being able to pop a question or two once
the interviewee breaks through the crowd. While you may receive
an 'exclusive' word or two, it's inevitable that your colleagues will
pump you for the result of any 'private' tête-à-tête.

The third confrontation, the 'death knock', is the worst duty you
may ever have to carry out. If you are asked to interview the rela-
tives of a victim, take a lead from the PCC Code of Practice, which
states: 'In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries should
be carried out and approaches made with sympathy and discretion.'
Check that the relatives know of the death. It has been known for
journalists to break the news before police arrive.

Most people are unlikely to want to discuss such stories over the
telephone, so you will often find yourself going to a victim's house.
If this is the case, and you are one of several journalists, appoint one
person to negotiate an 'all-in' interview. Ask politely for a photo-
graph if one is needed but do not lift one from the mantelpiece, as
I have seen done, and bellow: 'Can we have this one, then?' The
more tact used on these occasions, the better. Do not contribute to
the stereotype of the unfeeling and cynical tabloid journalist who
will stop at nothing to get a story.
Feature and documentary production for radio and TV

Documentary, feature: what's the difference? The words are often interchanged, but they don't really mean the same thing. Documentaries are basically factual. Features can be factual or entertainment. Documentaries are extended treatments of a single subject; they tell of real events, of real people. They include all the ingredients of first-rate news reporting.

There are two types of documentary: news and cultural or lifestyle documentaries.

Documentaries should always be angled at the human side of the story: great political events have to be analysed, but from the point of view of the people involved. That's what makes a documentary interesting and worthwhile. Radio excels at one type of documentary; TV at another. In making a documentary you are a reporter, an interpreter, explaining complex issues. Research is vital. Consult everything and everyone you possibly can for background: press cuttings, relevant books, reports, experts, eyewitnesses, and video of other relevant programmes or interviews.

Documentaries and features can be long or short. They can be on one theme that takes an hour or more, or they can be on one theme broken down into a number of specific angles, each lasting only a few minutes. Inexperienced producers often find themselves more interested in filling a time slot rather than producing a great programme (which may be short because there's only that much material). Remember: it's not what you can put in but what you can leave out that makes it interesting.
PRODUCING A DOCUMENTARY OR FEATURE

Research

This is part of the planning. First ask yourself, what am I trying to achieve? What do I want the audience to feel/know about my subject? List various topics within the main subject that you want to include, then decide how you will do the programme and how everything will fit within the allotted timespan. Next, set out a provisional running order. Don’t worry about the title at this stage; that will emerge later. Put your thoughts down on paper and see how they relate to each other, then you’ll see where the emphasis should be and what is unnecessary. Your aim is to finish up with a tightly edited, balanced, interesting programme that uses sound and pictures to the full.

When deciding on how to do the documentary or feature, list:

- the working title
- the aim
- the duration
- information you already have (probably what has triggered the idea)
- provisional content
- key questions
- interview sources: categories to interview etc.
- reference sources: cuttings, library, government reports etc.
- actuality: the pictures/sound that will form a big part of the programme.

You can then decide how much emphasis should be given to each and whether there are enough ideas to sustain the listener’s or viewer’s interest. You will soon realize that there is a lot to get into the programme.

Structure

The main decision is whether to use a narrator or not. A linking, explanatory narrative is useful to give the programme a forward drive that makes it logical and informative as well as interesting. A narrator can help a programme cover lots of ground in a short space of time, but can also give the impression of being unemotional. Narrators should link, not interrupt. There won’t be the need to use a narrative
voice between every insert or contribution. Inserts can be linked
together, different voices following each other to tell part of the story.
without the intervention of a narrator.

Collecting the material

Mostly you will do your interviews on location; seldom in the studio
and hopefully never on the telephone. In documentary and feature
programmes, because there is usually some time in which to do them. 
everything should be studio quality. If you decide there will be no
narrator, it is essential when doing the interviews that you remember to
have speakers introduce themselves in some informal, natural way:
speaking as a truck driver . . . , for example.

You might ask interviewees for a lot of statistical and other factual
information that you won’t use in the final programme but will be
useful source material for you. Also, decide whether you are going to
leave the interviewer’s voice and face in the programme. Sometimes it
can be presented more as a personal investigation, with the producer,
presenter, interviewer, narrator being one person. When you use a
different narrator, all the questions should be removed, otherwise it
looks untidy. The replies can then serve as individual statements, being
careful in the linking script to preserve them in their original context.
Don’t take them out of order or out of context; they must always be
exact reflections of what the speaker intended. Be consistent in the
structure, once you have decided what it is. However, form and style
are infinitely variable, and it is important to explore new ways of
making programmes. Clarity and interest are the keys.

Impression and truth

You will probably want and need to use lots of actuality. This creates
the right atmosphere for telling the story. People will also recognize
the authentic sounds, if it is on radio, and what they see on TV. It all
helps.

Take great care about using sound effects from discs. These days they
are very good on CD, but they must be genuine.

Never stage manage: in other words, don’t ask for something to be
done again after the real event so that you can call it real. In these
Feature and documentary production for radio and TV

situations, a proper journalistic approach is to admit a simulation with a caption or voiceover.

Unless you tell the listeners or viewers otherwise, it is essential for them to be able to believe that you are telling them the truth. This applies to sound and pictures as well. What the listener hears or sees must be the genuine article; you must never deceive or confuse for the sake of a good picture or sound effect.

Music

Try to use it as little as possible, and only when there is real reason for doing so. Music must be used only when it generates atmosphere. It can be the easy way out, so be careful.

Assembling the material

After the research, do the interviews and gather the pictures and sound effects. Then you can edit the rough cut and write a basic draft of the script.

The start of the programme is crucial. It must get the attention by using a strong piece of sound or picture actuality, or a soundbite etc. The remainder of the programme will consist of a compilation of interviews, links, actuality, vox pops, music. You might use additional voices (actors or other reporters) to read official documents, for example. Always remember never to have one sequence too long. Break up the sequences into short elements. Don't have all the interviews together; break up a long voice piece or statement for use in several parts. Edit interviews so only the best part is used, with the less interesting bits put into the script.

The easiest way to assemble material is chronologically, using time sequences to tell the story. It will usually be better within this time sequence to stop and balance views with others on occasion before continuing. The programme has to make sense. That's the basic rule. Remember the listener must understand it on first hearing, whereas you, as producer/reporter, will have heard it many times. Structure is the most consistent fault with documentaries; not their content. You must have enough signposting. The listener in radio must know who's talking all the time; the same applies in TV.
voice between every insert or contribution. Inserts can be linked
together, different voices following each other to tell part of the story,
without the intervention of a narrator.

Collecting the material

Mostly you will do your interviews on location; seldom in the studio
and hopefully never on the telephone. In documentary and feature
programmes, because there is usually some time in which to do them,
everything should be studio quality. If you decide there will be no
narrator, it is essential when doing the interviews that you remember to
have speakers introduce themselves in some informal, natural way:
*speaking as a truck driver ...*, for example.

You might ask interviewees for a lot of statistical and other factual
information that you won’t use in the final programme but will be
useful source material for you. Also, decide whether you are going to
leave the interviewer’s voice and face in the programme. Sometimes it
can be presented more as a personal investigation, with the producer,
presenter, interviewer, narrator being one person. When you use a
different narrator, all the questions should be removed, otherwise it
looks untidy. The replies can then serve as individual statements, being
careful in the linking script to preserve them in their original context.
Don’t take them out of order or out of context; they must always be
exact reflections of what the speaker intended. Be consistent in the
structure, once you have decided what it is. However, form and style
are infinitely variable, and it is important to explore new ways of
making programmes. Clarity and interest are the keys.

Impression and truth

You will probably want and need to use lots of actuality. This creates
the right atmosphere for telling the story. People will also recognize
the authentic sounds, if it is on radio, and what they see on TV. It all
helps.

Take great care about using sound effects from discs. These days they
are very good on CD, but they must be genuine.

Never stage manage: in other words, don’t ask for something to be
done again after the real event so that you can call it real. In these
situations, a proper journalistic approach is to admit a simulation with a caption or voiceover.

Unless you tell the listeners or viewers otherwise, it is essential for them to be able to believe that you are telling them the truth. This applies to sound and pictures as well. What the listener hears or sees must be the genuine article; you must never deceive or confuse for the sake of a good picture or sound effect.

Music

Try to use it as little as possible, and only when there is real reason for doing so. Music must be used only when it generates atmosphere. It can be the easy way out, so be careful.

Assembling the material

After the research, do the interviews and gather the pictures and sound effects. Then you can edit the rough cut and write a basic draft of the script.

The start of the programme is crucial. It must get the attention by using a strong piece of sound or picture actuality, or a soundbite etc. The remainder of the programme will consist of a compilation of interviews, links, actuality, vox pops, music. You might use additional voices (actors or other reporters) to read official documents, for example. Always remember never to have one sequence too long. Break up the sequences into short elements. Don’t have all the interviews together; break up a long voice piece or statement for use in several parts. Edit interviews so only the best part is used, with the less interesting bits put into the script.

The easiest way to assemble material is chronologically, using time sequences to tell the story. It will usually be better within this time sequence to stop and balance views with others on occasion before continuing. The programme has to make sense. That’s the basic rule. Remember the listener must understand it on first hearing, whereas you, as producer/reporter, will have heard it many times. Structure is the most consistent fault with documentaries; not their content. You must have enough signposting. The listener in radio must know who’s talking all the time; the same applies in TV.
The ending:
• allows the narrator to sum up
• may repeat some of the key statements, using the voices of the people who made them
• may repeat a single phrase that appears to sum up the situation
• may speculate on the future with more questions left unanswered so interest is maintained
• should end with the same voice and actuality that you used in the beginning, but with some small variation to show it’s the end
• may do nothing, leaving it to the audience to form their own assessment of the subject.

Don’t use jump cuts (an abrupt cut from one part of an action to another with no transition). If you join a shot of someone seated with a shot of them standing, that’s a jump cut. You also see it sometimes in badly edited interviews. To avoid it, either insert a shot of the person getting up (a cut-in) or put in a shot of someone looking at them, thus giving time for them to get up (a cutaway). When doing a documentary, you must provide the editor with lots of cutaways and cut-ins to make all the sequences work.

When doing documentaries and features, learn to explain things visually. Remember:
• wide shot
• medium shot
• close-up.

The wide shot orients and tells us what’s going on. The medium shot takes us a bit closer, tells us a bit more about the action and prepares us for the close-up. The close-up is usually the most exciting shot, and gives us a great deal of information about a small amount. The wide shot explains, and it’s usually too much of a jump to move straight to a CU; hence the MS in between. Zooms can help, but don’t overuse them.

Structure

The structure of your programme, the way the elements of the story are arranged, is difficult. Remember: your programme should have:
Feature and documentary production for radio and TV

- a beginning
- a middle
- an end

...but not necessarily taken in that order.

The opening sequence sets the scene and gives the visual and verbal information needed to understand where the programme is going. Don’t wait too long before getting to the point. The middle section involves the complete development of the story. Remember the original story concept, the essence of what you are trying to say. Endings are often very difficult. The film can’t just stop when you don’t have anything more to say; it must obviously come to a conclusion, tie up loose ends, recapitulate without telling the whole story again. The shots and sequences should somehow say ‘end’. Wide shots, zoom-outs, tend to make good closing shots.

Juxtapositions

Look for good and interesting juxtapositions. One sequence cannot comment on another merely by being next to it. The same is true of interviews. You need to make the connection of ideas. One idea should be made to lead into another, not necessarily in the most obvious order. Sometimes areas need to be broken down into separate elements and distributed through the film. A good juxtaposition, a good connection, may occur to you that gives a whole new type of structure to provide interest.

Narration

Remember, the primary source of information in TV is the pictures, no matter how good the words or how ordinary the pictures. Viewers must understand something through the pictures, otherwise they will not understand the information. The information used in TV must be made visual, just as in radio the information has to be converted into sound. In TV you will do this with lots of graphic material. In radio it’s the impression that counts, not the detail.

There are lots of kinds of information that you can use in a TV programme, not just facts and figures. For example, a shot of a man walking across a field can tell us how old he is, what he’s like,
whether he’s a farmer or something else, whether the field is a good one or not, whether there’s been a lot of rain, the season, etc. When you come to write the script for that shot, you must remember that there is already a lot of information unspoken in the shot. It’s no good just repeating what can be seen, although the shot might need signposting to make sure viewers understand some of the less obvious things in it. The script must give extra meaning to the shot in story terms. Your aim should always be to give added meaning to the primary visual information. Good commentary does not merely point out what is in the shot; that’s fine for a slide show, but not for professional television documentaries.

Remember to leave the occasional gap without words for the ideas to sink in and for the pictures and sound to tell their own story. Know when to keep quiet, and do so often. Wall-to-wall words don’t work.

Sound

Sound is not a second thought in TV; it is very important. Sound provides the reality. It gives you people’s voices, narration and music.

You can always include ‘thought-tracks’ (the voice of the subject used over appropriate visuals in place of narration). This provides a different approach, and the story is carried by someone within the film, who gives a sense of intimacy to it. Use thought-tracks to give someone’s feelings or specific experiences. Basic information should be in the narration. Inexperienced reporter/directors tend to over-use thought-track, either because it’s a new toy or because they have to write less narration (never a good reason for using this technique).

Music

Music can be a powerful tool, but only if used correctly. Music makes sequences seem shorter than they actually are, but it should never just be used to fill a gap on the sound-track. It should give extra meaning to a sequence. Don’t always choose the obvious piece of music. Music provides you with an extra decision: whether music or effects are to be dominant in the mix. You must reach your decision with the editor and sound mixer. You cannot give everything equal prominence. Remember: music does not have to be loud to work.
PRODUCTION HINTS FOR TV DOCUMENTARIES OR FEATURES

- don’t overdirect
- don’t give too many instructions: it will destroy what people are doing for you
- make sure people doing things on camera for you aren’t self-conscious: it’s always obvious even though they might only be walking in a wide shot
- tell them not to react obviously to the presence of the camera
- when you have people doing things in a documentary, have them doing what they do best every day. A farmer driving a tractor won’t be self conscious; sitting behind a desk he will be.
- don’t forget the long shot. The geography can be important for the viewer.
- give your interviewee head room in close-up shots, unless you’re going for a very close-up shot.
- save the really tight close-up in interviews for when you want real visual impact.
- watch the backgrounds when setting up interviews. Avoid shots in which objects seem to be growing out of a person’s head because they are on the same line as the subject and the camera.
- avoid shots that are wider than they need to be to contain the action. Even more rigorously, avoid shots that are too close to contain the action. It is annoying for the viewer to see someone reading something that can’t be seen or pouring drinks that are out of view.
- in establishing shots or long shots, give some thought to foreground. Objects in the foreground give framing, interest and depth to the composition of a picture. Dress the set where possible and appropriate.
- try not to use zooms. If you do, hold the beginning and end of any zoom so the shots can be used without a zoom.
- in reverse questions, ensure that the camera frames you in much the same style as the interviewee. There can be variations, such as over-the-shoulder two-shots, but reasonably matching head and shoulder shots are best.
- in interview close-ups, keep distracting objects clear of the interviewee unless the object is relevant to the film and interview, in which case it shouldn’t be distracting.
FURTHER READING.

Mistakes, Corrections and Hoaxes

Perhaps an editor might divide his paper into four chapters: heading the first, Truths: the second, Probabilities: the third, Possibilities: and fourth, Lies.
Thomas Jefferson

Once upon a time, newspapers did not make mistakes. If that reads like the beginning to a fairy tale, that’s because it is one. Newspapers did make mistakes: it’s just that they did not admit them – or at least not unless forced to do so by lawyers. For decades, the Press preferred to be confident liars than seekers after the truth.

This pretence of infallibility was absurd. Inaccurate reporting produced (and is producing) millions of wrong details, false accounts and not a few spectacularly duff stories. On the 13 April 1912, for instance, the Baltimore Evening Sun ran a story headlined ‘All Titanic Passengers Safe’. On 3 November 1948, the Chicago Daily Tribune proclaimed ‘Dewey defeats Truman’ and on May 1983, The Times declared all over its front page ‘Hitler’s Secret Diaries to be published’. As contemporaries knew very soon after each of these stories appeared, 1,500 died on the Titanic, Harry Truman beat Dewey and the diaries were not written by Hitler but by a little German crook called Konny Fischer.

These days, newspapers of quality do admit mistakes and they put them right as soon as they can. They recognise that stories are written by fallible human beings under great pressure and without access to all the sources. Inevitably, some errors will creep in. They fall into one of six categories:

• Errors of detail – names, ages, addresses, etc.
• Errors of narrative – false part of an otherwise true account.
• Hoaxes and inventions – where the entire story is fiction.
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- Errors of context – incorrect or missing background causing a false account.
- Errors of omission – an account made misleading by a missing part.
- Errors of interpretation – adding two and two and coming up with five.

The better papers such as the Chicago Tribune also have a system for recording and tracking mistakes, and attempting to put right any part of their processes that caused the error. Such papers have learnt a great deal about how mistakes arise, and who makes them. And the truth is that no group of journalists produce more errors than reporters. According to surveys carried out at The Guardian and the Fort Worth Star-Telegram in Texas, reporters made half the errors that were published. (Copy editors were responsible for about one mistake in five.) This is an important insight for the papers and even more for individual writers: for nothing destroys a reporter’s reputation faster (or more comprehensively) than a record of generating errors.

Reporters serious about not falling into this category should realise two things. First that the accuracy of their stories is their responsibility and is not something that can be passed up the production chain to a news editor or copy editor. Second, train yourself to be so aware of how errors creep in that checking for these potential ambushes becomes second nature. Learn not just from your mistakes but also from those of others. When you see a correction in a paper, think of how it might have occurred.

Mistakes

There are eight main causes of errors in stories:

False information from sources

With simple facts like names, dates and ages there is said to be not a lot you can do about wrong information. I disagree. You can double-check. Ask yourself if the source is in a position to know what they are telling. Listen out for tell-tale clues to uncertainty (‘I think...’ ‘...probably...’ ‘...or so I was told...’ etc.) and ask if the information sounds plausible. Often a little reflection will tell you that it does not. A related source of error is to take information given to you (perhaps in the midst of an as-yet unclear situation) and present it as unattributed fact, rather than a sourced contention. This was where the Titanic error was made, because the papers took on trust assurances from the ship’s owners, the White Star Line, and did not attribute them when reporting the passengers were all saved.
POOR NOTE-TAKING

Shaky notes—from an uncertain shorthand outline to a long-hand word that could be this or could be that—often make shaky stories. Time to brush up on the short-hand or handwriting. And don’t guess what sources meant—ask them again. Few will mind as much as you imagine, if at all. And learn to ask them to spell out, or write down, names.

FAILURE TO DOUBLE-CHECK ‘FACTS’ WITH SOURCES

Often one source tells you something that contradicts an earlier source. Check it, double check it, and triple check it, if necessary. The same applies to working from documents. A few seconds checking that you have copied figures and names correctly will save untold grief.

RELUCTANCE TO CHECK ‘SENSATIONAL’ FACTS OR DEVELOPMENTS

There is a smirking part of the culture of journalism which discourages reporters from checking too closely the more outrageous parts of stories, lest someone deny them or water them down. Such perilous idiocy flies in the face of generations of experience which is that few stories are as straightforward, black and white, or outrageous as they first appear. If you were not born with healthy scepticism, acquire some.

FAILURE TO READ A STORY ONCE WRITTEN

We all make typing errors when working quickly, and we also have ‘facts’ in our heads that are not borne out by our notes. A read for accuracy (apart from one for style and possible cuts) stops a lot of these errors.

FAILURE TO LISTEN TO YOUR OWN ANXIETIES ABOUT A STORY

Any experienced reporter knows the feeling of having a ‘sensational’ story which will make big headlines, but about which they have some anxieties. It does not quite ring true. It does not fit with what you know of the world, etc. The mistake is to charge ahead, afraid that caution will rob you of front page glory. Instead, listen to those doubts. Most of the time they will prove correct. Many of the errors I have made were when my show-off ego would not heed the wise doubts of the sensible little journalist in my head.

OMISSION OF FACTS NOT FITTING WITH A PRE-CONEIVED (OR TOO-RAPIDLY CONCEIVED) THEORY

Making your mind up about a situation before knowing all the facts (although you can never know all the facts) is one of the great traps a
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journalist must perpetually fight to avoid. It is an ever-present danger on major incident stories. for there is then great pressure to deliver both a seemingly all-knowing account and a pat explanation for the incident. A classic case was the riots at Strangeways Prison in Manchester, described in Chapter 11 on Disasters.

Rushing into print too early

This was the mistake with the Hitler Diaries. The anxiety to protect an exclusive property (exacerbated by the belief within News International that, ultimately, entertainment and not truth was the object of journalism) meant that the story was published before all the scientific checks were made. This fear of being scooped rushed Murdoch into sanctioning publication, despite strongly expressed misgivings by some of his most senior Sunday Times journalists. The pitfalls of dashing into print with a story that is far more emphatic than the evidence warrants is a frequent cause of major errors on stories large and small. The moral is obvious – publish only that of which you are certain.

(Note the absence of fatigue and inexperience from this list. They are not causes of errors, but excuses for them.)

Finally, for reporters who think the importance of accuracy is not quite all it’s cracked up to be, a sobering story. It appeared in the C-Ville Weekly, a tabloid circulating in Charlottesville, Virginia. It told of the discovery by a female health club client of a two-way mirror that had been installed in the women’s changing room. The paper also carried pictures and detailed graphics. The story went on to speculate freely (via quotes from a psychologist) about the motives of the person who had set up such a peephole. The story proved true in every detail, which was just as well because five days after it appeared, the owner of the health club was found dead in a local park. He had committed suicide. The repercussions for the reporter, had the story proved inaccurate in any way, hardly bear thinking about. The tale is a reminder that, since you never know the effects your stories can have, they had better be correct.

How should you respond to mistakes?

‘Quickly and with candour’ is the answer. This applies in spades if, as is often the case, you realise your mistake before anyone else does. Move speedily – there may be time to correct the mistake before the story is published, or, on larger papers, to correct between editions. Even if it is too late, a prompt confession (and, if the mistake is bad enough, contacting the source affected) will help to mitigate the consequences for the paper legally and for you personally. My experience is that, providing
the error is not too gross: journalists who speedily hold their hands up and take responsibility emerge with reputations far less damaged than those who lurk in the shadows waiting to be unmasked. Those are the ones who are sacked.

With complaints from outside the paper, the first thing is to establish that the 'mistake' definitely is one. Sources often try it on, especially those whose openness with you may have caused them trouble within their own organisation. Many claims, especially of mis-quotation, prove to be nothing more than sources trying to cover their tracks.

Once an error has been established, a speedy correction should be published, preferably in a regular place. Some papers, such as the Mobile Register in Alabama, run all corrections on page one. At the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the correction goes as close as it can to where the original mistake was published and is indexed on page 2. The Augusta Chronicle does the same and, if the mistake occurs on page 1, then that's where the correction goes. Such policies are not an admission of weakness, but a simple matter of honesty and better informing the reader.

(Promptness is another virtue in corrections, but on a few occasions newspapers have not been deterred by the passage of time. In 1920 the New York Times publicly ridiculed Professor Robert Goddard, the father of space exploration, for his claim that rockets could operate in a vacuum. Some 49 years later, when Apollo 11 carried the first men to the moon, the Times published the following: 'It is now definitely established that a rocket can function in a vacuum. The Times regrets its error.' The record, however, is the 199 years that elapsed between the Observer of London reporting the death of Mozart as having happened on 5 December 1791 and it correcting this date to 5 December in early 1991.)

Honesty is not the only motive in correcting errors. Avoiding a lawsuit is also a pretty powerful reason for prompt correction. Some years ago, the following appeared in an Irish newspaper: 'In the edition of the Sunday Press dated March 18 1990 a photograph of Proinsias De Rossa TD was published with the caption "prospective minister". This should have read "prospective minister".' Similarly an English local paper ran this correction to a court report: "Father head butts his son" should have read, "Father head butts his son's attacker".

You can almost hear the rustle of potential legal proceedings in the distance as you read these corrections. No doubt the editors who ordered them into print were well aware that speedy correction can help stave off a defamation lawsuit, or at least form part of the subsequent defence. Gilbert Cranberg, the former editorial page editor of the Des Moines Register, who surveyed 164 libel plaintiffs in 1987, found that most people who sued for libel did not originally want money. They wanted a correction. Only after they were brushed off by the paper did they then go to law.
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However, unless corrections are being carried at the point of a lawyer's writ, they merely have to recall the mistake and amend it. There is no need to grovel, promise you won't do it again, apologise or launch into an explanation of how it was the regular editor's night off and his assistant was feeling under the weather. A few publications, like American Lawyer, actually name the reporter and editor who made the mistake. Others, like the San Jose Mercury News, go the other way and have eliminated any words of blame such as 'due to an editing error', etc. And there is, somewhere, a limit to what can be sensibly corrected. For instance, on the day after it carried a review of a new cartoon film, the Boston Globe carried the following: 'In our film review yesterday, statements made by Sylvester the Cat were erroneously attributed to Daffy Duck.'

Finally, factual errors are easy to correct: other types less so. Many complaints to newspapers centre on inappropriate or missing context, or a missing element which alters the overall story or the impression it gives. For these, papers can offer space in the letters page, or, more rarely, comment columns. To deal with such cases, the New York Times runs an Editor's Note to 'amplify articles or rectify what the editors consider significant lapses of fairness, balance or perspective.' It publishes about 25 of them annually. It is a useful device that deserves to be more widely copied.

Great newspaper hoaxes

In 1976 the following advertisement appeared in New York's Village Voice:

Cathouse for Dogs

Featuring a savoury selection of hot bitches. From pedigree (Fifi, the French poodle) to mutts (Lady the Tramp). Handler and vet on duty. Stud and photo service available. No weirdos please. Dogs only. By appointment. Call 254 7878.

The same day a press release from the dog's brothel was sent out, and, as stories appeared about the dog brothel, calls from pet owners (plus weirdos) flooded in. ABC began filming a documentary, requests for press visits came in and the story began to grow in other ways. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals called for the brothel's closure, as did the Bureau of Animal Affairs, vice squad, mayor's office and various religious and moral busybodies. The controversy was reported with relish. The US Attorney General even served a subpoena to the address of the service for illegally running a cathouse for dogs. It was
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at this point that the man behind it all, one Joey Scaggs, stepped forward and revealed it was all a hoax.

Such attempts to hoodwink the press are by no means as uncommon as journalists think. Assorted hustlers, anarchists, gold-diggers and funsters have provided a rich history of spoof stories that found their way into print. Faked documents have been particularly successful. The Hitler Diaries took in The Times, Sunday Times, Stern magazine and others: the ‘memoirs’ of Howard Hughes (actually written by Clifford Irving) fooled Life magazine into paying $250,000: the Parnell Letters which expressed the Irish leader’s approval of political murders humiliated The Times when it proved to have been written by a man called Pigott for cash: and the Zinoviev Letter showing the Labour Party as a ‘front’ for Moscow was eagerly swallowed by the Daily Mail and conveniently published on election day in 1924. It was a forgery. These are well-known cases, but other hoaxes deserve a wider audience.

The radiation-proof cockroach

United Press International was once approached by Dr. Joseph Gregor, a leading world entomologist, and persuaded that he had developed a strain of nuclear-proof cockroach. Their extracted hormones would cure arthritis. acne and anaemia and protect people from radiation. The resultant story, ‘Roach hormone held as miracle drug’ was sent round the world by UPI. Dr. Gregor was, of course, dog brothel inventor Joey Scaggs.

The topless string quartet

Large sections of the US press were duped in 1967 by stories about a forthcoming tour by these bare-breasted female musicians from France. The inspiration for this nonsense was one Alan Abel, who sent out press releases explaining that the musicians needed to play sans clothes in order to produce ‘pure and unhampered tones’. He also hired four models to pose in white gowns for publicity shots. After the stories appeared, requests for recitals came in and Frank Sinatra’s Reprise label even offered them a recording contract.

The earliest sayings of Jesus

In May 1991 the Financial Times published a long article about the discovery of what seemed to be the earliest surviving text of the sayings of Jesus. Only when the article was published did the paper realise the significance of the name of the supposed discoverer of the priceless find – Batson D. Scaling.
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The Society for Indecency to Naked Animals

This was one of the more elaborate newspaper hoaxes, perpetrated by Alan Abel. The Society for Indecency to Naked Animals was invented by Alan Abel in 1959. Abel hired an unemployed actor called Buck Henry to impersonate the fictional founder of the society, G. Clifford Prout Jr. He appeared on NBC’s ‘Today Show’ to demand all animals over four inches high should be clothed for decency’s sake, and Abel hired pickets to protest outside the White House and even set up a phone line and operator to take calls. Many newspapers published stories. The cover story was that SINA had been set up with money left to Prout by his father. This attracted the attention of the tax authorities and the IRS wrote to demand back tax. When no reply came, they visited SINA’s offices, found a broom cupboard, and realised it was a hoax. Buck Henry went on to better things, getting a part in a soap opera and becoming a successful writer and actor in such TV series and movies as ‘Get Smart’, ‘The Graduate’, ‘Catch-22’ and ‘To Die For’.

Central to the success of all these hoaxes was the simple failure to check, and a taking at face value press releases or calls from plausible new ‘sources’. Preventing such attempts being printed should be a straightforward matter of not letting the desire to get your byline on such stories overwhelm the simple precautions of asking questions and knocking on a few doors. Hoaxes are so much easier to perpetrate on reporters who never leave their offices.

The money paid for stories by some popular papers is so high (the Sun spends millions of pounds a year on payments to sources and freelances) that there have even been one or two people who earned a living as professional newspaper hoaxers. The best of them was probably a film stuntman called Rocky Ryan, alias Major Travis. Peter Bernstein, David Oppenheimer, Rocco Salvatore or one of the other false names he regularly used. He sold the People (a mass-market Sunday newspaper) a story about sex and drugs orgies among a Himalayan expedition, and to other media a tale that Gorbachev had resigned two years before he actually did (with the result that millions of dollars were lost on the foreign exchange markets), plus a story that top Nazi Martin Bormann was alive and well and living on a kibbutz in Israel. None of them was true.

He also made $18,000 by concocting transcripts of a phone conversation between Prince Charles and Princess Diana and then stung papers into paying for this. He got an actress friend to phone the People to say a friend in the security services wanted to talk about the royals. She gave a number in a smart part of London, and when the paper rang the telephone was answered by another friend who said he worked for British intelligence. He explained that they had been bugging Prince Charles’s phone. He said he was prepared to sell the transcript of the
MISTAKES, CORRECTIONS AND HOAXES

phone conversation for $7.500. The People bought it, as did other papers. The reason they fell for it was that the hoaxers were giving them a story they wanted to believe was true – the art of the confidence trickster down the ages.

*Journalism constructs momentarily arrested equilibriums and gives disorder an implied order. That is already two steps from reality.*

Thomas Griffiths
Unit 5

Pengaruh Persekitaran terhadap Proses Pengumpulan Berita

Objektif Pembelajaran;
Pada akhir pembelajaran unit ini para pelajar akan dapat;

1. Menerangkan bagaimana faktor persekitaran politik mempengaruhi kaedah pengumpulan berita.
2. Menerangkan pengaruh sistem politik yang berbeza terhadap proses kewartawanan.
3. Menerangkan pengaruh budaya politik yang berbeza terhadap proses kewartawanan.
4. Menerangkan pengaruh persekitaran ekonomi terhadap pemilikan dan kawalan media.
5. Menerangkan faktor yang mempengaruhi gaya pemberitaan media penyiaran.

Topik Perbincangan Tutorial dan Latihan
1. Bincangkan bentuk hubungan antara kewartawanan dan politik.
2. Terangkan perbezaan antara sistem politik demokrasi liberal dan authoritarian berdasarkan perspektif kewartawanan.

3. Apakah yang dimaksudkan dengan arah aliran politik (political trends) dari sudut kewartawanan.

4. Bincangkan pengaruh budaya politik dalam kewartawanan.

5. Bincangkan kaedah kawalan yang digunakan oleh ahli politik terhadap media.

6. Bincangkan bagaimana pemilikan dan kawalan ke atas media dikaitkan dengan pembangunan ekonomi?

7. Bincangkan apakah wajar bagi sebuah akhbar untuk menyokong mana-mana perjuangan parti politik?

8. Pada pendapat anda bagaimanakah proses pengumpulan berita untuk kewartawanan popular dilakukan?

9. Bincangkan gaya penyiaran berita berdasarkan pendekatan "infotainment".

Sumber Bahan Pembelajaran Modul

Rujukan yang digunakan sebagai bahan pembelajaran pada modul Unit 5 ini adalah sebagai berikut;

1. The Political Environment (m.s.241)
The Economic Environment (m.s.260)
Sumber:

2. Investigative Reporting (m.s.284)
Sumber:
The political environment

This chapter focuses on the political determinants of journalism. The form of the political environment defines more than any other set of considerations the functions which the journalist is expected to perform in a given society, acting as a frame within which the parameters of journalistic activity are drawn. Whether functioning in the context of a liberal democratic or an authoritarian political system the journalist is perceived by the politicians, and by those who would influence the politicians, to be a key cultural player, the successful influencing of whom (by whatever means necessary) is worthy of considerable expenditure of resources.

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To study the relationship between journalism and politics is to assume, as German sociologist Josef Ernst puts it, that 'News is a product of biases which derive from the foreknowledge individual journalists have about their own political environment and the pressures this environment places on their work' (1988, p. 126). As the great Bolshevik Lenin once said, partly in justification of his own political party's intolerance of dissenting journalists, 'to live in society, and be free of it, is impossible'. Journalists, he meant, are not free agents — a statement which applies as much to democratic societies as to non-democratic ones. Nor could journalists be entirely free, if one thinks about it, despite the ambitious demands of liberal democratic theory. They, like most other professional groups, must work within a political environment which contains a certain amount of regulation, control and constraint, exercised through a variety of formal and informal channels. Sometimes these controls
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and constraints are justified by the needs of good government and social cohesion; sometimes they are the product of political self-interest (for a discussion of the political, economic and organisational constraints on media freedom in liberal capitalist societies, see McQuail, 1992).

Journalism, as the 'watchdog' profession, plays an important role in defining where that line is drawn. For this and other reasons related to their privileged place in the culture, journalists must constantly struggle against the political apparatus for their freedom to report and analyse events, and be prepared to defend this role against the state's tendency, and that of the government of the day (the two are not the same in a democracy), to control and restrict the flow of information. This frequently puts them in the front line of political debate and conflict.

The extent to which the political environment shapes the journalist's work, and the extent of the journalist's power to resist that shaping and act autonomously of the political world, is the product of four variables, which will be discussed in the next four sections of this chapter.

The nature of the political system

Most fundamentally, the historically determined, culturally specific form of a society's political system determines the legal principles by which information flows within it and the degree of legislative freedom enjoyed by its cultural producers. Both elements are key to the work of the journalist.

It is useful to remember at this point that most societies, throughout most of human history, have been authoritarian in character, ruled by individuals, families, clans or parties which have monopolised political power for themselves and ruthlessly suppressed dissenting voices. For most of human history, furthermore, the suppression of dissent was carried on in the absence of media, of journalists or of populations capable of reading what journalists, had they existed, might have written. The key ideological influence in such societies was organised religion, which told people what to do and think, backed up by the application of physical force by the state when the people disagreed.
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Liberal democracy

The modern journalistic form, as has been noted, emerged out of the struggle of the radical, revolutionary bourgeoisie of early modern Europe, with the outmoded feudal dictatorships holding back their economic and political ascendency. For this reason it developed alongside the evolution of liberal democratic political systems and came to embody the principles of intellectual freedom and pluralism which we associate with democracy. Consequently, societies such as the United States, France and Britain which have been formed through the rejection (often violent) of authoritarianism are characterised by a corresponding liberalism in respect of journalism.

Liberal democracy implies a low degree of political control of the media and a high degree of tolerance amongst political elites for the unwelcome and critical things which journalists in such a system will write and say. More than that, a liberal democratic political system demands journalistic criticism of elites as a condition of its legitimacy. Critical and pluralistic journalism is viewed as a safeguard against the possibility of a return to authoritarian rule and as a watchdog over the abuse of political power by those to whom it is entrusted by the people in elections. Woodward and Bernstein's coverage of the 1972 Watergate break-in and its cover-up exemplifies the freedoms enjoyed by journalists in a liberal democracy such as the United States, and the Guardian newspaper's coverage in the mid-1990s of the 'cash for questions' parliamentary scandals (Figure 5.1), provides a more recent British example of what journalistic freedom is supposed to lead to in practice. In both cases the writings of journalists contributed substantially to the removal of tainted governments. In both, journalists and their editors defended their work as the legitimate exercise of their responsibilities in a liberal democracy.

Leftist critics of liberal democratic political systems have, as noted in Chapter 2, been sceptical of the extent to which examples of this kind truly reflect journalistic 'freedom' to attack the 'ruling class', as opposed to being symbolic and superficial attacks on the management of capitalism, which by removing 'rotten apples' from the barrel serve ultimately to strengthen the system and its inherent inequalities. Noam Chomsky and Ed Herman stress throughout their writings on the media the limitations of press freedom in the United States and elsewhere, arguing that it never extends to challenging the real bases of economic and political power. Ralph Miliband (1973) wrote similarly about Britain in the 1970s. Their arguments are valid insofar as journalistic freedom within liberal democratic regimes is limited, at
least within commercial and mainstream public media, to criticism of the running of the system rather than the system itself. Radical, even anti-systemic journalism of left and right does exist in pockets, but it has never been a fully viable part of the capitalist media system. But their more mainstream, liberal counterparts have nevertheless enabled important reforms of the system to be made, and by their investigative and expository work contributed much to the ‘humanising’ of Western capitalism in the twentieth century, widening and deepening its democratic foundations. Journalists in liberal capitalist societies have, as democratic theory insists they should, made economic and political power more accountable rather than less so. With the failure of utopian socialist alternatives to capitalism, the ‘watchdog’ role of the journalist will become ever more important as a safeguard against the emergence of new forms of despotism in the advanced capitalist societies of the twenty-first century.

**Authoritarianism**

Authoritarian regimes by contrast, of which there are still many in the world, do not normally allow criticism of their actions by
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journalists. Such regimes, whether inspired by ideologies of the left or the right, view pluralism and intellectual freedom as subordinate to the interests of the collective (the definition of collective interests typically being monopolised by the regime itself). Criticism of the regime is viewed as treason to class (in the case of Marxist-Leninist inspired governments), Allah (for fundamentalist Islamic regimes) or race (the nazis; the apartheid regime of South Africa). There are in addition what may be regarded as 'gangster' regimes, such as that of Haiti until it was overthrown by US intervention in 1995, which control journalism and other cultural forms for nothing more principled than financial gain.

Authoritarian regimes of whatever kind insist on journalistic deference and conformity to the official line on events, believing – as Lenin put it when he said that 'words were more dangerous than bombs and bullets' – that criticism may lead to political unrest and collapse of the regime. In addition, they often regard journalism as a tool of social engineering, to be put to the service of encouraging social development in a particular direction, and preventing unwelcome trends from taking root. In contrast to the liberal approach, which positions the journalist as a disinterested reporter of events, authoritarian systems enlist journalism unapologetically into the apparatus of ideological control. Soviet journalists, for example, were prohibited from reporting on such problems as crime (with the exception of political crime, or 'dissidence'), economic mismanagement or the spread of HIV/AIDS within the USSR. Instead, they were urged to focus on the positive achievements of Soviet society and to convey by selective reporting of economic and social success stories an image conforming to the utopian predictions of Marxist-Leninist ideology. In their news Soviet citizens learnt not about serial killers, environmental disasters or air crashes (all of which were present in Soviet society) but heroic feats of overproduction in the fishing industry, or the fraternal harmony in which different ethnic groups were alleged to live. Events which contradicted the general picture of successful societal development painted by the Communist Party never achieved the status of news. (For a book-length study of Soviet-era journalism, see McNair, 1991.)

Historians differ as to when the rot of personal dictatorship set in (with Lenin in 1917, or Stalin in the 1920s?), but most agree that what began in the early twentieth century – in the midst of barbaric world war and mass famine – as a sincere and principled critique of 'bourgeois' news values, with their antiproletarian stress on striking
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workers and revolting peasants, became by the end a means of covering up failure, decay and corruption, to the benefit only of the self-appointed elites in Soviet society.

This distinction between sincerity and cynicism is an important one because, as students of the media in societies which are relatively affluent and conflict-free, we should recognise that there are other societies which, at certain moments in their development, cannot afford the luxury of a free press; which, in times of revolution or war, require a journalism which provides models for emulation and inspiration, rather than dissent and demonstration. There have been and still are societies where, for a time at least, the freedom of the journalist to criticise must be subordinate to the needs of the people to be fed and housed. But the history of the twentieth century shows that, whatever the pressures which have led to authoritarian regimes and which may give them temporary legitimacy, they ultimately, if not subjected to democratic control, decay into corrupt dictatorships. Their journalists, like it or not, gradually become servants of criminal elites.

The international political environment and the national security state

Even democratic societies, in time of genuine crisis (Britain and the United States, for example, during the Second World War) may with good reason apply authoritarian principles to their media for the greater good of the collective, brushing aside the professional ethic of objectivity and turning journalism to the production of propaganda. During the cold war between the capitalist West and the communist East, which lasted for most of the twentieth century and ended only with the collapse of the Soviet state in 1991, most Western journalists were immersed in a political environment characterised by ideological polarisation and the assumption that taking sides was appropriate. Although East and West were not actually at war, and many informed observers disputed the factual basis of the Soviet ‘threat’, the propagandistic production of ‘images of the enemy’ became a routine feature of much mainstream journalism (for an account of British television news coverage of the ‘new cold war’, as Noam Chomsky described it, see McNair, 1988). Chomsky and Herman’s powerful analyses of US media coverage of East–West and human rights issues in the years of the cold war convincingly
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demonstrates its biased, misleading character (see Chomsky and Herman, 1979). Such coverage, and its equivalents in Britain and other countries, was the product of a particular political environment in which virtually the entire globe was divided into friends and enemies and their respective activities glorified or demonised according to their place in the interpretive framework imposed by the cold war.

Since the end of the cold war, and the demise of the Soviet enemy, only Saddam Hussein and Mohammad Gaddafi have regularly inspired similarly propagandistic coverage. For the most part, however, the international political environment has become much more unstable and volatile, its ideological fault lines less obvious and more blurred. As it has done so, international journalism has lost much of what, in the past, gave it structure and coherence. Wars in the former Yugoslavia, for example, have not been easy for journalists to make sense of, involving as they have done not ideological divisions of left and right, but forms of racism and ethnic prejudice which had been thought to belong to an earlier era.

Political trends

The terms ‘liberal democratic’ and ‘authoritarian’ belong at the opposite ends of the spectrum, with most societies falling somewhere in between. Many, such as Taiwan or Korea, are in transition from authoritarian systems to democratic ones, displaying characteristics of both. Journalists in these societies are grappling with the changes in their role which democracy brings, often importing advice and experience from other countries. Others, such as China and Cuba, find it increasingly difficult in a world where communication is ever more accessible and immediate to maintain authoritarian control over media, and one can speculate with some confidence that early in the twenty-first century they will be forced to embrace at least some democratic principles, as the Soviet bloc countries had to in the 1980s and 1990s. Some – a few, fortunately – such as Iran and Afghanistan, have moved towards authoritarianism, where they will remain for as long as their ideologies of Islamic fundamentalism convince or compel their populations to comply. In general, though, it appears that the global political trend is away from authoritarianism and towards democracy, if only because the rapid growth of information and communication technologies such as fax, e-mail and the Internet (see Chapter 8) are having that effect on the exercise of
power. For that reason it is not utopian to suggest that the global journalistic community of the twenty-first century can expect to have more freedom and thus more responsibility than did their predecessors in the twentieth.

The political culture

A second factor defining the political environment confronted by journalists is that of political culture. This is a less tangible concept than that of 'political system' and is secondary to it, but it is important nonetheless since it describes the informal, non-institutionalised relationships which develop in every society between politicians and journalists over time. For Gabi Wolfsfeld, writing on news coverage of the Middle East conflicts, political culture refers to 'the norms, values, beliefs and practices that define the ways in which each news medium relates to the world of politics' (1997, p. 39) as opposed to the legal frameworks and instruments which are the hallmark of a particular political system.

The distinction made here between political system and political culture means that within, for example, systems defined as 'democratic' there may be great variation in the way journalists approach their work. Even where journalists are formally 'free', as they are in post-Soviet Russia, with laws and a constititional framework guaranteeing their independence from government and the state, they may because of broad cultural and historical traditions be more inclined to partisanship and propagandism than their colleagues in, say, the United States. One of the great challenges faced by Russian journalists in the post-Soviet era has been to 'unlearn' the authoritarian habits and instincts of the system which they (or most of them) gladly left behind in the early 1990s (for an account of the challenges and issues facing journalists in the former Soviet Union, see McNaught, 1994). Soviet press theory and editorial practice, based as they were on Marxist–Leninist principles of authoritarian control, rewarded partisanship and commitment over what was officially viewed as the 'bourgeois' concept of objectivity. The journalist was a class warrior, dedicated to the service of the Party and the state.

After 1991, when Russia formally embraced the principles of political and journalistic pluralism, many journalists nevertheless found it difficult to free themselves of the 'genetic memory' (as they themselves called it) of Stalinism. They approached political debates
not as objective reporters but as committed voices of one party or another, enthusiastically taking sides. Press and broadcast journalism organisations became identified with particular parties and politicians, to the growing frustration of a newly enfranchised population who wanted not cheerleaders but someone to make sense of an extremely complex and confusing situation on their behalf. Partisanship is, of course, commonplace in the journalism of democratic societies (in the press especially), but with the proviso, as we have seen, that straightforward lies and propagandising are not welcome. In Russia, sacrificing truth to the interests of the favoured politician became for a time the rule rather than the exception. In the presidential election of 1996 even television news organisations abandoned all pretensions to objectivity in their enthusiastic endorsement of Boris Yeltsin and their negative coverage of his Communist opponent, Gennady Zhuganov. Long before that campaign, Russian audiences had grown weary with the unrelenting polemicising of their newspapers and television news bulletins, leading to falling circulations and ratings for Russian journalism.

This partisanship was a cultural rather than a legal problem for Russian journalists (and similar features have been observed in the post-communist journalism of other emerging democracies, such as Bulgaria and Romania). There were no laws requiring them to beat the drum for Boris Yeltsin or Vladimir Zhirinovsky – on the contrary, journalists volunteered for duty, seeing it as their job to wage ideological warfare rather than report on and analyse with some distancing the competing positions of the newly democratised politics. The politicians, for their part, encouraged journalists to become their allies, and used their considerable powers of patronage to enlist supporters. The problem was thus political and professional: indeed, the two factors of journalistic production were intimately linked in the emergence of a political culture not yet free of authoritarian attitudes.

Resolving such a problem – and the excessive partisanship of journalists was and still is widely perceived as a problem in Russia – is a matter of changing the ‘norms, values, beliefs and practices’ listed by Wolfsfeld rather than simply reforming the law. In Russia, therefore, the assistance of many Western journalistic and educational institutions, such as the USAID-funded Internews and the UK-government-funded BBC Marshall Plan of the Mind project, has been welcomed, notwithstanding warnings by some people of the dangers of cultural imperialism. The ‘best practice’ of journalists in the United States,
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Britain, France and other countries has been recognised as a model to be learnt from if the conduct of Russian journalists is to be brought into line with the liberal democratic principles which now underpin the political system, and if journalists are to be equipped to resist the pressures exerted on them by politicians.

All countries have their distinctive political cultures, of course, shaped as Russia’s has been by history and tradition. The US tradition leads to a print journalism which is perhaps less partisan than the British. In the United Kingdom, newspapers happily act as cheerleaders for their favoured political parties, often at the expense of ‘truth’ (although their editors and proprietors would not always admit this). In Britain, also, the political culture of party adversarialism is reflected in a broadcast journalism which is closely regulated and monitored for ‘impartiality’ (see Chapter 4) – impartiality being defined in relation to broadly equivalent coverage of the competing parliamentary groupings.

In the United States there is a strong political culture of executive accountability, manifest for example in the institution of presidential news conferences. In Britain, by contrast, political journalists who want to report the executive’s views (the prime minister’s) have to cooperate with a secretive, cliquish system known as ‘the lobby’ which enforces strict rules of accreditation designed in essence to ‘preserve plausible deniability’ (for an account of how the lobby system works, see McNair, 1995). In general terms the US culture of ‘openness’ is acknowledged to contrast sharply with the British tendency to political secrecy, and to have an impact on the reporting practices of journalists in both countries. In the United States freedom of speech is guaranteed by the constitution; in Britain there is no ‘bill of rights’ which can function as a guarantor of journalistic freedom, rather an accumulation of legislative instruments which often lead journalists into difficulties with political elites. In 1998, however, the Labour government of Tony Blair progressed through parliament its promised Freedom of Information Act, and introduced significant changes to the system of governmental information management. In late 1997 Tony Blair’s chief press secretary, Alistair Campbell, announced that henceforth a more direct system of prime ministerial briefing would be permitted, ending the need for journalistic use of the attribution ‘sources close to the prime minister’. These and other reforms were intended to encourage a more open political culture and a more open political journalism.

In France, a political culture tolerant of extramarital affairs amongst
the elite protected the late François Mitterand from publicity concerning his mistresses and illegitimate child, although their existence was widely known about amongst journalists. In the United States, on the other hand, cultural intolerance of such behaviour brought to an end Gary Hart’s 1988 presidential bid. Four years later, Clinton managed to effect a transformation of the political culture so that extensive coverage of Gennifer Flowers’s kiss-and-tell allegations did not destroy his credibility as a presidential candidate in 1992. Nor, of course, did the revelations contained in the Monica Lewinsky affair damage his popularity ratings in 1998.

The economic relationship between the journalistic media and the political apparatus

A third political factor of great importance for journalists is their economic relationship to the state: does the political apparatus have any control over their resources which can be employed as a means of exercising pressure? Authoritarian regimes of the left, for example, have tended to monopolise ownership of the media or to wrap media organisations in forms of public ownership which are subject to state financing over which the ruling group has control. In such systems, the state and the government are usually the same thing.

Liberal capitalist countries such as the United States, on the other hand, tend to eschew all public ownership of the media, fearing the political abuses which this might lead to. US journalistic organisations are almost entirely owned by private commercial interests or non-profit-making charities, the only exceptions being the international propaganda producers of the cold war era such as USIA and Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe, which have in any case changed their role in the post-cold-war world.

The European tradition has fallen somewhere in between these two extremes, with private ownership of the press often existing alongside public ownership of the broadcast media, the latter being pursued in the context of strict limitations on direct political interference by government in media output. In Britain, the exemplar of this public service model, the government of the day sets the level of grant available to the BBC – a sum paid for out of taxation through payment of a fee for possession of a television receiver – but is not permitted to intervene directly in the content of the
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BBC’s journalism. There is no governmental ownership. In Italy, by contrast, television channels were traditionally viewed as the property (intellectual, if not always economic) of particular parties (Christian Democrat, Socialist and even Communist) and expected to display correspondingly biased journalism.

In general, governments and parties in liberal democracies do not tend to own journalistic media, which would be perceived as propaganda in any case, preferring to exercise control in other, less obvious, ways (see below). One of the main arguments for privatised media in post-Soviet Russia, for example, has been that only this form of ownership guarantees the freedom of the journalist from the politicians (although it does not address the problem of political culture discussed above). In practice, the public-private distinction is not a reliable indicator of how journalists will behave politically, but it does have an obvious bearing on the extent of the politician’s power over the media.

Elite perceptions of the importance of journalistic media

Finally, we should note that the degree of political pressure likely to be exercised on journalists is closely related to elite perceptions of how important different media are to the formation of public opinion at home and abroad. In Britain the BBC is more frequently attacked by politicians than is the commercial television news provider ITN, not because it is watched and listened to by more people (it is not) but because, as the longest established national news provider, it is perceived to carry the greatest weight as an opinion former and leader. Such perceptions may or may not be true, but their effects on the BBC are no less real for that. Most countries have their ‘news media of choice’, and it is these which tend to find their output most closely scrutinised by politicians.

Exercising political pressure

The means available to politicians to control journalist media include a mix of formal and informal devices.
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Physical force

At one extreme, and most depressingly, violence, including murder, is employed against dissident or troublesome journalists by political elites throughout the world. Violence is used mainly, though not exclusively, by authoritarian regimes and their opponents as a means of preventing unwanted viewpoints from gaining wide currency. In 1997 some 84 journalists were killed as they went about their investigative business worldwide. In Chechnya alone, in 1995–96, 10 Russian journalists were killed in suspicious circumstances.

Sometimes individual journalists are the target; in other cases, the aim is to intimidate the journalistic community as a whole. In many Middle Eastern countries, for example, journalists who have supported or opposed regimes have been assassinated, often on the streets of foreign cities. The apartheid regime in South Africa used violence against its journalistic opponents working from exile in Angola and elsewhere, as did the 1980s death squad regimes of central and South America. More recently, in Algeria a murderous civil war has resulted in many journalistic casualties as fundamentalist militants signal their intolerance of more liberal perspectives. In Russia, where the worlds of politics and organised crime are closely intermeshed, journalists campaigning against corruption have been the victims of kidnapping, beatings and murder. Moskovsky Komsomolets correspondent Dimitri Kholodov, for example, was murdered by a conspiracy of army officers in 1994 after he threatened to expose corruption amongst the military.

The law

Though the threat of violence is all too common for journalists in all too many countries, it is fortunately not typical of the politician–journalist relationship in liberal democracies. In the latter, legal means of control are favoured, reflecting in their specifics the political system and culture of the country concerned and the balance of political forces over time as expressed in elections. These then confront the individual journalist as a set of constraints and, when necessary, protections against the abuse of power. Consequently, ‘the news is a social and historical form which has been moulded by... political interests as expressed in legislation’ (Bruhn-Jensen 1986, p. 49), and also by a society’s historically
evolving views on how best to maintain the political independence of journalism as a 'fourth estate'.

In Britain, for example, broadcast news coverage of election campaigns is governed not just by the broad requirement of due impartiality (see Chapter 4) but also by legislation contained in the Representation of the People Act. This legislation attempts to secure balanced reportage of the main participants in an election contest, in the most important media, at the most crucial time in the political cycle, for the benefit of the populace as a whole. In so doing it acts as a constraint on journalists, who cannot report the views or activities of one candidate in a particular constituency without also reporting the views and activities of his or her opponents. The result is a style of election journalism in the United Kingdom which is often criticised for being too 'tit-for-tat' in its structure. The demand for strict balance, as measured in quantitative 'stopwatch' terms, distorts news values and produces, it is alleged, bored and disinterested viewers.

In general, we can say that journalists in democratic societies work within laws which seek to define and limit their rights and responsibilities and to strike an appropriate balance between the two, sometimes conflicting, categories. In Britain, for example, relatively strict laws inhibit coverage of official information unless authorised by government, while coverage of individual celebrities' private lives is relatively free from restriction, as long as certain other laws (of theft or trespass, for example) are not broken in the process of gathering information. In Britain, too, laws of libel prevent news media from publicising defamatory information about individuals. The late Robert Maxwell frequently used these laws to prevent investigative journalists exposing his corrupt business affairs. As a result, many thousands of people lost their jobs and their pensions (for further detail on British media law, see Welsh and Greenwood, 1997).

In the United States, on the other hand, a prevailing political culture of openness and accountability is reflected in rather less official secrecy legislation and a generally less legalistic media environment than is present in most European countries.

The tensions and contradictions of media law vary in different countries, as do agendas in debates about legal matters. In Britain for most of the late 1980s and early 1990s politicians and opinion leaders (such as journalistic columnists) argued that tighter privacy laws were required to protect members of the royal family and others from intrusive reportage of their personal lives, views which became more vociferous after Diana's death in August 1997. The lack of legislation
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preventing 'chequebook journalism' came under attack after the wife of the serial killer Peter Sutcliffe (the Yorkshire Ripper) was paid for her story by the Daily Mail newspaper. By the mid-1990s, however, in the wake of Robert Maxwell's exposure as a fraudster, journalistic coverage of political corruption (the 'sleaze' scandals) and the efforts of the press to self-regulate their activities through the application of a meaningful code of practice, the pressure for legal reform had subsided, as people became aware that the powerful stood to gain more than the public by any tightening of privacy legislation. On the other hand, and not withstanding the election of a Labour government committed to information openness and transparency, British journalists continue to fight for greater freedom of official information, more akin to the system enjoyed by US journalists.

Censorship

Throughout the world, under liberal and authoritarian regimes alike, journalists are continually required to fight against political censorship. Some censorship is clearly justified (on national security grounds and in time of war, for example, journalists accept that there should be constraints placed on what they can report). Some is not. Conflict arises when journalistic and public organisations disagree with government or the state on which of these categories a particular act of censorship falls into. The ban on the broadcasting of statements by members of Sinn Fein in Northern Ireland, for example, imposed by the Conservative government between 1988 and 1994 was not directly a matter of national security, having no military value in the fight against the IRA. Rather, it was acknowledged to be an act of moral-political censorship of views which the government found offensive. Journalists whose work was affected by the ban argued that, irrespective of the offensiveness of Sinn Fein's on-air apologies for terrorist murders, it was an unjustified and counterproductive act of censorship which would make martyrs of Sinn Fein and harm the government's international and domestic image – which it did, until political developments allowed it to be removed in 1994. After that in the period up to the 1998 peace agreement, as British television viewers frequently had occasion to note, the spectacle of a Sinn Fein representative trying to explain why yet another life had to be taken by a bomb or a bullet arguably did more harm to the Republican cause than any ban on their media appearances ever could.
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Journalists have been subjected to military censorship in a succession of recent conflicts around the world. In the Reagan administration's invasion of Grenada, for example, or the Bush administration's invasion of Panama, the US news media were shepherded around the margins of the fighting and obliged to construct sanitised, gung-ho pictures of the events, minimising casualties and demonising the enemy to the greatest possible extent. In the Gulf War, too, censorship of the international media corps was a central element of the allies' war-fighting repertoire.

Although usually justified on military grounds — and the lives of combatants, as well as civilians, are a wholly legitimate qualification on a generalised media freedom — the aforementioned examples also had clear political implications. In Grenada and Panama, US governments sought to emerge unambiguously as the 'good guys' against foreign thugs. In the Gulf in 1991, the United States, Britain and their allies required domestic and international public opinion to fall in behind the war effort, and carefully controlled media images of the conflict contributed substantially to achieving that political objective.

Old-fashioned censorship of this kind, which dates back at least as far as the Boer War of the late nineteenth century (often described as the first 'media war'), is increasingly used in conjunction with military public relations techniques (see Chapter 8) to encourage a compliant, cooperative war journalism.

On the domestic front, censorship is usually more difficult for a democratically-constituted government to justify. Apart from official secrets legislation and laws of defamation (the form and severity of which vary internationally) there are few generally accepted grounds on which journalists may be required not to report something which would otherwise be newsworthy. This does not stop governments trying to suppress sensitive information, of course — celebrated US examples include Watergate and Iran-gate, and in Britain the Westland and arms-to-Iraq affairs severely embarrassed the governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, respectively — but such efforts do not amount to censorship so much as cover-up, the exposure of which itself often becomes a major news story, capable of damaging or even bringing down a government.

Informal lobbying

Politicians in a democracy may not have the legal means of controlling the media enjoyed by their authoritarian counterparts, but they
are no less interested in what the journalists have to say about them. Thus, they have developed a battery of informal lobbying techniques intended to win journalists over rather than coerce them into slavish obedience. Chapter 8 examines political news management techniques related to the content of journalism (such as ‘spin doctoring’ and ‘rapid rebuttal’) in greater detail: here we are concerned with the pressures politicians apply to the media as institutions, cultivating their support and discouraging their hostility.

Famous examples of such informal lobbying include Spiro Agnew’s 1960s attack – mounted on behalf of the Nixon administration – on the ‘liberal’ Washington media, just a few years before the Watergate scandal engulfed the president. Political executives frequently let their views on the media be publicly known, particularly if they are critical, in the hope that the weight of their authority may have an impact on the content of troublesome journalists and their managements.

British politician–media relations in the 1970s and 1980s featured Margaret Thatcher’s assiduous and highly effective courting of tabloid newspaper editors, as a result of which she won their support throughout her premiership. In return, her government rewarded supportive editors and proprietors with knighthoods and other honours, while Rupert Murdoch was allowed major concessions on media cross-ownership. Thatcher’s ‘seduction’ of the British press contributed substantially to her 11-year dominance of the British political scene.

In turn, Tony Blair’s cultivation of the traditionally pro-Tory press after his election as Labour leader in 1994, executed by his press secretary Alistair Campbell, produced an unprecedentedly pro-Labour press in the 1997 general election. Murdoch’s support for Labour, like his earlier support for the Conservatives, did not come without a price tag attached, however, and Labour’s adoption after 1994 of a markedly more liberal regime of media ownership regulation was clearly a gesture to News International, which stood to gain most from such a policy.

These are examples of positive political pressure (public relations of a sort) in which persuasion, backed up by rewards, is used to secure favourable media coverage. More common, historically, has been negative pressure of the type exerted by Agnew on the US press, or by successive British governments on the BBC. We noted above that the degree of political pressure exerted on journalists is related to the politicians’ perception of their importance as news providers.
and opinion formers. In Britain, the BBC has been pre-eminent as the ‘national broadcaster’ since its foundation in 1926, and is thus the regular target of political intimidation.

The tendency of governments to put pressure on BBC journalists goes back to the General Strike of 1926, but became more regular after its journalists began to rid themselves of the culture of political deference in the 1950s. Until then, broadcast political journalism had been something of a contradiction in terms, often comprising little more than opportunities for politicians to field a few pre-planned questions from an obsequious and deferential interviewer who would not have dared to upset the guest. This changed with the coming of commercial television in Britain in 1955 (see Chapter 6) and the development of a more investigative, critical, interrogatory journalistic style in an effort to make broadcast news more interesting and viewer-friendly. At the same time, international events generated serious political controversy in Britain, shattering the post-war, late empire consensus which had prevailed since 1945. The Suez Canal crisis of 1956 was the first international event, therefore, in which the British government did not find a compliant media prepared to parrot its line, but a journalism which set out to report the national debate with true objectivity. Former director general of the BBC, Alisdair Milne, has written that ‘The Conservatives’ disenchantment with the BBC can fairly be dated to Suez and the critical, sometimes jarring, tone of programmes like That Was The Week That Was’ (p. 58). But it was not only the Conservatives who exerted pressure on the BBC:

Labour’s shock, on coming to power [in 1964], and finding the BBC allowing criticism of them as sharp as anything that had been directed at the Tories, was profound. Yesterday’s Men [a documentary produced in 1971] compounded that feeling and was a major step along the road to today’s perception by the politicians of ‘the media’ as a hostile political force rather than a necessary channel for dissemination of news and participation in political debate. (Milne, 1998, p. 58)

The continuing pressure which has resulted from this perception was shown in the BBC’s handling of the Real Lives affair, when a documentary programme profiling leaders of both the Republican and the Unionist movements in Northern Ireland was taken off by the BBC’s board of governors after governmental objections. In 1992 the Panorama current affairs strand cancelled a programme about
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the problems of the British economy (inevitably critical of the government), prompting speculation that it was afraid of upsetting the Tories (the official explanation, that the programme was poor quality, was generally regarded as unconvincing).

In October 1995, as the verdict of the O.J. Simpson trial was about to be announced in Los Angeles, new Labour leader Tony Blair had just delivered a keynote speech to the party’s annual conference, with high hopes of its receiving headline coverage on that evening’s television news bulletins. To convince BBC news editors that a Labour leader’s conference speech was more newsworthy than a celebrity murder in the United States Blair’s office faxed them a memo, setting out their case. The BBC resisted Labour’s pressure, and led with O.J.’s acquittal. The memo was then leaked to the press and became a story in itself, thereby shedding useful light on the processes by which political elites seek to influence journalism.

In general, political pressures of this kind are greatest around the time of general elections, with all major parties lobbying fiercely to ensure that the BBC gives them a ‘fair and impartial’ (that is, favourable) coverage. On the eve of the 1997 election the Major government explicitly threatened the BBC with privatisation after the next election (assuming that the Tories had won) if its coverage did not become less ‘pro-Labour’, as the Conservatives perceived it. Since Labour became the government in May 1997 it has bombarded the BBC with a succession of threats and criticisms, at least as intimidating as anything initiated by the Conservatives during their 18 years in office.

All parties in Britain play these games, then, although the party in government (or likely to be in government in the future) can threaten with more conviction, since it controls the rate at which the television licence fee is set and the broader environment in which threats of privatisation can become real. Governments can also use their powers of regulation to intimidate or ‘persuade’ privately-owned media organisations to cooperate. The support extended by the News International titles to Tony Blair’s Labour Party in the 1997 election was not unrelated, some commentators suggested, to Rupert Murdoch’s need for a favourable (or at least, not hostile) climate in the sphere of cross-ownership for the next stage of the expansion of his media empire into digitalisation.
The economic environment

The spheres of politics and economics are frequently so interconnected within capitalism as to be difficult to distinguish. We will do so nevertheless, for the reason explained in the introduction, and in this chapter move the focus from the activities of political elites to those elements of the economic environment which shape the journalist's work.

Economic forces impact on journalism in two ways. First, the production of journalism is largely the business of an industry, owned and controlled by private individuals and conglomerates (with notable exceptions such as the BBC in the United Kingdom). Journalism is, in a real sense, the private property of these individuals and conglomerates, and they are free within the law to dispose of and use it as they like. Journalists are employees, strongly influenced by those who own or control their organisations. They are subject to direct economic power in the same way as other employees of capitalist enterprises, although some journalists - the 'star' correspondents and columnists, such as Julie Burchill and Hugo Young in the United Kingdom, and Hunter Thompson and William Safire in the United States - bring their own reputations to the market and use them to 'buy' editorial autonomy.

Second, while journalism is an industry it is also a commodity, offered for sale in an ever more crowded information marketplace. As such, and like all commodities, it must have a use value and an exchange value for potential customers. It must be both functional and desirable - a fact which has had considerable impact on the content, style and presentation of journalism in recent decades. Journalism must compete with each other for market share.

In both of the contexts listed here the impact of economics on journalism has generated public concern and debate. On the question
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of ownership, liberals and critical theorists have consistently warned against the dangers of excessive concentration, whereby media 'barons' come to own more of a particular media sector than might be regarded as healthy for a democratic society. Left-wing critics have been especially vocal in this regard, since the majority of media barons tend to have right-of-centre political views and to put their media interests to the service of conservative ideological causes. But the perceived threat of excessive concentration of ownership is a wider concern. Ted Turner, the founder of CNN, who has watched the Murdoch journalistic empire expand in the United States, is reported to believe that his rival uses 'the media outlets over which he has control to further his political agenda' (Usborne, 1996).

In relation to the workings of the market, many critical observers have argued that the quality of both print and broadcast journalism has been damaged by the need of media organisations to compete effectively on commercial criteria and that the normative role of the journalist in a democratic society has been sacrificed to the business needs of the organisation which employs her or him (Bourdieu, 1998).

This chapter will explore both of these issues, beginning with a discussion of contemporary concerns around the ownership and control of journalistic media, before moving on to the impact of commercialisation on content.

Ownership and control

The structure of ownership and control of journalistic media is important to the sociologist for the obvious reason that 'the person who pays the piper calls the tune'. Economic power translates directly, through media ownership, into cultural power. As Chapter 3 showed, the precise extent and nature of this power, as expressed in media effects, is difficult to assess and measure. Very few analysts, politicians or media entrepreneurs would dispute that it exists, however, and that the sociological implications are significant. The British general election of 1997 was accompanied by another episode in the ongoing debate about the impact of newspaper coverage on citizens' voting behaviour. Did the press on that occasion affect the electorate's decision to back the Labour Party for the first time in 18 years, or did it merely reflect shifts in public opinion which had taken place long before the campaign started? If the latter, what role did the newspapers play in facilitating those shifts? No one can answer these
questions conclusively, but the strong assumption that journalism has effects of various kinds has always made media ownership an attractive proposition to entrepreneurs with political ambitions.

The fact that most journalistic media are constituted as large and (since Rupert Murdoch smashed the British print unions and introduced new technologies into the newspaper industry) lucrative capitalist enterprises means that they tend to be pro-systemic in their output. The men (and it is, almost exclusively, men, although Rupert Murdoch’s daughter, Elisabeth, could break the mould) who own and control them are key players in the domestic and international capitalist economies within which their media operate. Understandably, they use their media to support those economies, and to preserve socio-political systems which allow them to go on generating profits. They are part of the supporting ideological apparatus of capitalism, using their media to reproduce and reinforce the values of free enterprise, profit and the market. The cultural power of the media, such as it is, is harnessed to the maintenance of certain ideological and political conditions, from which the economic health of the media enterprise derives. Culture, ideology, politics and economics are linked in the output of media organisations in a way that is true for no other sector of capitalistic enterprise.

Within the media as a whole journalists are particularly important in this respect, as Chapter 1 suggested, since their output is often distinguished from the ideological and the value-laden, claiming the status of (more or less) objective truth, disinterested fact, fair and balanced reportage of the world. Harnessing the cultural power of journalism can, in the context of universally accessible mass media, be presumed to have direct economic benefits.

That the journalistic media are used in this way should not be surprising if we assume that their owners are rational economic actors. And yet, throughout the short history of journalism studies, analysts have debated the issue as if it were in some dispute.

Media owners, adherents of the competitive paradigm have argued, typically take a hands-off editorial approach to their properties, leaving their day-to-day management to professional journalists who make decisions about content on professional criteria. This view, if sincerely held, is naive. William Shawcross’s biography of Rupert Murdoch shows beyond any doubt (and Murdoch does not bother to waste his valuable time denying it) that he is a leading member of the secretive cross-national elite of top business and political leaders who have sought ever since the Second World War to
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make the world safe (as they would see it) for democracy (1992). In Australia in the 1970s his newspapers played a key role in the controversial ousting of left-wing Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. In the 1980s, expanding onto the global stage, he positioned himself as an active supporter of Ronald Reagan's aggressive free-market capitalism (and US cultural values in general), using his growing transnational media empire to actively promote it. In Britain, as noted in the previous chapter, Murdoch was even more supportive of Margaret Thatcher's government than he had been of Reagan's and was amply rewarded for it. His newspapers became during her premiership the effective party organs of the Conservative Party, toeing an ideological line just as persistently, and with as much regard for the truth of a story, as did Pravda in the old USSR. His newspapers during these years pursued a blatant pro-business, anti-Labour, anti-union bias, on top of the routine sexism, homophobia and xenophobia which made the Thatcher-era Sun a byword for the degeneration of journalistic morality and ethics. His employees, policed by their editors, were required to submit copy which reflected the proprietor's ideological and political values. His editors were used to being woken in the early hours of the morning with 'advice' from the proprietor which they were in no position to ignore. Although successful News International editors such as Andrew Neil and Kelvin MacKenzie were given managerial autonomy over the titles for which they had responsibility, they were never more than employees, to be removed when they had become expendable.

Of the need for journalists in general (and not just those who work for News Corporation) to reflect the biases of their proprietors, one practitioner points out that 'to survive and rise in, or on, "the game", you pander to the political prejudices of your paymasters, giving them the stories that you know will make them salivate' (Bevins, quoted in McKie, 1995, p. 128).

While most newspaper proprietors have tended to be politically Conservative the late Robert Maxwell wished to be thought of as being on the left, and used his papers - though with equal disregard for the ethic of journalistic objectivity - to support the British Labour Party, and as what he himself called a 'megaphone' for influencing the political debate in the countries where he owned media. Maxwell, caricatured by the satirical magazine Private Eye as a 'life long socialist', was a rare example of a left-of-centre media baron who used the cultural power of his newspapers to pursue a broadly social democratic agenda in Britain, while maintaining good (and for
The economic environment

him, profitable) relations with the Communist leaders of the Soviet bloc countries. Norwithstanding his eventual emergence as a corrupt, dishonest bully, he was one of the few exceptions to the overwhelmingly right-wing political character of international media barons in the 1970s and 1980s.

The historical paucity of left-wing media barons has been a major factor in driving the debate about ownership and control. All commercial journalistic organisations are pro-systemic and thus pro-capitalistic. It would be odd if they were not, given that a healthy capitalist economy is in their proprietors’ interests as business people. But, many argue, did they need to be so pro-Conservative as, in Britain at least, they have been? The British labour movement, by common consent, has been consistently marginalised, denigrated and abused by the British press throughout the twentieth century, despite its social conservatism, democratic credentials and enduring popular support. Despite the wishes of the electorate expressed in many general elections over the years (45% consistently, with the exception of the 1983 election), the British Labour Party had never, until the election of 1997, received anything like a corresponding share of press support. On the contrary, it had suffered a ‘press deficit’ as the big press proprietors lent the services of their newspapers to the Tories year after year, in election after election. This situation, many believed, was a serious violation of press responsibility in a democracy, and one which needed remedying by various combinations of state subsidy, tax breaks and other governmental supports for a left-wing press.

Liberal perspectives on press ownership – which have always opposed state intervention in the newspaper market on the grounds that it would lead to political censorship (see Chapter 5) – had traditionally sought to minimise the importance of economic ownership by stressing the diversity of editorial stance which a ‘free market’ generated. The media barons themselves also used this argument. In Murdoch’s Sunday Times columnist Jonathan Miller pointed out some time ago that

Walking into a [British] newsagent, readers face a choice of twenty-one national daily and Sunday newspapers owned by ten different groups, eighty-nine regional and local daily papers, 1,500 weeklies and 7,600 magazines and periodicals. The titles reflect every conceivable point of view. (1992)

This is disingenuous, since it ignores the fact that for most of
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twentieth-century British political history, and despite the formal freedoms enjoyed by the press, editorial diversity has meant in practice overwhelming support for the Conservative Party. The pattern of pro-Tory press bias peaked in the 1987 and 1992 general elections, both of which Labour lost.

But then, in 1992 as the British Conservatives settled into their historic fourth term and the memory of Margaret Thatcher began to fade, something unexpected happened to the British press. After 1993 in Britain, press loyalty to the Conservative Party fragmented, for a variety of political and economic reasons, including the breakdown of the personal relationship many editors and proprietors had with Margaret Thatcher following her resignation, continuing anger with the new Tory leadership at the manner of her departure, a loss of faith in the radicalism of the Major-led Tories, disgust at the air of sleaze, sex and corruption which came to surround the Tories in their final years (and which the pro-Tory press had themselves done much to create) and enthusiasm, shared by the British public as a whole, for the 'radical centre' position adopted by Tony Blair's New Labour party after his election as leader in 1994.

Table 6.1 shows how the British press 'voted' in the 1997 general election by comparison with their stated preference in 1992. Most surprising is the position of Murdoch's News International titles, of which only one behaved in the traditional manner by urging its readers to support the doomed John Major, 'warts and all'. The News International tabloids – the Sun and the News of the World – completed the slow drift towards New Labour which had been going on since 1994 by coming out firmly for Tony Blair and the desirability of a Labour government. In doing so, it now seems clear, these newspapers were following a leftward shift in the views of their readerships. Moreover, it is reasonable to suppose that, calculating that Labour would be the next government of Britain, Murdoch gambled that support for them before rather than after the election would maximise his prospects of experiencing a sympathetic business environment into the next Labour-led century. Time will tell if he was correct in this calculation, but we can legitimately conclude that, as in Bob Hawke's Australia, Murdoch changed horses for essentially commercial, pragmatic reasons associated with the long-term growth of his business empire. The partial demise of the 'Tory press' in Britain, at least for the time being, signals Rupert Murdoch's endorsement of the new management team at British capitalism plc and merely confirms his power as a proprietor, now being applied to the benefit of the Labour Party rather than its disadvantage.
## The Economic Environment

Table 6.1 Press support for the major political parties in the 1997 general election. Source: Audit Bureau of Circulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily papers:</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Liberal Democrat</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Circulation'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,819,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirror*</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3,032,362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>740,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,133,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,220,439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,132,789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>756,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>429,101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>263,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>319,400</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday papers:</th>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>Labour</th>
<th>Liberal Democrat</th>
<th>None</th>
<th>Circulation'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>News of the World</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4,429,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mirror</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,231,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,908,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail on Sunday</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,129,376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Express</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,153,873</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Times</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,331,656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Telegraph</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>910,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observer</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>480,426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>278,465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on Sunday</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


## Exercising Proprietorial Control

Proprietorial control of journalistic output is exercised, as in any other capitalistic organisation, through the appointment of like-minded personnel in key management positions who are delegated to carry out the boss's will. Journalists who disagree with editorial policy often have their copy 'spiked', or are removed from their positions. This is not to deny that newspaper editors are important figures in their own right, stamping their journalistic and management styles on their titles. When an editor is notably successful in improving a newspaper's market position, or gains a positive reputation for quality, he or she may acquire a relatively high degree of autonomy from the proprietor. Both Kelvin MacKenzie, during his
The sociology of journalism

time as editor of the Sun, and Andrew Neil on the Sunday Times enjoyed this status in their dealings with Rupert Murdoch. But even they – editors of two of the most commercially successful and politically influential British newspapers of the 1980s and 1990s – were liable to receive frequent personal calls from their proprietor and both were eventually promoted out of their editorial seats when Murdoch judged that the time for a change in direction was right.

In some cases, newspapers get guarantees of editorial independence from a prospective buyer, but these are rarely honoured after the transfer is made. Murdoch gave such guarantees in relation to The Times and Sunday Times because he had to in order to gain control of them, but he replaced key editorial staff as soon as he could or made life difficult for those whom he wished would leave. Someone who is investing millions in a newspaper is going to run it as he or she likes.

The economic fact of life which is proprietorial influence clearly has important sociological implications for the role of journalism. When ownership becomes excessively concentrated in a few hands, the influence of those few on political life increases proportionately (all other things being equal). The liberal critique of journalism (and the materialist–Marxist critique) has therefore always highlighted the evidence of concentration of ownership and campaigned against it (for effective antimonopoly laws, for example). Ironically, perhaps, some aggressively pro-capitalist countries such as the United States have very strict laws in this respect, whereas others, including Britain, operate more liberal regimes.

Evaluating the societal impact of the structure of media ownership is not straightforward. A fairly small number of owners dominate the newspaper market in Britain, but the situation is relatively worse in many other countries. There are those, such as Jonathan Miller in the quote reproduced above, who argue that there is sufficient diversity and pluralism in Britain, ranging from the Guardian on the left to the Daily Telegraph on the right; that there are also successful periodicals of the left and the right (the New Statesman and the Spectator, respectively); and that it is hardly surprising if the spectrum of mainstream editorial diversity stops short of political extremes. There is, it is argued, no mass market in Britain for an ‘authentic’ left-of-centre tabloid, as the disastrous experience of the News On Sunday proved. What is ‘the left’ anymore, it might be argued, outside the meeting rooms of elitist, doctrinaire factions? There is certainly no mass left on whom a left-of-centre press (that is, more traditionally
The economic environment

left-of centre than the Guardian] would depend. The 'legitimate' left
- the Labour Party, the trade unions - are, for the moment at least,
well served by broadsheets, tabloids and periodicals. State interven-
tion in the market to subsidise politically correct media would be
both dangerous, from the democratic perspective, and futile from the
commercial.

These arguments are compelling, as Britain enters a prolonged
period of Labour government, and the left is apparently on the ascen-
dancy. Unless and until a British Berlusconi comes along who can
influence the political environment, as Forza Italia did, through con-
trol of the media, the pressures for restrictions on media ownership
and control are unlikely to be a major priority in the United
Kingdom.

Of course, as we saw in Chapter 5 in the discussion of politics,
such legislation may still be used, or its use threatened, as a political
weapon in the hands of parties competing for media support. Follow-
ing Tony Blair's election as Labour leader in 1994, and the
beginning of the Party's 'courting' of News International, its policy
on cross-media ownership became noticeably more liberal, even by
comparison with the avowedly free-market Conservatives. Although
it is generally acknowledged that ownership rules have to change as
the media industries increasingly converge and 'globalise' and
economies of scale become available many observers concluded that
Labour's new liberalism on the issue was a carrot dangled before
News International in order to secure a more sympathetic coverage
of its policies. If this was the case, the strategy certainly worked.

The market

Given what we have said thus far about the cultural power of media
proprietors it is fortunate that, even where there is identifiably exces-
sive concentration of ownership in a particular media sector, the
workings of the information marketplace may mitigate against the
straightforward translation of proprietorial influence into editorial
bias. There are a number of market-led constraints on the output of
journalistic media, not least of which is the fact that journalism is a
commodity and must find a buyer in a competitive environment. This
requirement has two implications:

• first, the journalistic text has to acquire an exchange-value (price)
  from which income and profit largely derive;
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- second, where advertising is sought, an audience of a certain quantity and quality has to be delivered to the advertiser in order to secure the maximum price for space.

The need to find an audience, and an audience of the appropriate 'quality', can overrule the ideological predilections of proprietors, and place limits on their ability to use their media as an instrument of propaganda. When Rupert Murdoch set up Sky News, for example, he did so to gain some respect as a broadcaster, in a market (British television) which placed high value on the quality of broadcast journalism and which he dearly wanted to enter. A loss-making 24-hour news channel, operating under the same guidelines of balance and impartiality as the BBC and ITN, was the price Rupert Murdoch decided to pay for respectability in the United Kingdom media marketplace. So Sky News, since its inception, has enjoyed a much higher degree of editorial independence than have the News International papers and has, as a consequence, been widely praised for the journalistic quality of its content.

Similarly, Murdoch (even before News International's turn to Labour) let the Sunday Times contain a wide range of journalistic viewpoints (right, left and downright off-the-wall) because he knew that his youngish, affluent, educated readership would not respond to being patronised and lectured from the right alone.

In these cases the market has shaped content, because the proprietor's business interests come first (even before ideological commitments). When the Sun supported Labour in the 1997 election it was in part because this is what Murdoch and his editorial staff believed its readers wanted. Support for New Labour, as already noted, was a rational business decision, of relatively low risk given Tony Blair's abandonment of 'old Labour' ideology, and entirely consistent with News Corporation's global strategy.

Broadcasting

The applicability of what has been said about the press above to privately-owned broadcasting organisations varies from country to country. In the United States, where broadcasting was from its inception regarded as a business, individuals and corporations (increasingly the latter, since no individual in the US market can withstand the financial power of the multinationals for long) have played an important role in shaping the editorial policies and stylistic conven-
The economic environment

tions of news. Ted Turner's Cable Network News illustrates the power of one man to influence the journalism industry, even if he had in the end to cede ownership of his company to the larger Time-Warner corporation.

But private ownership of broadcast news in the United States has not had the perceived negative effects seen in, for example, Italy, where one man (Silvio Berlusconi) succeeded in becoming prime minister at the head of an entirely media-created political party, Forza Italia. US broadcast news has no legal obligations to impartiality and balance but the demands of the marketplace, and the premium placed by audiences on the objectivity of news, have acted as an incentive for both the established networks (CBS, NBC, ABC) and new entrants (CNN, Fox) to maintain the highest possible standards of fairness and accuracy in regard to their coverage of public affairs.

As we saw in Chapter 2 critics like Chomsky and Herman insist on the deep structural biases of US broadcast (and print) news organisations, pointing to their function as the propaganda wing of what they call the National Security State. Ideological bias is certainly a feature of US broadcast news (as it is of all news, everywhere) and can often be best explained in relation to the connections of class and culture which bond media elites with other elite groups in US society. Nevertheless, it has never been the case that the capitalistic form of US television news leads to a narrow partisanship in favour of one party, candidate or public lobby. The biases, to the extent that they exist, are more fundamentally pro-systemic than that.

In Britain, too, commercial broadcast news has to make a profit, like newspapers, but unlike the press must avoid overt political bias in its coverage. In Britain, where the public service broadcaster sets the industry standard in news, the commercial providers, to survive in the market, must compete with the BBC. Thus, Independent Television News (ITN) differs from the BBC in its style and presentation but must match the latter's reputation for impartiality. ITN's commercial status frees it from some of the statutory obligations on the BBC (during coverage of general elections, for example, ITN may choose not to follow the regulatory guidelines on balance too precisely), but it adheres to public service conventions of news production because, to compete successfully, it must, as must any other serious news provider in British broadcasting.

Conversely, the BBC, although not bound by commercial constraints, must compete for audience share with the commercial news providers. Winning the case for a real increase in its licence fee
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income year after year means, among other things, demonstrating its popularity with and acceptance by the British public as a whole, who pay the fee. In this sense, then, quasi-commercial criteria of audience share influence the output of the public service broadcaster, which can no longer be isolated from the market. As the broadcast journalism industry continues to expand, providers proliferate, and audiences fragment into advertiser-friendly 'niches', such pressures on the remaining public service and state-owned broadcasters throughout the capitalist world will increase.

Commodification and its critics

The steady commercialisation and commodification of first print and then broadcast journalism since the mid-nineteenth century has been accompanied by the growth of a large and dynamic news industry. Information has become a key strategic resource, and its processed form – journalism – a product of great political, cultural and economic significance, as we have seen. In the process, however, the style and content of journalism has changed in accordance with the needs and demands (real and presumed) of audiences. For many observers, these changes have been damaging in their social effects (Bourdieu, 1998). The modern form of journalism emerged, as Chapter 2 asserted, as a service to democracy, a means of publicising important information, overseeing government and political authority and permitting public debate (by constituting a public sphere). These principles were formulated nearly 300 years ago and have remained in place as a central part of liberal democratic societies. Capitalism has developed in that period, however, as has journalism, and not always, it is argued, in a manner compatible with the principles outlined above. What have ‘Freddie Starr ate my hamster’, or ‘Headless body found in topless bar’?, to recall two notorious examples of what I have elsewhere called ‘bonk’ journalism (McNair, 1996), got to do with the noble history and normative ideals of the ‘fourth estate’? Not very much, at first glance. Those who are critical of the commercialisation of journalism will cite these as exemplars of the degeneration of the liberal journalistic tradition and its absorption by market-driven principles of entertainment rather than information. This trend, moreover, is interpreted by some as the implementation of a broad strategy of mass manipulation by the capitalist media, made necessary by the advent of universal suffrage and literacy in the nineteenth century.
In early capitalism, we recall, journalism was not an item of mass consumption but an elite luxury, serving an elite public (only men of a certain educational and financial status had voting rights, and only they generally had access to and could read newspapers). As the progressive tendencies of capitalism generated mass literacy, and pressure for citizenship rights to be extended to the middle and (eventually) the working classes, newspaper readerships grew and press content began to reflect the developing agenda of social reform. Titles such as *The Workingman’s Friend*, *The Poor Man’s Guardian* and *The Leveller* reveal the left–radical emphases of these media, an agenda which was correctly perceived as a political threat by elites in Europe and the United States.

James Curran and Jean Seaton (1997) and Michael Schudson (1978) are among those authors who have drawn attention to the fate of the nineteenth-century radical press, in both the United States and Britain, as they were driven out of an increasingly competitive, capital-intensive newspaper market by the emerging ‘media barons’. Where the radical press had covered controversial political issues of reform and revolution, servicing a growing mass public newly equipped with political rights and an appetite for the information required to make use of them, the commercial press which gradually replaced them tended to avoid ‘serious’ matters in favour of what we would today call ‘tabloid’ news: crime, sex, scandal and whimsy. This, it seems reasonable to conclude from such contemporaneous remarks as the following by Lord Henry Brougham in the 1830s, was at least in part the result of a conscious strategy of social control and political management:

> It is no longer a question of whether the people shall be politicians, and take part in the discussions of their own interests, or not; that is decided long ago. The only question to answer, and the only problem to solve is, how they shall be instructed politically, and have political habits formed the most safe for the constitution of the country and the best for their own interest. (quoted in Schiller, 1981, p. 75)

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards popular journalism played an important role in the incorporation of the newly enfranchised masses into the capitalist system. The expansion of the audience for journalism was, therefore, accompanied by the deradicalisation of its content. Habermas notes that in Europe as a whole:
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The mass press was based on the commercialisation of [mass] participation in the public sphere . . . [and] designed predominantly to give the masses in general access to the public sphere. This expanded public sphere, however, lost its political character to the extent that [it] could become an end in itself for a commercially fostered consumer attitude. In the case of the early penny press it could already be observed how it paid for the maximisation of its sales with the depoliticisation of its content. (1989, p. 169)

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, as literacy grew and working-class radicalism declined after several defeats in Europe, newspapers went mass-market. Competition for audiences and market share intensified. This meant the emergence of a popular press in which political and social concerns were replaced with a news diet heavily dependent on sensationalism, scandal and trivia – the staples of the popular press to this day. Anthony Sampson argues that ‘as the mass market developed, the press owners assumed less and less intelligence’ (1996, p. 43) on the part of their readers. This ‘dumbing-down’ of the press was combined, as already noted, with a strong editorial commitment to right-wing politics, enforced by proprietors who had no illusions about their role in the maintenance of the status quo.

Popular journalism and democracy

For more than 100 years the prevalence within popular journalism of a superficially apolitical, entertainment-led news agenda, usually framed within the context of right-wing editorial policy, has raised concerns about the role of the press in democracy. If, as has been suggested, newspapers are deemed essential to the liberal ideal of well-informed citizens acting rationally in democratic contexts, what happens if their content is dominated by coverage of sex scandals, crime and bizarre happenings of various kinds? The debate began in the late nineteenth century but has continued throughout the twentieth century, as commercial pressures have driven newspapers to be ever more prurient and sensationalist. The information, education and publicity functions of the press have, it is argued by some critics, been diluted to a pale shadow of their ideals.

The period since 1969 and Rupert Murdoch's arrival in Britain is often viewed as a particularly dark chapter in this process. Murdoch
bought the Sun, which had until then been a moderately successful left-of-centre tabloid, and almost immediately bought the serialisation rights to Christine Keeler’s biography, thus reviving the Profumo scandal of a few years earlier and earning himself in the process the nickname of the ‘Dirty Digger’. Then he introduced the device of the ‘page 3 girl’, accompanying it with an editorial focus on sex which was unprecedented in British popular journalism. His titles also introduced aggressive marketing techniques to the promotion of the press, using bingo, television advertising and other devices new to the British scene to attract readers. In 1978, with this heady mix of sex, scandal and promotional give-aways, the Sun overtook the Daily Mirror in circulation figures and has remained the dominant tabloid ever since. In the late 1970s, as was noted earlier, it came out behind Margaret Thatcher, championing her right-wing policies in domestic and foreign affairs. For the 11 years of her period in office, the Sun was, it may be argued, the ‘public voice’ of Thatcherism.

The Sun’s defence against charges of prurience and political propagandising has always been precisely that it is popular journalism, reflecting the views of the mainly working-class people who read it. If the liberal intelligentsia do not like it, that is their problem. The public gets what the public wants, and the Sun is there to give them it. The author of an affectionate and light-hearted history of the title notes that:

Intellectuals find it beneath contempt, dismissing it as a tit-and-bum comic, not designed to be read. Attacking the Sun is a popular sport among those who proudly boast that they don’t read it themselves – a fact that somewhat weakens their argument. But the Sun is not written for Guardian readers or eggheads who enjoy delicate debate. Its whole style is based on telling readers what they think – reflecting what is being said in pubs, on factory floors, in bus queues, behind counters and over back fences throughout the land. (Grose, 1989, p. 7)

The intellectuals who find the Sun ‘beneath contempt’, on the other hand (and there are many, even in the aftermath of the title’s epoch-making decision to support Tony Blair and the Labour Party in the 1997 British general election) see it, and the tabloids in general, as the purveyors of something akin to journalistic pornography, exposing that which should remain hidden in order to generate an arousal in the reader which is almost sexual (many of the stories are sexually explicit in any case).
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The Sun’s ‘soaraway’ success prompted new players to enter the British tabloid market with even more sensationalist content (the Daily Star in 1978, the Daily Sport in 1986), and existing rivals such as the Daily Mirror to go downmarket in a spiral of declining standards and prurience. For this reason, leading left-wing journalist John Pilger is among those who have accused Rupert Murdoch of accelerating the decline of an ‘authentic’ popular press (and the Mirror, in particular, for which Pilger had once worked). In a television documentary broadcast in 1997 he argued that, until the 1970s, the Mirror alone in the British tabloid market had preserved the authentically radical tradition of popular journalism, campaigning on behalf of ordinary people and against the establishment. Its decline in the 1970s and 1980s, he argued, was part of ‘a wider malaise that is now so serious it threatens to sever the link between democracy and popular journalism’ (1997).

The then editor of the Mirror, Piers Morgan, replied in a Guardian piece that Pilger’s argument was self-serving and pompous, that the Mirror had been just as trivial in the 1960s and 1970s as it was accused of being in the 1990s, that there had been no golden age of campaigning popular journalism and that trivia and titillation were just as much a part of the 1960s Mirror as they were of the current version. The Mirror went into circulation decline, Morgan insisted, because people had stopped buying it. It had had to update and change, or go under, whether Pilger liked it or not (Morgan, 1997).

Some academic commentators have found sympathy with this view, interpreting the tabloidisation of news as a cultural expression of democratic development, insofar as it has indeed reflected the interests and priorities (populist and trivial though they may be) of the contemporary mass public. John Hartley, for example, argues that ‘in communicating public truths (and virtue) to a post-revolutionary public, contemporary commercial journalism mixes seduction with reason, pop with politics, commerce with communication, as it has done since 1789, in the very service of public-sphere virtues’ (1996, p. 201). A mass public sphere is by definition a populist public sphere in which commercial criteria play a key role. But precisely because they are bound by the rules of commerce to win audiences popular newspapers can often play a subversive political role. Hartley points out that, in their coverage of the royal family, the British tabloid press have been pro-democratic, because they so cruelly expose the contradictions of primogeniture. This, he suggests, harks back to the radical origins of journalism in the struggle.
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against feudalism, even if the primary contemporary motivation for such coverage is economic (competition). 'Those overheated but under-rated journalistic watchdogs worry and tug incessantly at the most fundamental problem that the incomplete revolution has bequeathed to the British political system — its royal family' (1996, p. 11). If the British monarchy loses what remains of its power and prestige in the coming years — and that possibility is a very real one — it will arguably be largely due to the tabloid newspapers' (and some of the broadsheets') exposure of its members as humanly fallible and imperfect.

And the tabloids 'worry and tug' not just at the remnants of Britain's feudal monarchy but at elite-group 'deviants' in general. Government ministers in extramarital affairs, heterosexual and homosexual; drug abuse by sport and entertainment celebrities; 'fat cat' businesspeople; sex-mad clergy — all have featured prominently in the British tabloid press in the 1990s. Although the views articulated in such coverage are hardly revolutionary (in the full Marxist sense of the term) they could hardly do less than encourage a disbelieving, politically cynical citizen, who justifiably takes the claims of the powerful with a pinch of salt. This may be a good or a bad thing, depending on whether one thinks the elites of capitalist society should be allowed to get on with their privileged lives in peace or be exposed and held accountable when they are corrupt, dishonest or hypocritical.

Desirable or not, it is beyond dispute that the British popular press were largely responsible for the wave of damaging sex and financial scandal stories which engulfed the Conservative Party after 1992 and for the steady decline in the royal family's fortunes. The modern tabloids — often owned by foreign businesspeople who are not part of the British 'establishment' — are no respecters of elite status or class. The competitive pressures of the market often push the tabloids towards positions which would be defined as subversive by the most dogmatic Marxist. For all these reasons, popular, populist journalism can be anti-establishment as well as sexist, racist and homophobic. Popular journalism is, in the end, a contradictory discourse, reflecting the reactionary content of popular attitudes as well as their anti-establishment prejudices.

Journalism of this type is a peculiarly British phenomenon, although other countries have their imitators. In the United States the tabloids have declined, to be replaced by National Enquirer type publications, described by one observer as 'bizarre hybrids which
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combine magazine layout and design with investigative newsgathering techniques' (Taylor, 1991, p. 17). Perhaps surprisingly, this writer regrets the passing of a truly 'tabloid' newspaper culture in the United States, and with it a democratising irreverence towards elites: 'The lesson from America is that, without the tabloids and their spirit of irreverence, the press becomes a bastion of conformity dedicated to lofty purposes understood only by the few, an instrument for and by the elite' (p. 18).

The investigative tradition

Upmarket of the tabloids, the broadsheets maintain an older tradition of critical, investigative, expository journalism, more recognisable as a 'fourth estate' overseeing standards of public life and the elite's misbehaviour. But they too have been obliged to respond to the demands of an increasingly competitive market, and an increasingly affluent, lifestyle-orientated readership.

In the United States there has been the coverage of Watergate, IranGate, the Whitewater and Monica Lewinsky scandals and other instances of journalists revealing the murky undercurrents of government. In Britain the freeing of the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six and the Bridgewater Three were all the outcome not just of dedicated legal teams but of persistent campaigning journalism over many years. In 1997 the Daily Mail deserved praise, in the eyes of some observers, for its revealing of the names of the alleged (but unprosecuted) killers of Stephen Lawrence. Writing in the Guardian, Roy Greenslade noted that this exposure would have positive effects on the campaign to put the accused behind bars. As he put it, 'Gather round, you seen-it-all before hacks and revel in the rightful use of media power to free the innocent and jail the guilty. Amid the celebrity interviews and royal tittle-tattle, this is a reason to celebrate real journalism (1997b).

Possibly the most dramatic and politically influential recent example of 'real' journalism has, however, been the campaign conducted by the Guardian against the corruption of standards in public life by members of parliament (MPs). Following an initial story published in October 1994 the Guardian (and, to a lesser extent, the Sunday Times) pursued the issue of 'cash for questions' for nearly three years, exposing several Conservative MPs who had taken sums of money or other favours (free accommodation at the Hotel Ritz in Paris,
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for example, in return for asking official questions in the House of Commons. This 'selling' of parliament's privileges and resources to the lobbying industry was not necessarily illegal but breached accepted standards of integrity in public life. The Guardian's journalism led to the resignation of several MPs, two high-profile but unsuccessful libel cases (initiated by Neil Hamilton and Jonathan Aitken) and, many would argue, the defeat of the Conservative government in May 1997. The story changed the British political landscape, as Watergate had changed the US political landscape 25 years earlier, and serves as a paradigm illustration of what the media's 'fourth estate' function is supposed to be, and still can be, about.

The tabloidisation of television journalism and the trivialisation of the public sphere

The power of the market is clearly seen in the press, where private ownership has always been dominant. It has been less evident in the content of broadcast journalism even where, as in the United States, private ownership of television and radio channels is the norm, because it has been perceived that broadcasters should operate by stricter standards of impartiality; that they should be positioned above the cut and thrust of party political polemising, press editorialising and demagogery. Broadcasters, it has usually been agreed, are too important to be monopolised by one party or another but should report all credible views to a high standard of objectivity, reliability and aesthetic quality. These broad principles of broadcast journalism have been interpreted and implemented differently between systems but they form a normative standard which liberal democratic capitalist societies generally adhere to. However, as the broadcasting market has developed in the second half of the twentieth century – in particular, as it has been commercialised to an ever greater extent – the content of its journalism has come under attack.

Broadcast style

Many variants of these criticisms exist in the literature, but one strand can be summarised in the claim that, for reasons of commerce, technology and professional vanity, the style of journalism has gradually come to take precedence over substance. An increased concern
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with news style at the expense of substantive content is a feature observed by many critics, in both Britain and the United States. In 1994 BBC television began broadcasting a 'spoof' news programme called The Day Today. As its title hinted, the programme was based on a sustained lampooning of the codes and conventions of television journalism: the style of presenters and reporters; the use of sources and experts; the employment of statistics and graphics to convey trends. For journalist and culture analyst Bryan Appleyard The Day Today cruelly captured the fact that 'television news has become fantastically mannered and stylised. It is encrusted with gesture and posture, most of which is intended to reinforce — though in reality it subverts — its aspiration to cool objectivity and authority' (1994). This is a US-driven phenomenon, he asserts, spread by communication consultants such as Frank Magid Associates which stress the importance of presenter—anchor chemistry and personality. The goal of these stylistic developments is, in a crowded news market, to 'cultivate and advertise seriousness': 'The cult of seriousness has become a style in itself ... there has been an extraordinary blooming of technical and representational style, driven by a highly competitive market that demands the maximum impression of significance and sensation' (Appleyard, 1994).

Broadcast news outlets have to signal difference from their competitors, and style is one means by which this can be done. The style of ITN in Britain is, as Chapter 4 noted, different from that of the BBC — 'lighter' and more informal, though still aspiring to be serious and relevant, as it must be to compete with the BBC. This does not necessarily make it inferior, unless one assumes that there is only one style of broadcast journalism which is consistent with the concept of high quality. As the market for news expands and fragments, style becomes a more important element of each provider's unique selling proposition. Different market segments require and are at ease with different styles, which is perhaps as it should be, although one observer believes that 'the [journalistic] obsession with surface is doing deep and permanent damage to the best broadcast journalism in the world' (Pearson, 1994).

'Infotainment'

Another category of criticism concerns the impact of commercial pressures on the broadcast news agenda. As the quantity of broad-
cast journalism available to viewers and listeners has grown exponentially, and competition for viewers and listeners has increased, critics argue, its agenda has followed the tabloid newspapers down-market. The US journalist Walter Cronkite, for example, has attacked what he sees as ‘the trend towards trivialising “infotainment”’ in US television news (1997), a trend he believes to be the consequence of news organisations transforming themselves from network loss leaders to profit centres in the 1980s. As broadcast news has moved from being a public service to a commercial one – the delivery of audiences to advertisers – news values are undergoing change, becoming more like those of the tabloids described above.

Cronkite’s reference was to the United States, but his argument applies also to Britain where, too, television news has become more focused on commercial success as measured by audience share. The 1990 Broadcasting Act required ITN to become a profit centre, with shareholders to whom, for the first time, it became accountable. Professional marketing and communication consultants were employed to package and ‘brand’ news, and the BBC followed suit with branding of its own. The news values of ‘infotainment’ were imported from the more popular end of the newspaper market, leading Channel 4 news presenter Jon Snow to argue in 1997 that ‘the whole fabric of democracy is threatened’: ‘Democracy pleads that quality news and public service information must be safeguarded – partly through regulation and partly through being divorced from the demand to make profit’.

Walter Cronkite (1997) agrees that high quality news and current affairs, of the type he now believes to be under threat, is ‘fundamental to the nation’s welfare’. But what is ‘quality’ in this context, and who defines it?

In the comments of both Snow and Cronkite we see the questionable assumption that ‘quality’ equates to a particular set of news values, a particular style and presentation of the world which focuses on the worthy issues of politics, economic and foreign affairs, while paying less attention to the unworthy concerns of human interest and trivia. The Snow–Cronkite line can be viewed as an intellectual elitism which ignores the realities of the contemporary mass media audience. Not everyone in that audience wants, needs or can assimilate ‘serious’ news in the style deemed ‘fundamental’ by Cronkite. For some, the genres of ‘true crime’, real-life rescue and celebrity lifestyle coverage are as much broadcast journalism as is needed, with per-
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haps a cursory scrutiny of the main news headlines to keep abreast of current events.

It may be unwelcome to some, but it seems inevitable that as broadcasting becomes more like print in its financing and market structure the news values of popular print journalism will be further replicated in television and radio. We can interpret this trend as a degradation of the public sphere, or the degeneration of journalistic principles; or we may choose to acknowledge that the 'tabloidisation' of broadcast journalism is no more nor less than one consequence of mass democracy, with positive and negative features. One observer attacks the elitism of some critics by noting that: 'Tabloid TV news simply means news led by the audience's interests - less pompous, less pedagogic, less male; more human, more vivacious, more demotic' (Dugdale, 1995). And, like tabloid newspapers, tabloid television has in places a subversive, anarchic quality which is profoundly disturbing to the establishment. In January 1997 ITV broadcast a lengthy live debate programme on the future of the British monarchy, culminating in a telephone poll showing considerable lack of support for Prince Charles as future king and a general dissatisfaction with the royal family's performance of its role. The programme shocked and disturbed many commentators with the critical savagery and lack of deference of its participants - ordinary people who were no longer passive dupes to the mythology of the Windsors.

Jon Snow, Walter Cronkite and others are, of course, entirely right to argue that quality news about politics, economics and other 'serious' matters is crucial to democracy and must be preserved in some form, but there is no serious evidence that it is in decline. BBC television produced, as of 1995, six and a half hours of news and analysis daily; ITV and Channel 4 produced another four hours; Radio 4 six hours; and Sky News and Radio S Live were both producing round-the-clock broadcast journalism. In November 1997 the BBC launched a 24-hour news service for the domestic market. Comparable quantities of airtime are devoted to journalism in the United States and other advanced capitalist countries.

Some of this material is 'tabloid', much more is not. The nature of the mass audience means that there is a demand for both. And as the broadcasting market fragments further under the influence of new communication technologies the scope for providing a diverse range of broadcast news styles and contents will increase, enabling all preferences to be satisfied. 'Quality', or 'serious', broadcast journalism
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will survive, like the broadsheet newspapers, for as long as there are people who want to watch or listen to it.

The real economic threat to journalistic quality is not in 'tabloidisation', therefore, but in the potential effect of the proliferation of organisations, and the reduction of audience share, on the resources available to each. New technology allows greater pluralism and diversity in news provision but reduces the resources available to any single producer, thus threatening quality. As Walter Cronkite puts it:

As for the hundreds of special interests that, in the future, will supply programming for the multitude of satellite or cable channels or news sites on the Internet, it is unlikely that they will have the resources or the will to provide highly expensive, well-rounded, comprehensive news services. (1997)

Conclusions

This chapter has argued that the influence of economic factors on journalism is less predictable than we might imagine. Ownership and control give proprietors outlets through which to pursue their political agendas, of that there is no doubt, but they cannot buck market trends or ignore the views of their audience. They may try to change or influence those views (with no guarantees of success), but not to the point of putting their businesses at risk. Sometimes, as in mid-1990s Britain, they must follow their readers, in this instance as they move to the left.

Journalistic organisations have changed, it is true, from being agents of radical reform and revolution as they were in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to being essentially business organisations, working in capitalist business environments. For that reason, freedom of the media has come to mean in practice, as Ralph Miliband put it many years ago, 'the free expression of ideas and opinions which are helpful to the prevailing system of power and privilege' (1973, p. 197). If this is true as a generality we must also recognise that liberal journalism's essentially conservative function is often in conflict with the competitive demands of the media marketplace, which reward (with increased circulation and profit) exposure and revelation, particularly of the powerful. This leads to one of the most interesting features of journalism in contemporary capitalist societies and should warn us against overly simplistic denunciations
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of media ‘bias’. Modern media ‘barons’ have to reconcile the political and ideological functions of journalism (and who will deny that these are essentially conservative institutions?) with their need to survive and prosper as businesses, selling news as a commodity to a public increasingly used to publicity. This leads, in many cases, to some surprisingly ‘subversive’ journalism. This chapter has examined how the demands of the marketplace have driven the content of newspapers and broadcast journalism towards more expository, revelatory, forms of coverage, often to the point where it can indeed be described as ‘subversive’ if not necessarily ‘antisystemic’.

The abolition of the British royal family (to which, if it ever happens, the capitalist press will have contributed substantially) would not threaten British capitalism and might even revitalise it in some ways. Neither does the destruction by the press of the Tory Party’s moral reputation threaten capitalism if the alternative is New Labour (which merely wants, in the Old Labour tradition, more efficient capitalism with a more human face). Indeed, for a moral conservative such as Rupert Murdoch, avowed Christian Tony Blair’s moral agenda might seem genuinely attractive. What we have seen in Britain, it might be argued, is merely the rotation of the political elite, after 18 years, in which the Tory establishment has been relieved of its executive management of British capitalism. We can be reasonably sure that if Murdoch and the other proprietors sense the mood of their readers swinging away again, perhaps back to the Tories, they will follow suit.
Investigative reporting

WHAT TO INVESTIGATE

Investigate anything. Anything can be improved by a bit of investigation. The investigative story is often staring us in the face, waiting to be seen and looked into. The investigative story produces a story that is gathered and published or broadcast that would not have been revealed without your hard work. It provides a story of public importance that had to be pieced together from diverse and often obscure sources. It reveals a story that may be contrary to the version announced by the government or business officials, who might have tried to conceal the truth. It results in a story that is important and prominently displayed.

Investigative journalism is exciting. Consider an investigative piece as original work produced by a reporter, rather than a report on something. There will have been some attempt to conceal information, and the result will be very important to the audience.

Investigative journalists are always on the look out for corruption, mismanagement, unfairness and political secrecy. To be a good investigative reporter, you need to have in-depth familiarity with the way government and business works, how the law and the courts work and how to find out information from documents and from the Internet. You need to know how the police investigate graft and corruption, and about the civil service and criminals. You need to know how to find out about the latest drug scene, and all the rumours and gossip about who is controlling supply. A good investigative reporter has great knowledge and personal integrity, a balanced judgement, tenacity, a sense of justice and morality and a controlled sense of anger at injustice, unfairness or corruption in government or private institutions. The good investigative reporter also needs a wide general knowledge to pinpoint specific injustice and crime. Successful investigative reporters have to be fair and ethical in their investigations. If they aren’t, or involve themselves in something illegal or unfair, this can undercut the whole story and destroy a valid journalistic inquiry.
It pays to be honest and ethical. Always use an honest, direct, balanced approach when dealing with sources and investigative subjects. Sources and the public will be disillusioned if the reporter misuses the power and privilege of the press and intentionally distorts the picture or engages in superficial sensationalism. You need patience and confidence that an honest and systematic inquiry will eventually uncover the full truth or establish the official responsibility for a cover-up of mismanagement, corruption or other malfunctioning of government or a private company. You need the ability to stand back occasionally from the details of the story and view the participants in human terms. Try to imagine how the people you are investigating will think and feel, and ask yourself if you have been fair to them in your story line and approach – both to those who are your protected sources and to the people you are investigating. Successful investigative reporters also need the courage to admit that they were wrong on fact or perspective and to take the steps necessary to correct the record immediately when there has been a significant distortion that reflects adversely on anyone.

GETTING THE STORY

1. Research the records and interview in depth.
2. Don't wait to be assigned to an investigative story; come up with your own. Develop small investigative projects on your own initiative. Be a self-starter on little projects that have little risk, and deal with simple record research, thorough legal research and in-depth interviews.
3. Look for as much corroborative evidence as you can. Get documentary evidence that will support the story. You have to do it cautiously and within your existing resources; you will quickly move on to bigger pieces. The foundation of effective investigative reporting is the dull, boring routine of repetitious record-checking at police stations, government offices, the courts, and on the Internet.
4. Develop a simple and accurate method of keeping records on an investigation that will give ready and quick access to the materials, and keep them safe for your later use but remember the Data Protection Act.
5. Good interviewing is essential. The technique you use will vary depending on the story and the people you are interviewing. E-mail
can be useful. Sometimes you might like to appear ignorant of the facts when interviewing someone (but you must always be fully aware of all the facts in the case before you do any interview about it). There is no excuse in important interviews not to have examined the records, all available facts and documentary evidence before you do the interview.

6 Be careful when dealing with the police, government investigators and crown prosecutors. You don’t want to become an arm of the law enforcement; you must always be independent.

Write to the length of the importance of the story. There is a temptation to write very long, wordy pieces to justify the length of time taken on the story investigation. Resist. Don’t over-estimate the audience, or their interest. Explain in clear simple language why a particular story is worth investigating and why it is against the law, but don’t insult their intelligence. There’s no need, for example, to tell them that ‘lots of people like money’. Always relate the story to how it affects them. Comparisons and analogies are particularly useful to illustrate just how the wrongdoing is costing taxpayers money, or how it is destroying their neighbourhood. Or how, if judges worked a 40-hour week like everyone else, x number of extra cases could be sorted out in a year. However, not every story needs to be like this. Stories of sex, glamour and great wealth will always be read, however they are written.

Writing an investigative piece is not preaching a sermon or teaching a lesson. Don’t assume the audience is on your side. Every allegation must be supported with as many facts as possible; every instance in which the subject of the investigation has violated the law or accepted practice should be pointed out. Even when this is done, reporters will find that many readers display a surprisingly high level of tolerance to corruption. Your job is to show why and how the corruption exposed is bad for them, for many other people as well, or for an individual the reader can relate to. Readers aren’t interested in the trouble or frustrations of the journalist in getting the story; they want to know about the story itself. Unsupported allegations or insults directed at the subject of an investigation will always work against the reporter. Readers won’t be interested in those opinions. They’re interested in the facts the reporter has uncovered. But there’s no need to use every single fact you have uncovered.
As with all reporting, it's what you can leave out that often makes the story better. You have to know by instinct and experience how to exclude irrelevant or uninteresting information from an investigative story. Most investigative stories are too long. No one reads a story if it's too long, except specialists, and reporters are not writing for specialists but for the ordinary reader.

Investigative reporters have to live by the law. Stealing information and trespassing on private property are violations of the law. You must never deliberately misrepresent the facts, do a story for personal gain, out of a sense of victimization or out of personal bias. Beware of being too aggressive, although it's better to be this way and get the story than not.

The methods used by an investigative reporter are mainly those used by all reporters:

- interviews: introductory interviews; interviews with the people closely involved; interviews with those being investigated so they have the opportunity to give their side of the story and answer all complaints or allegations
- documents: official and unofficial; you have absolute proof in a document, and it can't change its story. Use the Internet
- surveillance: you will almost certainly have to watch people; you must see the area or the people, a slum story cannot be written without you getting first-hand knowledge of what it is like
- surveys: take a car to several garages to check on charges or how well they repair, testing the case, investigating, getting facts and figures and proof
- following a tip, an unknown voice on the phone, a casual remark from a friend: make some quick phone calls to check it out, search for some documents to substantiate at least some part of what you've been told.

To develop an investigative story, first gather lots of information about the subject. Stockpile it, organize it, make it understandable. This all takes time. Start with an idea; one idea leads to another idea, and each idea leads to a new search. When looking for a story, keep an eye out for such things as problems with public or private transport; nursing homes, prisons or public housing; well-intentioned government schemes gone wrong. Look for possible fraud or wrongdoing or inefficiency. Look for bad salesmen who may be getting people to sign...
up for wrong things. In each case, look for performance and cost. Is the school bus safe? Are the schools being overcharged for the service? Investigating government wrongdoing can mean getting a look at the records. Most investigative stories are about political issues and social problems rather than individuals, but people tend to become central issues in a story. An investigative personal profile can therefore be useful. When you are writing, decide whether to write a straight news story, a serious feature or a lighter piece. Illustrate the story and break it up with graphs, pictures and photos, but only use real shots. Never stage them or make them up.

Check and double check your facts and always keep in mind that you will probably have legal and ethical constraints on your investigative reporting. You may, however, have a public interest reason to override these constraints. Another restraint in most countries is some form of data protection in which people have the right of access to electronically stored information about themselves. Therefore it may be wise for investigative journalists to limit what is stored on their computers. Always check the local laws in operation before starting your investigation.

FURTHER READING

Unit 6
Pengumpulan dan Penulisan Berita Khusus

Objektif Pembelajaran;

Pada akhir pembelajaran unit ini para pelajar akan dapat;

1. Menerangkan kaedah umum pengumpulan berita untuk sesuatu peristiwa khusus.
2. Menerangkan kaedah pengumpulan berita daripada sumber peristiwa maut.
3. Menerangkan kaedah pengumpulan berita untuk jenis-jenis penulisan khusus.
4. Menerangkan senarai panduan penulisan berita perniagaan.
5. Menerangkan maksud penulisan berita skandal.

Topik Perbincangan Tutorial dan Latihan

1. Senarai dan bincangkan contoh-contoh peristiwa besar dan khusus yang dilihat dari perspektif kewartawanan.
2. Bincangkan kaedah pengumpulan berita untuk peristiwa besar.
3. Terangkan bagaimana pengumpulan berita yang melibatkan peristiwa maut dilakukan?
4. Bincangkan contoh-contoh penulisan berita khusus yang terdapat dalam sesebuah akhbar.
5. Bincangkan jenis-jenis penulisan rencana akhbar (newspaper column).
7. Apakah elemen-elemen yang terkandung dalam penulisan berita sukan?
8. Bincangkan panduan untuk menulis berita sukan.
10. Apa dia berita skandal.

Sumber Bahan Pembelajaran Modul

Rujukan yang digunakan sebagai bahan pembelajaran pada modul Unit 6 ini adalah sebagai berikut;

1. How to Cover Major Incidents (m.s.292)
   Sumber:
2. **Specialist Reporting (m.s.302)**
   
   *Sumber:*
   

3. **Case Studies (m.s.322)**
   
   *Scandal (m.s.325)*
   
How To Cover Major Incidents

Have you noticed that life, real honest-to-goodness life, with murders and catastrophes and fabulous inheritances, happens almost exclusively in the newspapers?

Jean Anouilh
The Rehearsal. 1950

There is an unwritten rule in journalism that the stronger the story, the easier it is to write. There is, after all, no need to spend hours chewing the end of a pencil wondering what the angle for the intro should be when the story is that 68 have died in a disco fire. But while the writing of major incident stories is usually straightforward, researching them to the point where a clear story has emerged is often difficult.

Major incidents are, by their very nature, chaotic. Even to the authorities it is often unclear, for many hours or even days, exactly what has happened. Disasters can happen in inaccessible places, in countries where communications are poor, or where authorities are badly organised and secretive. They can happen at night, or be the kind of natural disaster, like Hurricane Mitch in Central America in 1998, where it takes some days for the full enormity to be appreciated. The death toll, which for our professionally ghoulish purposes is often the key indicator of how big the story is, can often be slow to emerge. First reports of it can be particularly misleading.

Then there are the witnesses, invariably traumatised and confused, and, as a result, sometimes giving highly inaccurate testimony. The authorities, too, can often mislead: most commonly because their first priority is saving lives and not assisting journalists; or because they have an interest in promoting one aspect of the incident, or disguising another. In both the Hillsborough stadium disaster of 1989 (when 94 soccer fans died in a crush) and the Dunblane massacre (when a lone gunman killed 16 pupils and three teachers at a Scottish school) the police forces
concerned briefed to disguise their own share of the liability. These days, the threat of litigation, liability and insurance claims may make officials even more cautious, unhelpful and, occasionally, deceitful. Never underestimate the willingness of organisations involved, or representing those involved, in disasters to brief journalists to further some internal hidden agenda.

The classic case of this was the Strangeways Prison riot of April 1990, probably the most inaccurately reported major incident in living memory. It began on 1 April when prisoners, angered at overcrowding which meant they were locked in their cells for 23 hours a day, seized keys from officers. released up to 1,000 other convicts. set fire to the chapel and gym and took control of the jail. It was a major incident by any standards, made photogenic by the prisoners who hung banners from windows and sat on the roof wearing makeshift masks and hurling slates to the ground. And since the prisoners had barricaded themselves in the main blocks and held them for several days, there was no telling what was happening in there. There were strong suggestions that in the frenzy of the moment, the normally segregated sex offenders had been attacked.

This uncertainty of what precisely was happening was a vacuum that tabloid papers were not prepared to see unfilled. On 2 April, the Daily Mirror reported '11 dead in Jail Riot'; that day's Evening Standard said that 20 had died and two days later the Sun had a front page 'exclusive' that 'more than 30 might have died'. Not to be outdone, the Daily Mirror countered with 'Prison mob hang cop'. There were stories of hangings following kangaroo courts, castrations, prisoners thrown from landings, or impaled on furniture. throats slit, forced injections of 'cocktails of drugs' stolen from the prison pharmacy. batterings with iron bars and dismemberments.

There was not a shred of truth in any of these tales. Only two men had died and, as for the Mirror’s 'hanged cop', he turned out to be a convicted rapist, who was decidedly unhanged, having spent the days of the riot quietly serving his sentence in Armley Jail. 70 miles away in Leeds. What had happened was that several factors came together to make a heady cocktail of half-truths, false assumptions and lies - which the tabloids and a few of the broadsheets, then swallowed.

First there was the chaos of the situation. the impossibility of knowing at the time what was really going on. (A prime source for the 'execution stories was a solicitor who told Oldham magistrates court that his client had seen three bodies hanging from balconies. They turned out to be resuscitation dummies used in first aid classes.) Second was that many of the more lurid rumours came from men in uniform, prism officers especially. They had their own reasons for portraying the riot as 'an explosion of evil'. as they put it. Official spokesmen spoke constantly of 'deaths'. often in combination with off-the-record peddling of horror
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stories. The government department responsible added to this impression by, at one point, delivering 20 body bags to the jail.

But the press added hugely to their own subsequent embarrassment. They did not question what they were being told, and, in some cases, did not even report these statements as claims, but reported them as fact. They wanted to believe the worst, and, on this occasion, they found willing, official accomplices. They were told what they wanted to hear and believed it. The tabloids then excluded anything which did not fit with this thesis. On the morning after the riot started, for instance, a consultant at North Manchester General Hospital said in a press conference that he had not admitted any seriously wounded prisoners. Only the broadsheet papers reported it. And, crucially, most journalists did not ask themselves if what they were being told sounded plausible. They just reproduced it. They forgot that the responsibility of journalists goes beyond finding a source for a story. It extends to bringing some intelligence to bear on what sources say.

The other self-inflicted enemy of accurate, level-headed coverage of major incidents is the rush to judgement. It is far more common than the circumstances which undermined the Strangeways coverage, and journalists reporting disasters which involve human or mechanical failure are particularly prone to it. The modern need for an instant explanation, and immediate villains, pressures journalists into trying to point the finger of blame, sometimes long before all the principal facts are known. In May 1991, for instance, a Lauda Air Boeing 767 crashed in the Thai jungle, killing all 223 people on board. Among them was Don McIntosh, a 43-year-old British civil servant on secondment to the UN anti-drug programme. This fact alone was enough for the Daily Star to leap to conclusions. ‘Sacrificed’ read their front page headline over a story of how ‘ruthless drug barons’ (a knee-jerk cliché, straight from Central Casting) killed 223 people to assassinate one man. It was, of course, pure speculation based entirely on the coincidence of McIntosh’s presence on the plane. Before the week was out, the black box had been found and its tapes later revealed that an engine suddenly going into reverse thrust had caused the crash.

How to make sure your coverage of a disaster doesn’t turn into one

Often the first reports of what turns out to be a major disaster arrive on agency wires as apparently trivial incidents and then build into something huge. Sometimes it can be the other way round, appearing to be a calamity of vast proportions, which later reports correct to a relatively mundane event. Experience teaches you not to rush to make a judgement, and it can give you an instinct for which incidents will blow
big and which will stay small. A good guideline is that any incident not immediately downgraded should be treated as potentially big until you have proof to the contrary. No one’s reputation has ever been ruined by making a few extra phone calls that prove to be wasted effort, but plenty of journalists have become the life-long butt of office folklore for missing the big story.

The first hint of a potential disaster would probably come in a one-line report over the wires, something like: ‘Incident at Heathrow airport at 14.26, involving EuroAir Boeing.’ You know the domestic news agency would not bother with complete trivia, but at this stage the incident could be almost anything. From a full-scale crash to merely a small fire which leaves no one injured. So you wait. Then, maybe ten minutes later, the agency reports: ‘EuroAir from Frankfurt apparently crashed. No reports yet of fatalities.’

This is the point where a reporter and photographer get sent to the scene, and, if the news editor knows what he or she is doing, one of the better writers assigned to be the story anchor. This is the person who follows the story on the wires and creams off all the best material from the reporters in the field to write the main front-page narrative.

Further reports will now be coming in, making it clear that this is a major disaster. The plane caught fire on landing, over 100 people have died and there are many unanswered questions. As the day goes by, some of them are answered: a EuroAir Boeing 737 had some technical troubles on the plane approached Heathrow Airport. These grew worse. A fire started in one engine, which fell off in mid-air, another engine caught fire, the plane’s electric’s failed and the pilot had to land manually with only two engines. The engine that fell off landed on a school, which was fortunately unoccupied. More and more information comes in, not in the logical way that’s represented here, but in confusing bits and pieces, with retractions and corrections flying in with ever more bizarre details.

The death toll starts at maybe three or four confirmed dead. Then a reporter rings in to say he has spoken to a woman who saw ‘many bodies.’ Then you learn that on board the plane were the German Trade Minister, Deter Boch, who died in the fire after the crash landing, and rock star Elton John, who helped in the rescue. A press briefing is held where the airline says that the fire started in the cabin after the landing and within ten minutes had engulfed the plane. Only 60 of the 210 passengers are known to have survived, many of them injured. If you are lucky, very lucky, all this will be known in time for your first edition. Normally, however, the incident will be played out over several editions and the first edition has to go to press long before the whole story is known.

And, of course, running alongside this is the uncertainty for most of the day about how bad the disaster is, how many pages should be allocated to it, and how to handle the day’s other news. However, in an ideal
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world, this is the coverage a serious paper should aim for, and how it should be put together:

- **Chronological narrative of what happened:** You, or the team you are part of, must build up a minute-by-minute, or hour-by-hour, account of what occurred. From the moment it started to its final conclusion. This means never tiring of asking the question: 'And then what happened?' Try to build up a frame-by-frame video of the event in your head. You should also be in regular contact with all emergency services, hospitals and authorities. The main narrative will almost certainly be written by the anchor person and be the core of their account. The bare bones of it can also be written as a 'tick-tock' - a sidebar where entries consist of a few lines on every part of the narrative, each with its precise timing.

- **Eye-witness reports:** These are gathered at the scene by you, wires, freelances and office-based reporters calling people who have been on TV and radio. Reporters sent to a disaster or hospital should make sure they get a precise briefing on what aspect of the story they are expected to file on - colour, quotes, narrative, causes, etc. Without this, you often find several people filing what is essentially the same piece. And don't be upset if your job consists of collecting information and filing it in bits and pieces back to the office. The most common fault with most disaster coverage involving several reporters is that everyone stops reporting too early in order to get down to writing some purple-prosed version of the tale.

- **Cause:** Both the narrow, immediate cause of mechanical failures and, perhaps, the wider cause(s) are vital parts of the story, but it may take time to get hard information on them. Beware, especially, being in a rush to apportion blame. Concentrate instead on reporting the fullest picture of what happened and treat even official theories as speculation until proven. There is a long history of officials thinking aloud - sometimes wildly - about causes of disasters. Papers that report these ideas as established truth subsequently look very silly. Any unsubstantiated theory which involves terrorism or suicide should be treated with particular care, clearly attributed and any lack of proof made plain.

- **The safety record of Boeing 737s:** How many accidents have they been involved in? What were the causes?

- **Profile of EuroAir:** Full details and history of the airline involved, plus possible effects of the crash on the company, share prices, etc. If the airline's headquarters are within reach, a reporter can go and speak to staff about the company and its policies. It may, for instance, be that the airline has been economising recently, cutting back on the regular maintenance of planes in order to try to save money.
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- **Profile of the pilot**: According to the information we have, he played a heroic role in landing the plane manually and without two engines. People will want to know about his background and experience.

- **Dieter Boch obituary**: This may not be worth a separate piece, but when anyone prominent dies in a disaster, you should always put a reporter on to researching their life story.

- **Casualties**: Until the dead have identities, they are merely statistics. When you do learn their names, you want to know who they are, what they did, etc. There are nearly always stories about the person who only caught the plane at the last minute or something similar.

- **The rescue**: What happened on the ground once the plane had crashed? How did the emergency services react? Who were the heroes and heroines of the rescue? How was it carried out?

- **Elton John**: His role in the rescue and the reason for his journey, etc.

- **Chronology of recent crashes**: List of the fatal crashes in Britain in the last ten years, or the major air crashes around the world in the last two years. News agencies routinely supply this.

- **Description of the scene**: Colour from the airfield and inside the airport will be invaluable material for the main anchor piece. Look for detail and avoid the impressionistic and predictable.

- **The black box**: What is a black box flight recorder? How do they work, what do they record and what do they look like? The black box is one of those objects people always refer to, but know little about. Beyond the fact that they are an important part of any crash investigation. It is, for example, not black. A sidebar on the black box could stand on its own or be part of a piece on the investigation that follows.

- **Expert's view**: With many disasters, especially those which are rare, you suddenly need experts to explain technical matters. Plane crashes are not infrequent events, but, even so, an expert on air safety could be interviewed at length or write a piece for the paper. There may, for instance, be a retired former crash investigator who could give some fascinating insights. If you do get hold of experts like that, try to bring them into the office. After all, if they are in your office, other papers cannot get to them.

- **Anchor piece**: All the best information from these above stories (and other enquiries such as the effect on flight schedules and telephone numbers for anxious relatives to ring) would be pulled into the anchor piece. This would be the page one account of the crash and would be long and comprehensive. Normally the best approach is a simple one, with a straightforward, unemotional "It all began when..." narrative construction. Topped off with a few
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paragraphs of intro...Never try to be tricky, especially with a story that is still unfolding as you write. Report only what is certain and don’t leave any hostages to fortune when further and better particulars are known.

Not all of these elements would run as separate pieces, but many would. Some people may think that such coverage would be over the top in scale and scope. But on a story of this size you have a chance to report in depth on a matter of great public interest. Television will bring the immediate news and pictures to people first, but they cannot offer anything like the depth that papers can. A half-hour news programme contains only about as many words as does the front page of the average broadsheet paper. And, although this is not the first consideration, newspapers are judged by their staff and peers on how they cover the big stories. The most common regret in most editors’ lives is that there is a big story that they underplayed.

Death tolls

There are two aspects of reporting disasters which often give trouble – death tolls and contacting the relatives of victims. In the first few hours, death tolls are an incessant source of confusion. With natural calamities like floods, the uncertainty can last for days, and, even then, the official toll can prove to be wildly inaccurate. In the Tokyo earthquake of 1923, for instance, newspaper reports of the number of dead went from 10,000 to 500,000, and then to more than one million in just three days. The real figure was about 150,000 and by the time papers had reported that, they had also stated that Mount Fuji had erupted (it hadn’t), an island in Sagami Bay had disappeared beneath the tidal waves (not so), and that the Japanese Prime Minister had been assassinated by a frantic mob (also not true).

Early estimates of death tolls are as often a serious undershoot as an overshoot. The trouble is, you never know which until sometime later. However, with luck, there will be sufficient common agreement among the authorities for a reliable round figure to be confidently used. If not, then either take the lower figure from a source that is usually reliable and say ‘At least X people died when ...’ or take the highest figure that seems educated and say ‘Up to X people are feared to have died when ...’. No prizes for guessing which method papers normally favour, but the latter course should not be used as a licence to hype the story. And make sure you know what figure you are being given. Is it the bodies counted, or an estimate of the final toll? And the figures for those injured: is that people hospitalised? Or all wounded, however slightly?

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Even the most cautious authorities make big mistakes with death tolls. The Paddington train disaster in London in 1999 was a classic case. Two trains collided in the morning rush hour and it was immediately apparent this was a big incident. Within hours, the main sequence of events had been established, together with a death toll approaching 70. Lurid reports then began to circulate of the ‘fireball’ that had whipped through the instantly notorious Carriage H at the front of the train. Anyone inside, said officials, would have been instantly incinerated. By the day after the crash, some papers were reporting a death toll of 70-plus as fact and then this grew, on the back of briefings by the fire and police services, to ‘perhaps as many as 170’. But when the teams were sent in to search the wreckage in detail, it became apparent that, far from finding Carriage H littered with charred remains, there were no bodies in it at all. What no one – police or journalists – had bothered to do was to talk to the known survivors of Carriage H and ask them how many people were sitting in it. It turned out that, instead of the scores assumed from its capacity, there had been only a dozen. And they all escaped. Within a few days, the death toll had been reduced to 35.

The death call

Calling the relatives of victims is the job that every reporter dreads. You would have to be wired up pretty strangely to think otherwise. The difficulty, at least in the reporter’s mind, has a lot to do with the time that has elapsed since the family received the news. It always seems a lot worse to be asked to call or visit the bereaved within hours of the accident, rather than to see them days after their husband, son, wife or daughter died. In the US and other countries, where the police have less control over when names are released than in Europe, you can even find yourself speaking to a family that does not even know their loved one is dead. No wonder that some reporters, when asked to do this job, simply pretend to go through the motions and report back that no one was talking. We’ve all done it.

The death call is one of the many areas of the job where there can be no hard and fast approach. At one extreme is the idea that the public has a right to be told all details of an incident (including the minutiae of a victim’s life). Anything less is regarded as pussyfooting around. If that means bothering the newly bereaved, goes this argument, then so be it. The most insensitive case that I know of involved Los Angeles Examiner City Editor Jim Richardson. According to the autobiography of sportswriter Jim Murray, Richardson once ordered reporter Wain Sutton to call the mother of a murder victim.
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'Don't tell her what happened,' he instructed. 'Tell her that her daughter's just won a beauty contest at Camp Roberts. Then get all the information on her.' Sutton did as instructed, and the mother happily confided her daughter's life history. Then Sutton put his hand over the mouthpiece. 'Now what do I do?' he wondered. Richardson looked at him wickedly. 'Now tell her,' he purred.

As a technique, it belongs in a journalistic chamber of horrors. At the other extreme is the idea that any approach to the bereaved is an unjustifiable intrusion and therefore should not be made. Reporters, goes this line, should stick to information that can be gleaned from public sources or those with knowledge but not intimate involvement (such as colleagues or neighbours).

The most intelligent, professional attitude is, I think, to make a sensitive approach to the family, and to offer them a chance to speak. After all, who are you to deprive them of seeing the life of their loved one told, perhaps for the only time, in some concrete way, rather than being a mere name on a list of victims? And a thoughtful approach will often be surprisingly welcomed. Many bereaved want to feel that their relative had a life worth recording, and speaking to the media is also a way they can connect with the outside world and share their grief. In their situation, even talking to a reporter is part of the therapy. Daily Mirror reporter Derek Lambert wrote in his memoirs:

Whenever I visited a grief-stricken parent or grieving widow, I was welcomed into the home. Out came the scrap-books—a boy in knee-length shorts, a serviceman grinning ferociously and self-consciously in his best uniform—and out poured the memories. By the time I reached the garden gate, I was the one who felt like weeping.

The golden rule is to empathise, an attitude that is central to the excellent advice preferred by the Victims and Media Center at Michigan State University's School of Journalism. Their tips to reporters on death calls are:

- Give victims' families a sense of control. Ask them to tell you when they want to say something that they do not want in the paper. Give them your phone number and tell them that they can call to discuss the story.
- Discuss issues of privacy and confidentiality at the outset. Explain what you need, with whom you plan to talk and for how long.
- Prepare for the possibility that you will deliver bad news—such as an actual death message. These are difficult aspects of it that they had not known.
- Approach them without your notebook in hand and then ask if you can take notes. Ask if you can use a tape recorder.
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- Acknowledge their loss. Say something like ‘I’m sorry this happened to you,’ ‘I’m glad you weren’t killed,’ ‘It’s not your fault’ or ‘I’m sorry for your loss’.

If you do follow the last tip, then for heaven’s sake never catch yourself saying: ‘I know how you feel’. It’s highly unlikely that you do. Professors at Michigan State University were once told about a young reporter’s interview with a man whose daughter had just been raped and murdered. ‘I know how you feel,’ the reporter said. ‘I remember when my dog died.’ Not much comfort to someone who has just lost their only daughter.

Finally, if your contact is by phone, here is a tip on how to handle the angry or upset reaction. It comes from Edna Buchanan, the Pulitzer-Prize winning former crime reporter of the Miami Herald. In her 18 years on the paper she covered more than 5,000 violent deaths and frequently had victims’ families slam the phone down on her. Her policy was to wait 60 seconds, then pick up the phone and call again. Often, the person would have changed his or her mind or a more receptive family member would answer. ‘This is Edna Buchanan at the Miami Herald,’ she would say. ‘We were cut off,’ Buchanan adds:

It’s really important to give them the chance to reconsider because they might immediately regret hanging up or someone in the room might say, ‘You should have talked to the reporter.’ If they hang up again, I don’t give it a third chance. But more than half the time, they’d do it again on a second try.

All reporters are tough, aren’t they?

Finally, how well do you think most reporters would handle being part of a disaster? Everyone thinks that reporters are as hard as flint. Cynical, cold, calculating and maybe even a little cruel. The sort of people who can look a corpse in the eye and smile. A person, in fact, like Ben Hecht, co-author of The Front Page and a reporter with the Chicago Daily News.

In the late 1910s and 1920s Hecht covered every low-life, sordid kind of story that this roaring city of gangsters had to offer. His beat was the mortuary and the police raid, the courtroom and the condemned cell. His daily conversations were with killers and freaks, psychopaths and perverts. He had seen everything Chicago’s drags had to offer and always managed to keep his head and stomach from turning.

Until one day, when he attended the trial of a man who had slaughtered his entire family. It seemed like just another case to Hecht as he sat in the crowded reporters’ gallery watching the murderer, a great giant of a man, stand impassive before the judge for sentencing. The
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judge calmly pronounced death by hanging. and, at this, the giant came suddenly to life. Shouting ‘Hang me. will you?’ he produced from his jacket a long butcher’s knife and plunged it into the judge’s heart. The judge fell forward gasping out his life.

Stunned silence gripped the court. Everyone, including the hardened Hecht, was frozen. Everyone, that is, except a little reporter from a rival paper called the Inter-Ocean. Hecht could see him writing furiously. the only reporter out of 30 who had nerves strong enough to not be diverted from his task. He scribbled on a moment more, filling several small pages, then yelled ‘Copyboy!’ and a youth sprang forward to take the scoop off to the telephones.

Hecht later recalled: ‘None of us in the courtroom had the presence of mind to write a single word, paralysed as we were by the attack. Yet here was this guy from the Inter-Ocean, who had nerves of steel, who had never paused in doing his job. I just had to find out what he had written.’

Hecht ran after the copyboy, caught him by the arm, and grabbed the pages. On them, written over and over again in a shaky hand, were the words: ‘The judge has been stabbed. the judge has been stabbed. the judge has been stabbed ...’

When you hear something described by a journalist as disturbing, you know you cannot take it seriously.

Kenneth Robinson
Specialist reporting

THE EDITORIAL

All newspapers have an editorial page and take their editorials very seriously. Editorials inform, persuade, convince and conclude. As such, editorials are unique to ordinary print journalism. They are unique to newspapers and some magazines, and are not used in broadcasting. An editorial is about the opinions of the newspaper. It is what the newspaper believes, and is written in such a way as to convince the reader.

The editorial is about ideas and should present an idea or opinion concisely, logically and entertainingly. It should influence opinion and interpret events and news, mainly about serious issues, but not always. Sometimes an editorial is written to laugh at an issue. In the tabloid newspapers editorials are written in a very direct language; in the broadsheet newspapers editorials are usually written in more reasoned language. There is often more than one editorial; sometimes two or three shorter ones or, occasionally, one long one. The last of several is usually on a lighter subject.

Structure of the editorial

The editorial consists of three parts:
1. A statement of the subject, issue, or thesis.
2. Comment on the subject or issue.
3. The conclusion or solution.

However you write an editorial, always keep a grip on the argument throughout and never abuse people. Only abuse arguments. Begin with an unspoken question, then perhaps give various alternative answers. Assess and conclude and, in concluding, sum up somehow. Don’t just give a jumble of facts and sides of the argument. It is up to you to come down on one side of the argument or the other. The message of
an editorial always appeals to the intellect. The message can be its political or economic content.

Problem-solving editorials require a lot of research to get the solution right. You must recognize the problem, analyse it and solve it.

Editorials reflect the character, tone and style of the newspaper or magazine. They are the opinion of the newspaper. Sometimes this needs to be a single view; other times it should argue a case, illustrate an argument or opinion with facts and come to a conclusion. Don’t just assert.

Leaders should be topical whenever possible. The language should be clear, vigorous and very simple. For example, don’t say Mr X has overstated the case; say Come off it, Mr X. … Leaders can state a conclusion crisply at the start, then justify it. For example, Mr X has achieved the impossible. After much discussion, he has managed to get it wrong again.

In newspapers there’s a daily leader conference, when the leader will be discussed and its approach agreed. Remember that not everyone will automatically know the facts of the case. Never assume everyone knows the background. Leaders should give a single view, and they should be brief. Be careful of the on the one hand … on the other hand type of leader. Leaders that don’t reach a conclusion or make a point are a waste of time. Argue in a straight line. Leaders should be provocative and catch the reader’s attention. Once you have identified the issue in the opening, the body presents the argument logically. Don’t make unwarranted assumptions.

COLUMNS

Columns are popular in both tabloids and broadsheets. They are a showcase for writing style, wit and discussion about topical issues. They are very satisfying, because writers can virtually say what they think about a subject in their own style. There are five different types of newspaper column:

1. The ‘point of view’ column commenting on a current issue.
2. The ‘my say’ column, the most popular type of column and perhaps the hardest to write. You have to draw on experience. It is the personal opinion of the writer.
3 The ‘expert opinion’ column. This is a column interpreting the news. It takes more expertise than a more simple ‘my opinion’ column.

4 The trivia column. A ‘did you know’ type of column, which requires a lot of knowledge of reference books.

5 The ‘readers write, editors respond’ column. This is a dialogue-type column in which readers write in with comments, opinions, thoughts and prejudices and get a reply from the columnist or editors. It’s the print equivalent of a radio phone-in.

All news is subjective because it is selected from various possible angles. Personal columns are openly subjective, the result of ‘I’ journalism. There is no attempt to hide behind objectivity, balance or neutrality. A personal column is the work and thoughts of a signed individual, and must be seen and written as such. Personal columns need to be as original as possible. They may be witty, controversial, hard-hitting, quirky, whimsical or irritating, or all of these and more. The writer’s personality is always obvious in a good personal column. Often the column has a head-and-shoulders picture of the writer, so the reader feels they are a twosome. Style, language and tone are also appropriate to the person writing and to the newspaper.

Columns may be in the following forms:

- straight opinion
- those with a small amount of journalistic research
- those that are a selection of short features or newy stories reflecting the interests of the writer (gossip columns are like this).

Most personal columns take a significant news angle as their peg, but not always. The writing is always individual and personal to the writer. It can be a financial or politically-based column, or simply take something that attracts the writer’s attention and which is then written about in as different a way as possible.

PROFILES

Profile writing is painting portraits in words. People are news, and the profile is the best expression of the people-are-news approach of all journalism. Profiles can be of:

- people
- organizations
• buildings
• cemeteries
• roads
• parks
• schools
• festivals, and so on.

However, most of all a profile is about a person. In a people profile you are satisfying the reader's curiosity about someone: what makes a person tick, what that person has done to get where he or she is, what the person is really like behind the public face.

Developing the profile

There are many kinds of profiles and there is no standard form. A short profile may highlight some newsworthy feature of the person. This is a profile that focuses on the person's views about a specific issue or experience or highlights their recent achievement or failure. A longer profile will aim to provide an overview of a person's life. The person will be chosen because of a newsworthy element: (a new job, a new book, film, TV series, political campaign, a visitor). A person may be profiled because of an unusual feature of his or her life (an unusual job; the largest collection of . . .). It may be an obituary profile of an important or noteworthy person has died. There is also the type of profile that focuses on some aspect of a person's private life. The new financial secretary might be profiled in one paper focusing on past professional life or successes; in another paper the profile might be on reactions with family and friends. A film star might be profiled based on recent love affairs or divorces and what the star has learnt from them — I'll never do it again, says famous film star. Special focus profiles build a picture of a person around a specific angle, e.g. 'my biggest mistake', in which a person is profiled each week about their biggest mistake. Others include 'a life in the day of . . .', celebrities going shopping, etc.

The more knowledge of the person you have, the better. If you are interviewing someone, always be aware of their previous achievements. Check with Who's Who first. Before and, if possible, afterwards, ask people about your subject. You may want to include some of their views in your profile, but it will all be good background for your questions even if you don't use it directly.
Profiles don't have to begin with a newsworthy introduction. You might want to highlight a particular significant or unusual event in their past to start with, or open with a particularly revealing or interesting quote. You might have a descriptive intro focusing on what the person looks like or the environment where the interview took place (running together through a park, for example). However, many profiles are influenced by the news agenda, and in these cases the news angle must be near the top. For example:

Coincidence is a word that Gillian Slovo uses often, so it must please her that a whole set of coincidences surrounds the publication on Thursday of her fifth novel, The Betrayal.

(then go on to mention the coincidences and the book).

How about this beginning to a profile about the famous Russian conductor who is about to conduct a new work in London?

Ask anyone who knows Gennadi Rozhdestvensky — or Noddy, as he is affectionately called — for their impressions of this garrulous Russian conductor and you will get some unequivocal replies: clown, conjurer, modern Medici, a prince and protector of new Soviet music, a ghostly yet masterly, daring, wild conductor — and one of the strangest men you will ever meet. With that reputation to precede him, the grizzly bear of a fellow who turns up for his interview apologetically late, black beret pulled down over straggly grey curls, a single tooth protruding through thick, smiling lips, already holds a certain mystery — endorsed by his insistence on speaking through an interpreter, though his English is very good. Rozhdestvensky is here to conduct Boris Godunov, the revival of which opens tonight at Covent Garden; a work he has performed, he says, 'one hundred times at least'.

Most profiles carry the views of the person through the use of direct quotes. The language of these quotes is vital to showing their personality in the profile. A profile in which all the views are indirect quotes would be deadly dull. Hard news almost never starts with a direct quote, but profiles often do. For example:
'Any fool can father a child but it takes a man to be a father', says Larry Fishburne's character Furious Styles in Boys N The Hood. And anyone who has seen it will confirm that Fishburne's performance is central to the success of the film.

Some profiles will be based totally on an edited verbatim quote of the interview. Other profiles will merge direct quotes from a conversation (or several) into one long direct quote. Some profiles carry quotes from people about the interviewee, their personality and their work. Many profiles carry descriptions of the person, their appearance, mannerisms, asides, the environment where he or she lives, works or is interviewed. All this gives colour to the piece. It is not usual for a personal profile to start at the beginning and go to the end of a life; profiles change the chronology around quite a lot. For example, they might highlight a newsworthy aspect of the person at the start and then, in the body of the piece, take up a chronological theme. Sometimes it’s better to carry a sidebar box with biographical details accompanying the general profile piece, which leaves the space on the profile to concentrate on more interesting and up-to-date matters.

The tone of the piece is vital. In other words, the style needs to relate very closely to the subject. Decide whether you are writing a funny, affectionate, respectful, mocking, damming, witty, or neutral piece. Work out the tone; it affects the questions as well as the background.

When you have gathered all your information, through the basic interview with the person being profiled as well as from comments and quotes and background about the person from others and from the library cuttings, close your notebook. The worst way to write such a story is to look through what you’ve written to get the information you want. You have been with this story for some time; you know the person very intimately. Sit at the computer and just write your impressions as a first draft. The story is not in your notebook; it’s in your head. If you understand what you have just heard, and what the story is about, you’ll come back and write the story from your head and from what you remember. What you remember will be what interests you, and what interests you will interest the reader. Listen to the tape, or look at your notes afterwards, to confirm what you’ve written and to check the quotes. Always write your story from what you know, understand, believe to be the case and observe. Be selective about the quotes you use.
Take this story from the Wall Street Journal:

Gastronome No. 1 isn't your usual Communist grocery store. Its pre-revolutionary hall has mirrored walls, a stained-glass window, 18-metre high gilded ceilings and chandeliers. Crowds give it the air of a baroque Grand Central Station.

The lure of the place has to do with the rare items for sale: fresh Brazilian coffee, ripening Nicaraguan bananas, Cuban rum, and a rich assortment of meats and cheeses. In the culinary desert of the Soviet Union, it is something of an oasis.

Gastronome No. 1 has a new director. The previous one, Yuri K. Sokolov, was executed for illegally selling rare delicacies – like black caviar and wild boar – out of the back door to certain special customers – Western businessmen, Communist Party big shots and so forth.

A firing squad might seem stiff punishment for a little pocket lining. But shoppers shuffling through Gastronome No. 1 on a busy Friday evening and the staff in their neatly pressed white uniforms shed no tears.

One woman buying tomatoes to make Saturday night's soup thinks Mr. Sokolov got his just desserts.

'He needed to answer for it' declares Mira, an attractive 58-year-old doctor. 'You can't allow corruption to live. It must be stopped...'

There is no quote until paragraph six. The rest is getting readers interested, sketching the background, describing the whole thing so they get the right pictures in their mind for what is coming. A profile is about a person. Effective quotes are selected pieces of the conversation between interviewee and interviewer. As a journalist, you have to deliver the quotation to the reader in its best form with proper placement and economical yet responsible focus. You also have to remember appropriate grammar, word usage and punctuation so that the reader understands the spoken words the way in which they were meant.

Once you've written the profile from the head and from the heart, reread what you have written. Look for clarity and conciseness. See whether you have chosen the best words to tell the best story.
Specialist reporting

Remember, the second draft will usually be better than the first, and that complexity in language is easy, simplicity in language is difficult. Examine each verb; are they mostly active? Examine each adverb; does the adverb clarify the verb? Instead of using an adverb, try to find a better verb: not she moved slowly but she crept. She cried hard can become She sobbed. Examine each noun: use the best, most accurate noun. He is a young boy can become He’s a first-former. She made a lot of money when she was young can become by 25 she’d made her first million. Examine each adjective: ask yourself if you’ve used too many or too few. The right adjective helps a story; the wrong one doesn’t. Get rid of extra words and try to make everything shorter; it’s usually better that way. Be careful about statistics: don’t let them get in the way of the story. If you need to show statistics, put them in a box or chart to give the whole list. In your writing you should tell the reader the result, not the workings that led to the result.

REPORTING SPEECHES

All reporters will spend a lot of time listening to and reporting speeches. They form a large and important part of the daily job. The speech given is not yet a story. The reader wants to know what is said, what it means, how important it is; not just that a speech has been given. If nothing new is said in the speech, don’t report it. Normally you should summarize the main point made in the speech. It might have taken an hour or more, but you’ll be covering it in about 400 words maximum. Speakers don’t write their speeches in news form, and you will have to translate it into that form for the newspaper. Use the speaker’s words when they are most interesting; there’s no need to use them all the time. You are a journalist, not a stenographer. You’re creating a story, not simply repeating the speech verbatim. Analyse all the speaker has said; find what is new, what is interesting, what is valuable to the reader. These then become the points of the story. There will sometimes be more than one issue of interest. If there is one main point, use a single-incident lead and then mention the other important items in the following paragraphs. Somewhere in the first three paragraphs or so give the speaker’s background. The reader wants to know who is saying this and what his or her qualifications are. This paragraph
should also mention any local tie-ups, such as the group to whom the speech is made. If you get a handout of the speech, be sure to check it against what is actually said. Speakers sometimes put things in or leave things out, and these can be important additions or omissions.

SPORTS REPORTING

Sports reporters are often thought of as 'underdogs', not doing a proper job. However, the sports page is usually what many people in general turn to first. The sports department usually has its own head, the sports editor. Sports and finance have similar approaches, similar problems and similar styles of individual writing. Like finance writing, sports journalism has a lot of comment and speculation – unlike news reporting, of course, which deals solely in facts. Sports news is often presented in an interpretative rather than objective way. Like finance, sports reporting also relies on a specific type of vocabulary and an assumption of special interest and knowledge by the readers.

Sport usually has its own specialist staff for each type of sport, though newsroom journalists are often recruited to help with the wide variety of match coverage on Saturdays and weekend evenings. The sports editor controls page planning, sub-editing and production.

Sport is news, and it is usually given a larger proportion of total editorial space in the dailies and Sundays than most other specialities. The popular subjects can take up as much as 15 per cent of available space in the daily newspaper. It is essential to have good journalists who can and want to write about sports so that newspaper sports coverage is improved, writing is tightened up, better graphics and pictures are used and local events get more and better coverage. Above all, sports writing must be objective, and not just PR for athletes and footballers.

Sports reporting should inform, interpret and illustrate; it should be fact oriented, background oriented (profiles of sports celebrities) and opinion oriented.

Sports reporting can be factual or can be opinions about the team or event. All sports stories should contain the following elements:
• the final score (usually at the top)
• names of the teams or people taking part
• when the game took place
• where it took place
• key players
• crowd details
• quotes from players/coaches/supporters
• injuries
• any records set during the game
• effect of the game on the team’s standing in the league
• any oddities, length of game, etc.
• weather, if a factor.

Sports stories are often written in advance as features for publication on the day of the big game. Afterwards you would write a results story based on the above points.

Sports features

Guidelines for sports writing of an advance type include:

1 The significance of the game.
2 Tradition and history. How the teams’ or players’ rivalry began, and the most exciting and/or unusual contests they’ve played in the past. How they stand in won-and-lost figures in the series. The outcome of the last encounter is important.
3 Team or player records during the current season. Comments on the player/team records.
4 An analysis of comparative scoring records against mutual opponents.
5 Team/player conditions – physical and mental.
6 The weather. How possible changes may affect the outcome. How teams and players have performed in wet/dry/hot/cold.
7 A comparison of the way players/teams play, e.g. in tennis a player’s volley, serve or backhand against the opponent.
8 The individual angle. In a team, the importance of one player to the whole – whether he or she is in or out of the particular game.
9 The local situation. The atmosphere in the city where game is being played (in soccer in the UK, the home side usually has an advantage).
Writing style and special vocabulary

The special style can be seen from the following examples:

Clive Rees cut inside from Dacey’s pass with Scotland in turmoil. The ball switched magically between Dacey again, then David Richards, Eddie Butler and then to Robert Ackerman. He completed the break, Mark Wyatt surged through on the over-lap and gave the final transfer to Rees. . . . (rugby)

Kevin Reeves had one solid 20-yarder touched wide by Mick Leonard and centre-back Caton found the net with a seventh-minute header only to be ruled offside. The tricks and illusions misfired and when Hartford and Bodak combined at speed, centre-forward David Cross hit his close-range return embarrassingly 10 feet over Bodak’s head . . . . (soccer)

Soon afterwards, Brewgawn raced clear and it became a Dickinson monopoly as the chestnut’s four stable companions followed on. Captain John looked a big danger but made a mistake at the third last and had to settle for second. David Goulding said. ‘He was very unlucky – nearly on the floor – and it took the stuffing out of him’. Jonjo O’Neill produced Wayward Lad to perfection to have every chance at the last but the eight-year-old could do no more, finishing third. . . . (racing).

REPORTING LIFESTYLE

What is a lifestyle story? It’s about people and how they live, and about our culture. Lifestyle reports in newspapers can include lots of things and be about all kinds of stories. They can be about business, news, sport. However, they all have one thing in common: they relate the story to the way people live. Included can be such things as:
• food
• entertainment
• drama
• reviews
• television and the media
• sports
• business (from the point of view of shopping, fashion etc.)
• weather
• pollution
• new ways of spending leisure time
• medical breakthroughs that help our way of living
• travel.

In other words, these stories are about anything connected with the way we live. This therefore needs a different approach. Whereas other forms need a highly critical, factual or newsy approach, lifestyle stories can simply be soft and explore current and future living and lifestyles.

REPORTING BUSINESS

Business and economic news is news, not something specialized. It can be specialized, but only for the finance/money pages. This is why there are techniques for both the specialist and the general reporter. The trick is not to make it an advertising feature but to have enough interest and a specific story angle to cover all the business facts you want to write about. You must have facts and background, not just quotes from the people involved in the business; that’s just a public relations advertising story. Business stories are about new trends in business; profit and loss, fashion trends, comparisons of old and new business practices, not just about what a good brand of tea a particular shop sells. The business story has a major problem that must be addressed when writing it; it can be complicated and boring because of all the facts and figures and money terms it might contain. The goal of the business journalist is to report, accurately, the financial news (and remember, a misplaced decimal point can cost a fortune). Reporters have to make business news understandable and interesting.

In order to achieve this goal, every business story must be interesting and it must explain. To explain, you first need to understand, and this
often means admitting to yourself that you don’t know. Business news has to be made understandable to the ordinary reader as well as to the highly-educated business tycoon. To make the story interesting, it is a good idea to focus less on statistics and more on people. Changes in the economy affect people’s lives; business is full of human dramas and reporters often forget to write about the people affected by or behind the statistics. There must also be well-developed and interesting background, full of comparisons, facts and figures.

Guidelines for reporting business affairs

1 Avoid economic jargon. Don’t use the jargon of the economists and financial specialists. Translate.

*The official called on indigenous producers of industrial, consumer and other products to engage in local sourcing of component materials*

really means:

*Officials are urging local manufacturers to use local raw materials*

so write it that way.

Using economic jargon is a sign that the journalist has fallen victim to the real danger of economic jargon; hearing it so often that it sounds normal. It isn’t to ordinary people. There is a danger of oversimplification and distortion in translating economic jargon into normal language, but it can usually be done by stopping and thinking what the jargon really means. If possible, a good technique is to ask speakers to summarize what they are saying in everyday language, so the speakers (not you) do the translation.

2 Define economic terms. When you have to use economic jargon, then explain if possible. For example:

*Volatile inter-bank interest rates, which have been relatively stable in the past three months, shot up by about three percentage points yesterday.*
Later in the story, where it fits, it might be a good idea to add:

*Inter-bank interest rates are the rates at which banks lend money to and among themselves, and which are usually a fundamental factor taken into consideration when banks arrive at their final interest rates for loans to their customers.*

The *Wall Street Journal* and the London *Financial Times* always do this. The *Wall Street Journal* usually explains gross national product when it first appears in a story (the total value of a nation's output of goods and services). Explaining can take more words but, if they add to the story and make it more readable, so be it.

3 *Use statistics sparingly.* Reporters usually use too many figures. Important figures give authority and precision to an article; you should try to get rid of those that aren’t crucial to the story. Find your lead and then find the figures that will support what you are writing about. Forget the rest. The ordinary reader doesn’t need the data; the specialist reader already knows. Statistics can be put in sidebars or boxes outside the main text. Let the text of the story develop the why and wherefore of the statistics, not be used to provide the statistics.

4 *Compare statistics.* When you use figures in a story, put them into context. Numbers have little significance on their own; their true meaning comes from their relative value. When you write figures, ask yourself, ‘compared to what?’ Most statistics can be compared to equivalent statistics from another time, such as last year or the last financial quarter. They can be compared to equivalent statistics from another place, such as a neighbouring country or a competing company.

5 *Turn statistics into stories.* You, as a journalist, need to do more than report the figures. You have to turn them into stories by explaining their significance and saying what they mean. Ask: what's going on here, what does this all mean?

6 *Get the other side of the story.* You get a routine company announcement. Don’t just write up the press release or the announcement: that’s PR. There’s usually another side to the story. Find it. A single source rarely gives a complete picture. Find other sources to give other views. Be sceptical. Don’t believe everything you are told.
7 Humanize business news. Business news is about numbers, so the numbers have to be turned into people – not just government officials and business executives, but real people. Look for the human angle. Show the readers how they relate to the news or the story; how they are affected.

8 Show the significance of the story. Ask: so what? This is an important test when writing any story; particularly so with business stories. You have to explain to the readers what the consequences of a news event are likely to be; why the news is important for the company, workforce, industry, nation and, particularly, for the readers.

9 Go beyond the press release. The release is only the starting point. It is where you get an idea from which you develop your own story. Flesh it out. Company press releases should always raise questions that require answers from the company itself. Find out the significance of the announcement. Ask what impact the development will have on the company, and on other companies. Will it have an impact on the workforce? How will it affect the industry? Or the nation? Or the readers? All these questions need answers, and all spring from the simple press release. Never trust press releases, and never just copy them.

10 Generate unusual business story ideas. Find new angles on business developments. Find the business angle in important general news stories, and look at the human angle of business news. Examine trends that grow out of and have long-term importance for particular events. Look for trends. Look for case studies that illustrate a trend. Business isn’t just about big business; it’s also about small business, and small businesses are about people. To write financial or business stories, it’s important to know the rules of the game.

There are two types of business journalism:

- that intended for the experts
- that intended for the ordinary reader.

Sometimes finance/business journalism does not appear on the general pages but in its own section. However, business and finance generate a lot of good news and feature stories that can and should interest the general reader. Journalists need to have some knowledge of it, even if they are just going to be ordinary reporters.
THE PHOTOPAGE AND PHOTO NEWS

Words alone don't tell the whole story; pictures and other visuals are also necessary. All reporters need to have good photo ideas, whether they take the pictures themselves while doing the story or whether they ask a photographer to take them. The same applies with other visuals. Reporters need to be aware of the importance of charts, graphs and illustrations, and to be able to suggest ideas to editors and graphic artists. Print reporters need to present a complete package of information: words, photos and illustrations. That's the way print journalists compete with television. A good story without any pictures might be run somewhere in the paper; with good pictures, it might be on page 1. Stories for the photopage need to combine the best words and the best art (photos, illustrations, charts, cartoons and other visual elements).

Newspaper reporters must add 'visual' to their list of story requirements. Visuals are not possible in every news story, but whenever they can be used, they add to the story and help the reader understand. Reporters must respect the importance of visuals; be prepared to understand the news requirements of charts, photos, illustrations; and understand the needs of and be willing to co-operate with photographers, artists and graphic designers. Photos make the reader stop scanning and read. They're that important. Reporters need not only to find the facts and write the story; they also need to find statistics that can then be converted to an easy-to-read chart and identify people who can be used in accompanying photos. The best photos provide their own messages, whether emotional or intellectual. The best illustrations add impact to the story by simplifying difficult facts and figures. Always be thinking of ways of taking the difficult statistics out of the body of the text and making them simpler to understand by graphics or a box.

Pictures need some kind of identification, usually called captions. The job of a caption is to explain the subject of a picture. There are two kinds:

1. Self-contained photostories built around the subject of the picture with extended captions providing the text.
2. Pictures used to illustrate a story, with simple line captions.

Writing a self-contained caption story is a skilled job. It gives scope for fun and imagination, since it often has to give a reason for using a
picture that in itself may be decorative or visually attractive but not necessarily newsworthy. A line caption is simply for identification, although a quotation on a news point should be used where possible—for example, *After the ordeal, Jane Smith considers the decision or Jane Smith: I’m lucky to be alive.*

All pictures need captions. Readers see the picture first and are therefore entitled to know who or what it is about. They will then want to read the story. Captions are always written in the present tense, even if the picture isn’t a ‘now’ one. The caption should normally identify everyone in the picture. Using (left) is acceptable, but try not to say, for example, *Mr Li (sitting).* It means you have to look too closely at the picture. If this is the only way of identifying those in the picture, choose another, clearer picture.

There must be a better way of writing a caption than, for example, *Mr Li enjoying a joke* (which you can see anyway). Try to write the caption as you would a TV script. Don’t identify what you can see, but give it some other kind of interest. For example, a picture of a chief executive could say: *Chief Executive Mr Wong,* or it could better say:

*Accountable . . . while emphasizing the business side of the Jockey Club, chief executive Lawrence Wong seeks openness, transparency and accessibility.*

Further examples include:

*Memorial . . . tourists in Beijing visit a tunnel used in the war against Japan.*

*Punting for tourists . . . life along the Sepik is changing.*

*All alone . . . the days when the elderly could look forward to twilight years surrounded by their children and grandchildren have gone as families fragment and move apart.*

In a photostory, there has got to be a better way of describing a picture than: *Jane (left) and Joyce check a diamond for a client.* In the picture you see the client and the two shop assistants, with one of them clearly checking a diamond. A much better caption with more interest would be a quote from
the story: A diamond is forever, so it's got to be right, which adds a lot to the picture of the woman checking the diamond. Over another picture of a woman checking a diamond: It takes an expert to find the best.

The problem with writing text to go with the photostory is that you should have only enough words, and not too many. Again, think of your script as a TV script to go with the pictures. You don't describe and tell the listener what's there on the screen in a TV script; the same applies in a good text for a photopage. Sometimes a very few words might be enough to provide a context, set the story up or to provide some colour or emotion to go with the pictures. You will certainly have to explain why you are running these pictures (where they were taken etc.).

Sometimes, only clever captions will be enough or you might need a lot of words; that is, make a story for which the pictures are further explanation. You, the photojournalist, must make these decisions. However, always try to write in a way that is different, creative and complements the picture story. Your photopage is a picture story, first and foremost. The words are secondary. If the words are the main part of the photopage, there is something wrong with the pictures and they should not be a two-page spread. Just as you write a news story differently from a feature, so you write a photopage story differently from anything else.

A good story idea for a photopage should be aimed at providing the pictures that will best show the idea you have. Try to have pictures that are interesting and say something in their own right. They should provide the reader with some additional information, interest, emotion that words can't give. They should also, wherever possible, show something that has movement in it, although a picture of a beautiful bowl of fruit or flowers can also provide all the elements of a good photopage.

The photos should provide easily recognizable links for the theme. The pictures can tell the story from beginning to end; they can compare, say, various historical and modern temples in Hong Kong; they can show the various stages of kicking a soccer ball; ballet lessons. The story ideas are limitless. Be creative and use your imagination to construct a theme that only pictures can tell, and the words will then write themselves.
INFORMATION GRAPHICS

Get used to thinking visually for your difficult data and statistics. People read charts on two levels:

- the visual (a quick scan that picks up the trends or relationships)
- the closer look (when the reader comes back to the graphic and looks at the numbers, the trends and the deeper levels of meaning provided by the graphic information).

Readers understand data better in graphics than in text, and remember the information presented pictorially and visually better than in text. Readers don’t like difficult artwork. The visual must never distract, distort or make understanding more difficult; the simpler the better. As a reporter, you need to ask yourself: “What’s the best way to tell my story?” The answer will be one of several: inverted pyramid; narration; lists; sidebars; graphics. Or, more usually, a combination of these and other ways. Often the story will be better told in pictures, graphics, illustrations or maps rather than in words.

Types of graphic

1. Pie charts. Think of these as pies cut into different size slices. Each slice shows the relationship of that part to the whole. In an election, for example, if 25 per cent of people vote for party X the X slice will be a quarter of the pie.
2. Line charts. Think of these as video. They show motion; lines rise or fall (like on a hospital temperature chart). They emphasize trends.
3. Bar charts. Think of these as a still picture. They freeze the numbers so readers can look at the comparisons. They can show trends, but they are most useful for comparing numbers at a given moment.
4. Tables. Tables help organize lots of data that do not necessarily have a mathematical relationship. A voting chart will show how the people in each area voted etc.

Remember: numbers don’t mean much until they are compared to something else.
FURTHER READING

Case Studies

Introduction

In the first part of the book we saw thematic analysis illustrated by a series of small-scale examples. In the second part we move to a set of extended case studies. Their purpose is twofold:

- They give the opportunity to test various ideas about our central topic against sets of linked events, rather than seeking illustrations for analytic themes from the ebb and flow of events in general. The more systematic approach typical of the extended case study should strengthen the validity of the claims made in the central analytic points.
- They explore one of the central propositions in the overall analysis of the book: that news values are inseparable from the continuity or discontinuity of the flow of events through time. It follows that these elements of continuity and discontinuity enter into source strategy calculations. If this proposition is correct, then it is only through longitudinal studies, and perhaps especially case studies, that the function of news values can be clearly analysed.

It is these purposes that underlie the choice of case study material. Two problems are clear in any case study based analysis: their suitability to the purpose at hand and their typicality in relationship to the general field of analysis.

Where suitability is concerned, in each instance I have sought sequences of events in which the flow of information via the mass media was clearly central to the course of events (in one way or another). The role of mass-mediated information allows an assessment of the relationships between news values and source strategies. As a result of the central role of events with a common theme and some substantial duration, it is inevitable that the stories in question are all - by average journalistic standards - big stories.

Where typicality is concerned, it must be said that my choice of case studies is inevitably untypical of news output in general, precisely because the stories are ones with high news values and extended duration. However, since news is largely event-driven, no story will ever be typical of news output in general, what is typical is not the event or its coverage but the process which leads from the event to its coverage. Events in general do not have protracted media lives and short-lived events are potentially just as typical of the relationship between news values and source strategies as are the protracted media events I have chosen. However, there is no reason to suppose that where the basic news processes are concerned there is any fundamental difference between protracted media events and one-shot ones. This is so despite some obvious differences such as the extraordinary allocation of source and journalistic resources to
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protracted events. This type of difference is reflected in current newsroom terminology about such stories: references abound to 'feeding frenzy' or (in Continental newsrooms) the 'newswave'.

A related problem of typicality is to be seen at the lowest level of media attention to events. Total omission of an event from media accounts. Where events are not covered, it is difficult in principle to know whether it is due to lack of media interest, or the capacity of potential news sources to hide what they are doing. Silence is as important a form of communication as its opposite, in the case of crisis public relations and damage limitation exercises it may well be the optimum result. Clearly events which do not have media lives, but which might have but for the efforts of news sources, are difficult to assess if one is not privy to the loop of information in which the possible results of different communications tactics are discussed. In particular, if silence or near-silence was sought and achieved, how could one know that an 'event' had taken place, or what its potential scope was? Assiduous reading of memoirs or similar documents may provide examples, some time after the event, but otherwise the analysis of news values and source strategies in such cases is difficult.1

The first case study is 'scandal'. This term can be applied to a wide range of human behaviour, and stories falling into this category have been common in the last ten years. We shall see examples of stories from the traditional news domain about sexual behaviour, but also from finance and business. I was unable to speak to any sources in this instance, due either to their refusal, or my own unwillingness to approach people who would certainly not add anything to what they had already said. In these case studies we will see the following features of the news encounter.

- Sources of information about scandals are often hidden, for obvious reasons, but where they can be identified, their motives and the techniques they use for placing information will be shown.
- The nature of scandal is such that in any scandal of substantial duration, sources with very different relationships to the scandalous material are involved, and this provides the opportunity to analyse features of different types of source motive and tactics. In particular, we can look at the features of source activities which come to light in conflict situations.
- Scandals deriving from different domains of behaviour will demonstrate different patterns of source and journalist behaviour. In the case of the sexual scandals analysed, it will be clear that the circulation of information between different types of media, each using their own news criteria, played a crucial role in the structure of the events.
Scandal is a long-term news value in its own right, in the sense that
denunciation of any substantial breach of consensual morality
makes frequent appearances in news output. In Chapter 2 we saw
the relationship between the ‘universal’ or ‘textbook’ news values
and the ‘local’ contexts in which they are manifested, which are
interpretations of events.

It is often thought that scandal is particularly associated with tabloid
reporting, especially perhaps where sexual scandal is concerned.
Some attention will be given to the differences between types of
reporting of scandal, and particularly to the element of decorum
involved in editorial calculations in this respect.

The second case study is the sequence of events surrounding
Greenpeace’s occupation of Shell’s Brent Spar oil storage facility in the
spring and early summer of 1995. In this instance, the ‘zero-sum game’
that arose as result of the direct opposition between two antagonists
produced a situation in which countervailing attempts at event
definition via the mass media are particularly clear. In this case study
we shall see the following features of news encounters

* The tactics that were used by both sides in this conflict can be
analysed in detail, and this will tell us more about the relationship
between source motives and tactics, in other words more about
source strategies

* The role of silence in the structuring of event profiles is amenable to
analysis because of the particular sequence of events. This reveals a
feature of source strategies that is frequently not amenable to
analysis since silence is rarely observable.

* The sequence of events in the spring and summer of 1995 was self-
contained in the sense that it was dominated by a single issue, this
makes it easier than usual to see the main features of the event
profile. This shows us how ‘universal’ news values were embodied
in the ‘local’ news values of event interpretation. This will make it
possible to analyse the relationship between news values and
source strategies on a well-developed empirical basis.

* Some attention will be paid to the relationship between regional,
national and international information flows, a feature of both news
and source behaviour which is traditionally less studied than those
elements which are national.

In the conclusion to Part II (pp. 119-36), we will look again at what
these case studies can tell us about the news encounter; the contents of
the case study chapters are primarily orientated to the internal
characteristics of each case.
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Scandal is a staple ingredient of popular journalism, and examples of press denunciations of improper conduct on the part of those who ought to behave properly are not difficult to find at all periods in the short history of the popular press, even though it is commonplace to denounce current press conduct by reference to an earlier period where such 'sensationalism' was less prevalent (see e.g. Leapman, 1992: 14-15). The extent to which scandal is - or has been - a staple of broadsheet journalism is less well discussed, and was the subject of controversy in the wake of the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Arguments about the role of freelance photographers in bringing about her death rapidly became linked to arguments about sensationalism in journalism in general. Recent UK history has been marked by a rich crop of scandals: two-thirds of Great Parliamentary Scandals (Parris, 1996), out of a total of forty for the whole of British history, occurred during the last two decades; while this is no doubt partly due to editorial choice, the availability of the topics is indicative. 'Reviews of the Year' for 1998 placed the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal as the major news story of the year. Political scandals since the 1997 UK elections are documented in Jones (1999).

Stories categorized in the contemporary press as 'scandal' refer to events ranging from sexual misconduct to financial impropriety, political corruption, and negligence or other misconduct which produces danger for the public. Commentaries on the frequency of such stories usually refer to the cultural framework within which they occur in order to understand them. Such framing elements range from a supposed 'anti-business bias' in journalism (Tumber, 1993: 347-9) to postmodern theories of 'carnivalesque' mockery of social norms (Mellencamp, 1992: 209; Fiske, 1989: 87, 1989b: 168-70). Other frequently cited cultural frames (for sexual
scandal) are the supposedly puritanical nature of British culture (see e.g. Financial Times, Guardian, 22.3.95, Independent on Sunday, 7.9.97), which produces an obsessive interest in other people's sexual peccadilloes, and the sociological function of the media (and gossip in general) in containing deviance by giving it negative publicity (e.g. Markovits and Silverstein, 1988: 2–3; Pearce, 1973; Mellencamp, 1992: 168–71). Central to public understanding is also the 'Fourth Estate' theory of the press, according to which one of its central functions is the watchdog role of denunciation (Siebert et al., 1963: 41–57, 74; Curran and Seaton, 1985: 284–301). These traditional themes in the explanation of the frequency of scandal in news reporting are also markers of the 'local' news values of scandals they indicate the reasons why scandal provides something which is of interest and/or importance. But we should add immediately that these operate in conjunction with even more local news values deriving from the identity of the participants.

I will review relevant theories below, but I can say immediately that they omit one important element: the structure of the information flow which produces the public representation of the events in question (see Lowi, 1968). Any adequate analysis of scandal must be able both to account for the information flows in question (which derive from source strategies) and to speak to the wider framework within which they occur, in other words the news values of scandal.

We start by reviewing an analysis of news which makes 'scandal' one of its main components, and which pays central attention to the role of news sources: Molotch and Lester's 'News as Purposive Behaviour' (1981) The authors start from the distinction between 'occurrence' and 'event'. An 'occurrence' is anything which happens, an integral part of which is the meaning or meanings attached to it by participants. 'Event' refers to the same happening transmuted into something with a public profile which has become fixed in the process of becoming public, primarily via the mass media.

There are various roles in event production, primarily their 'effector' (the person responsible for the original occurrence) and their 'promoter' (the person who makes information about it publicly available). Molotch and Lester then outline a typology of categories of events, distinguished on the basis of two variables: Was the original occurrence intended or unintended? Was the public profiling brought about by the effector or the promoter?

The interaction of these variables produces four categories of events (see Table 4).
Scandal

Table 4.1 Categories of events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event promoted by</th>
<th>Occurrence accomplished</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intentionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effector</td>
<td>Routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoter</td>
<td>Scandal</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Typical examples of a 'routine event' are a press conference and a demonstration, however, for Molotch and Lester the products of investigative journalism are also routine events, but routine events where the promoter is the same person as the 'news assembler' - by 'digging', the reporter creates an event (but not an occurrence) and promotes it by publishing the results (1981: 129) An accident is an event whose original occurrence was not the intended result of purposive activity, but which gets promoted and therefore publicly defined by someone else; whereas 'serendipity' is similarly not the intended result of purposive activity but is promoted by the person responsible. In this schema, 'scandal' is defined in terms of the split between the person who intentionally accomplishes the occurrence and the person who 'promotes' the event by giving it a public profile, there is no further element in the definition.

This schema is not entirely consistent. First, the role of the 'effector' of the occurrence is ambiguous. Effectors are responsible for the occurrence, which has the meanings attached to it by participants, but they play no part in event definition unless they are also the promoters, responsible for event definition. Yet in the case of investigative journalism, the effector disappears the promotion of the event is the same as the 'effecting' of an occurrence - or rather, the occurrence has entirely disappeared from the scheme of things. However, two features of investigative journalism fit badly with this model. Investigative journalism is most satisfactorily defined in terms of the bypassing of routine sourcing of stories in favour of some other access to information sources (Murphy, 1991. 9–19, 43–50), which implies an important role for sources - in other words someone other than the news assembler. It is also commonly understood to involve the undermining of some set of meanings already established in the public domain: an 'exposé' uncovering facts to establish a set of connections between events not previously established; this implies some concordance of values between the denunciation and a set of publicly recognized meanings, which have no place in Molotch and Lester's schema. Second, in this analysis 'scandal' is not necessarily anything shameful; a modest man who did not blow his own trumpet,
and who was discovered and ‘promoted’ by someone else would be
‘scandalous’, at the very least, this runs counter to common-sense
understanding of the term. Third, although ‘news assemblers’ are said
to be central to the process of event creation, they have no part to play
in the typology of events, which are differentiated entirely by
reference to the divergent roles of effectors and promoters. This
omission allows no role for news values in the process. All of these
weaknesses derive ultimately from the same source: the argument that
events have no intrinsic meanings, only the meanings that are attached
to them in the act of labelling them (Molotch and Lester, 1981. 119–21),
this allows no role for culture, in which events may be assigned to
predefined places in accordance with commonplace meanings.

At the same time, the strength of Molotch and Lester’s analysis is
clear: one of the central elements of a scandal is certainly the fact that
the person responsible for the scandalous conduct loses control of the
information flow about the events in question. To this extent, defining
scandal in terms of the divergent roles of effectors and promoters
makes sense. This strength derives from the same source as the
weakness noted above: events do indeed have to be defined in some
act of labelling them. To put the schema in the terms already used, the
role of news sources is central: in the absence of someone prepared to
denounce someone else, scandal would arguably never arise (for
current purposes, we may ignore guilty self-denunciation). Thus the
basic structure of a scandal consists of a denunciation that is picked up
by the news media and publicized. a scandal which is only known to a
small group of involved people scarcely fits the usual definition of the
term, in which the element of public knowledge is central (Lull and
Hinerman, 1997. 11–13). If scandal implicitly involves publicity, then
what is important here is the centrality of news judgement in
establishing the profile of an event which is potentially ‘scandalous’,
but this is inseparable from the judgement that what has occurred does
indeed plausibly have the negative meaning ‘scandalous’. A good
example is the case of Mary Ellen Synon and Rupert Pennant-Rea
(March, 1995). She denounced him as an adulterer, but had consider-
able difficulty in finding a newspaper willing to publish, not because
anyone doubted the reliability of her information but rather its value,
despite his public position (Deputy Governor of the Bank of England)
there were doubts about the public importance of his behaviour.
Eventually the Sunday Mirror accepted her story, and he was forced to
resign. To this should be added the salacious details Pennant-Rea’s
mistress supplied about their meetings in his office at the Bank which
inevitably attracted puns about the ‘Bonk of England’ (she subse-
quently claimed on RTE radio, reported in The Times, 22.3.95, that
some of these details had been invented by journalists). The
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salaciousness refers to a news value: sexual explicitness, which is
disjoint from both fame and deviance (or may be considered a variety
of deviance, depending upon the moral framework used to evaluate
the information). It is the combination of these elements which
brought about the news judgement that this story was worth printing.
Here disagreements over the meaning of the event illustrate the point
about the interaction between news sources and cultural definitions of
events, and the central role of journalistic judgement.

The discussion of the structure of scandals needs more case study
material, and recent press history furnishes a rich crop of examples.
My chosen focus is the series of sexual and other scandals that
The extent to which these can be seen as typical will be examined later,
and will be relevant to the various theories referred to above. In
keeping with the focus of this book, my initial concern will be the
structure of the information flows.

On 20 July 1992 the People newspaper revealed an affair between
David Mellor, the Minister for National Heritage, and Antonia de
Sancho. On the previous evening, Mellor had offered to resign in order
to avoid embarrassing the Government; the offer was refused, on the
grounds that the affair was a personal matter which did not affect the
conduct of his duties. There followed a week of intense media
attention, which then rapidly waned; however, early in September it
was rekindled by new 'revelations' about the affair - mostly consisting
of salacious details - which, in conjunction with further revelations
about Mellor's behaviour unconnected with his affair with de Sancho,
produced sufficient pressure to cause his resignation.

References to these events continued for an extended period -
indeed still occurred occasionally at the time of writing in 1997-98 -
and were particularly frequent during the first months of 1994 as the
media connected them with a series of other scandals, mostly sexual in
nature, involving Ministers and other members of the Conservative
Party. Some time in the opening days of December 1993 the News of
the World learnt from 'sources close to Julia Stent' about the child she
had had with Timothy Yeo, then a junior minister. They published the
story on Boxing Day, a time when the absence of much hard news
ensured that the story would have maximum prominence in the public
domain, at least on the day that it broke. The publication was followed
by intensive further reporting which lasted until Yeo resigned, on
5 January, following well-publicized lack of support from his consti-
tuency party. In the following weeks, a series of other scandals
followed: the death of Stephen Milligan MP (a Tory) during an auto-
erotic experiment; the revelation that another Tory MP, Alan Duncan,
had acquired a council house in Westminster by using the right-to-buy

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legislation in a way that was arguably not in accordance with its purpose; the suicide of Lady Carhness followed immediately by the revelation that her husband - a Minister in the Lords - had been having an affair with another woman. The sequence of scandals rapidly gave rise to the charge, in both Tory and anti-Tory papers, that the Government was ‘mired in sleaze’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chronology of ‘Back to Basics’ scandals</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20.7.92 The People publishes details of the relationship between Antonia de Sancha and David Mellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.9.92 The Bawwenses’ libel case opens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.9.92 Mellor resigns as Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>26.12.93 The News of the World publishes details of the relationship between Timothy Yeo and Julia Stent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1.94 Yeo resigns as Junior Minister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 1994 Three more scandals involving Conservative politicians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1995 Synon/Pennant-Rea scandal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

‘Players’ in the ‘Back to Basics’ scandals

John Major, Conservative Prime Minister, 1990-97
David Mellor, Minister for Culture in the Conservative Government, 1992
Timothy Yeo, Junior Minister in the Conservative Government, 1993
Antonia de Sancha, actress, Mellor’s lover
Mona Bawwens, family friend of the Mellors
Julia Stent, Yeo’s lover and mother of his child
Mrs Aline Horrigan, Conservative mayor of Haverhill, Suffolk
Norman Fowler, Chairman of the Conservative Party
Max Clifford, publicist
Rupert Pennant-Rea, Deputy Chairman of the Bank of England
Mary Ellen Synon, journalist, Pennant-Rea’s lover

In all of these scandals it is obvious that the person denounced had lost control over information flows. However, the obvious point about loss of control is not the central point: other people suffered similar loss of control, without a scandal developing, by reasserting control over information flows and thus avoiding protracted media attention. For instance, when the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Paddy Ashdown, was found to have had an affair with his secretary, he gave a press conference in advance of the story breaking in the national media. He
stated that the information was correct, that the affair was in the past, that his family stood by him, and asked for their privacy to be respected; little more was heard of the incident. In this case, control was reasserted rapidly – indeed, it is quoted as a classic example of successful damage limitation. Why did this not happen in the other cases? In general, the pattern of media attention conformed to a common model: an original revelation followed by further information, or reactions of others with a stake in the matter, followed by further reactions and information. This common model is significant because it directs our attention to the distribution of the flow of information across time, which is indeed central to the way in which a story builds. However, it says nothing about the details of how, in each instance, these information flows occurred, and it is in answering this question that we shall gain an understanding of scandal. The answers lie partly in the nature of journalistic enterprise, and partly in the behaviour of the news sources: in short in the interaction between sources and journalists, mediated by news values. As a result, the answers are not identical in each.

In the case of Mellor's affair with de Sancha, the way in which the information became public was a major focus of journalistic interest because of the possibility that it breached the Press Commission Code of Conduct and because Mellor, as the relevant Minister, had publicly discussed the possibility of an inquiry into whether a law to restrict press intrusion into private lives was necessary. De Sancha told a friend she was having an affair with an important man, and the friend scented the possibility of selling the details; he offered the use of his flat and bugged the telephone; it was these tapes that provided the original material. The original story was immediately followed up by pictures in the Daily Mirror of the flat where they met, and by a story in the Sun in which a former boyfriend of de Sancha gave various salacious details about her sexual habits which produced a punning headline ('toe job'), referred to on many later occasions. Salacious information about de Sancha's career followed, and some days later she gave an interview to the Independent. Mellor's wife's parents entered the story with an interview in which they claimed never to have liked their son-in-law, and a second interview in which they alleged he had threatened them with retaliation if they continued to speak to the press, this was followed by a well-trailed 'photo opportunity' of a family reconciliation. At the same time, the legitimate 'public interest' angle of the story allowed broadsheet newspapers, which might not normally give the same level or type of attention to such events, to cover it: because Mellor was the Minister responsible for any official inquiries or future legislation into the conduct of the press, the question of a conflict of interest arose. By the same token of public interest, the question of his
possible resignation, the depth of the Prime Minister's commitment to him, and backbench attitudes towards his position were also reported. Tories complained about this harassment of a Minister and charged that the People's argument of public interest in his behaviour was inadequate if not hypocritical. This argument was countered by the editor of the Sun stating on radio that during the election a Tory Minister had telephoned him with a series of false revelations about the sexual habits of leading Opposition politicians, a charge which the Government felt obliged to rebut.

Attention rapidly waned and little was said during August. However, two warning signs were in the air: de Sancha was taken on as a client by the top publicity agent, Max Clifford; and it was noted, some days after the original story, that Meller had been subpoenaed to appear in an unrelated libel case in September. The combination of these two circumstances bore fruit: in early September the tabloids were given a series of salacious revelations by 'a friend of de Sancha', which were in fact placed by Clifford. Carefully calculated to appeal to tabloid news values, they redirected public attention to Meller at exactly the time he was due to go into the witness-box to speak about a holiday his family had taken with their friend Mona Bauwens and which she had paid for. The tabloid 'revelations' (some of which were later admitted to be pure fabrication) lasted from 7 to 10 September and the Bauwens libel case started on 15 September. Eventually the pressure on Meller became irresistible and he resigned his ministerial post on 24 September.

In this instance, the protracted information flow that constituted the scandal was the result of a real campaign by news sources, motivated by gain. However, this gain could only be realized by appeal to news values. The values in question are tabloid oriented, and the appeal was successful, as we have seen; however, the appeal had to be constantly renewed, on a daily basis, and there is little doubt that during the first week of the story it was the constant circulation of information between different media categories (tabloid/broadsheet, press/broadcast) that fuelled its growth, to the extent to which information was offered unsolicited to newspapers by sources and the extent to which it was unearthed by journalistic enterprise is unclear. During the subsequent phase it was the previous history of the story, plus the well-calculated appeal to tabloid news values, plus the linkage to the forthcoming Bauwens libel case that, in combination, gave the story legs.

The series of scandals unleashed by the News of the World's exposure of Yeo is somewhat more complicated, both for contextual reasons and because of the behaviour of news sources linked to the context. The central element in the context is the Tory Party's decision
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to adopt the slogan 'Back to Basics' as the unifying theme for a series of policy initiatives debated at their 1993 conference. While many of these policy initiatives had no link to sexual behaviour, one did: the proposal to make it more difficult for single mothers to claim a range of welfare benefits, a proposal which attracted widespread comment. Although Yeo himself scarcely addressed the issue, his junior ministerial post placed him in the frame of association with the policy.

The conflicting behaviour of a range of news sources derived fundamentally from ambiguities attached to the 'Back to Basics' formulation. While some Tories interpreted it as no more than a catchy phrase linking a set of policies, others saw it as the prelude to an attempt to roll back the frontiers of the permissive society. In this they were encouraged by the media briefing at the Tory conference which preceded the Prime Minister's launch of the slogan; the briefing included the reference to the frontiers of permissiveness which featured in media reporting. The outline of the disagreement that emerged was that the Prime Minister defended Yeo on the grounds that - as he had said apropos Mellor - it was a private matter, others, however, insisted that such impropriety was a public matter and he should resign. This distinction became embroiled in the 'Back to Basics' policy initiative because it was argued that its fundamental thrust was to show that personal morality was indeed a public matter.

When the Prime Minister said on television (6.1.94) that in his opinion 'Back to Basics' was not about personal sexual morality, this brought immediate ripostes from the Tory Right to the effect that the personal moral dimension was integral to grass-roots understanding of the slogan (Evening Standard, 7.1.94). Placing this contextual framework around the events does not prejudice what their main dynamic was, nor whether the story was primarily a tabloid-driven sexual scandal or a political story.

The details of the timing of the News of the World investigation are significant because they focus attention on the reactions of participants who had ample time to rehearse their roles as potential news sources. Yeo knew by the middle of December that his secret was out and even though he may have hesitated to tell anyone in the hope that it would not be published, no one has claimed that he kept it a secret from the Tory Party hierarchy until the day it was public knowledge. There was some foreknowledge of the publicity, although when the information was available to the Tory leadership it is subject to different accounts, as is the extent of their knowledge. According to the Sunday Express (9.1.94) neither Ryder (Tory Chief Whip) nor No. 10 knew about the child until shortly before the story broke. One senior Westminster broadcast journalist said the PM knew about the relationship but not about the baby, and as a result was prepared to
support Yeo on what he subsequently saw as false grounds. Another broadcaster told me that on 12 January the Tory Whips’ Office confirmed to him that Yeo had told the Party hierarchy about the affair, but not about the baby, and that on the same day the PM’s office had said they realized that in future they would have to tighten up procedures in order to avoid the PM being misled in this way again.

According to the BBC’s Nick Jones, writing in the Guardian (17.1.94), the No 10 Press Office was ‘directionless’ on the night that the story broke, perhaps because the Director of Information was on holiday at the time. They had a pre-prepared statement from the Prime Minister supporting Yeo on the grounds that it was a private matter, but were unable to say anything meaningful about the relationship to ‘Back to Basics’ and whether other Tories would take the same line as the Prime Minister; it was not even clear whether the Prime Minister had been consulted about the story in the recent past. Every journalist to whom I spoke and who was working on Boxing Day evening sought further clarification and reactions from a variety of political figures in order to develop the story – although one tabloid reporter said that his paper thought the story would die quickly and downgraded it. Only two papers sought to exploit the angle offered by the MP’s relationship to his local party organization. The Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph. The Tory Party constitution gives a central role to the local party organization, and the Daily Mail, by dint of very protracted enquiries, managed to find a group of local party activists who were in favour of Yeo’s resignation. The newsroom had assigned some twenty reporters to the task for a period of roughly six hours, by contrast another tabloid, which had downgraded the story, had assigned one reporter who had made roughly half-a-dozen phone calls. Similarly, the next morning BBC World at One staff had started looking for Tories who were prepared to speak out against Yeo, they had guessed that some would oppose the Prime Minister’s interpretation of the event, perhaps on the basis of a statement put out on Boxing Day itself by the Conservative Family Campaign condemning Yeo’s behaviour. Eventually they found the right-wing MP David Evans who said on air that he thought Yeo should resign, a statement that was widely reported and commented on the grounds that the divergence of opinion from the Prime Minister’s was politically significant (e.g. Daily Telegraph, 28.12.93 and 29.12.93, and Evening Standard, 29.12.93). One broadsheet political reporter to whom I spoke said that he had tried to persuade his colleagues that Evans was too marginal a figure to be worth such attention, but they disagreed on the grounds that every other newspaper would cover it and therefore they had too. In the days between Christmas and the New Year both sides pushed their interpretations of the events: aside from the above-mentioned condemnations, friends of Yeo were very
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proactive during this period, phoning Tory newspapers to offer support. Sir Norman Fowler, then Chairman of the Party, was publicly supportive of Yeo in a radio broadcast. These attempts to support him had the effect of provoking even more condemnations from his opponents.

In these details of the beginning of the protracted story we can see some fundamental features of the growth of a scandal. First, the role of losing control of information flows: not only did Yeo lose control, but the Tory Government as an organization also did; whether centralized control would have been possible under different circumstances, given the Party's factionalization over moral issues, is impossible to know. Here we should note that the relationship between 'effector' and 'promoter'—to use Molotch and Lester's terminology—is more complex than their model allows: if Yeo is the effector and his secret denouncer the promoter, what role does the Tory Party play? Second, the role of journalistic enterprise in the pursuit of news values: in the absence of this pursuit, the Conservative Family Campaign press release might well have sunk without a trace (it was only very briefly reported) but it was a clear hint that looking for divergence would bring it to light. The more divergence came to light, the more it encouraged journalists to look for it and the more interpreters made themselves available for interview: journalists will continue to look for evidence of a new angle if they think it is likely to be found. Third, within days the journalistic momentum was such that suppositions about other journalists' behaviour was dictating editorial policy—suppositions supported by the constant circulation of news agency copy, radio, TV, the evening papers, etc. Every journalist with whom I discussed this feature of news recognized its centrality—in newsroom jargon it is often called 'theme of the week'—and all were somewhat mystified by the modality of its operation. All saw it as a process which was not subject to any individual's control, and many had anecdotal stories of trying to go against the flow and failing. Although no attempt has been made to quantify such reactions, it was clear from the way in which journalists discussed this phenomenon that it was very well known to them and occupied a significant place in their understanding of their job (see pp. 131–3).

Subsequently, the local dimension of the scandal came to occupy centre stage, and the process by which local activists came to the decision not to support Yeo is a crucial element in our understanding of the role of information flows in the nature of these events. Yeo had failed to tell anyone in the local party about his relationship, the baby, or the fact that the story was about to break. This ensured that when local activists were contacted by reporters they had no idea what to say, or at best repeated the Prime Minister's statement. However,
within twenty-four hours of the story breaking they could read in the Daily Mail that some of their number did not support the Prime Minister’s interpretation. By the following weekend it was known that Mrs Horrigan, mayor of Haverhill and a prominent local Tory, had written to the Prime Minister saying that Yeo should resign; the letter was printed in the Haverhill Echo, and was followed up in the East Anglian Daily Times by an interview with another prominent local Tory who estimated that 50 per cent of local party members would not support Yeo. The local circuit of information was crucial in organizing support for a move to oppose Yeo, and at the same time national media were providing proof that the local party was not alone in its evaluation of the situation. By coincidence, Yeo was scheduled to return from a pre-arranged family holiday (in the Seychelles) on the day that Horrigan’s letter reached Downing Street (after its local publication). Arriving in a taxi at the airport on the way back he made a fundamental mistake: confronted with photographers he tried to hide his face in his wife’s lap. This photograph made the front pages of most national newspapers the following day, and was universally interpreted in the accompanying text as a sign of guilt. Local activists who saw the photograph were horrified, and local impressions were that there was an immediate stiffening of opposition to Yeo.\textsuperscript{19} Yeo had clearly failed to appreciate the news value of his story and presumably was unprepared to perform his role as a news source: another element in the story spun out of control. On the following day, Mrs Horrigan gave an interview on ITN demanding Yeo’s resignation; it was her willingness to speak out in public that convinced TV newsrooms that the story was worth TV news time, as it clearly indicated that the story was no longer a piece of personal sensationalism, but an important political event.\textsuperscript{20} We can now give some answers to the earlier question about the role of the Tory Party as either effector or promoter or both: they – or rather, the different elements within the Party – were promoters in the sense that they made public interpretations of events which they offered to journalists, but effectors in the sense that these interpretations became themselves the events which were the focus of news reporting. The passage of time radically reconceives the relationship between effectors and promoters.

The story ran until Yeo resigned, with ever-increasing amounts of coverage. It was rapidly followed by the other scandals referred to above. In these subsequent cases we can see elements of information flows that compare and contrast with what happened in the Yeo case. In the case of Alan Duncan’s house purchase, the story failed to maintain any momentum because after a very short time journalists failed to find any new information, despite sending teams to interview Duncan on holiday in Switzerland. In the case of Lady Cashness’
suicide, it is clear that attempts were made to limit potential damage. Lady Calthness committed suicide on a Saturday afternoon, and the police and medical personnel were called the same day. However, the first public announcement was made late on the Saturday evening, by the Government, and in this announcement the event was defined as a personal tragedy and - by implication - nothing more. The timing of the announcement was forced by a freelance journalist's up-off from a police source and was no doubt calculated to give journalists time to process the information for the Sunday news bulletins and Monday's newspapers, but not enough time to pursue investigations into the background (Scotland on Sunday, 16.1.94). However, within twenty-four hours journalists had discovered (or been informed) that Lord Caithness had been having an affair with another woman, and the story acquired a new and greatly enhanced profile. In each case, information was made publicly available by mechanisms that have remained hidden, but where - because of the concatenation of events - the common ground was stressed and led to levels of attention that each event individually might have failed to generate in the absence of this linkage. Essentially the same structure of information flow marks them all: an initial loss of control, followed by attempts to reassert control, which were successful where no further information was forthcoming (in the case of Alan Duncan's house purchase) but were unsuccessful where new angles were either offered or found, and gave the story legs.

To what extent can such instances be said to be typical of scandal stories in general? We have seen that the other categories of action commonly labelled scandalous are financial impropriety, political corruption, and public negligence and abuse of power. While an examination of the structure of scandals in all of these domains is beyond the scope of this analysis, a brief examination of relevant features of one of these categories of scandal will show us to what extent sexual scandals are typical or untypical. We will look at two major financial scandals: the closing down of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International and the investigation of share dealings during the Guinness-Distillers take-over.

Certain features of business communication form an essential background for understanding the role of press reporting in financial scandals. Commercial confidentiality - which is increasingly enforced through 'gagging' clauses in employment contracts - as well as regulatory constraints on the revelation of price-sensitive information both place restrictions upon what can be publicly said about business matters. At the same time companies are obliged by law to make public statements about their business activities at specified intervals; this public information is a prime source for business page journalism, usually in combination with comments from informed people, such as
market analysts. With some few exceptions - such as tax, birth, marriage and divorce - there are no obligations to disclose personal conduct of the variety discussed above, and no restrictions on what one can say about one's own conduct if one chooses; to this extent, financial communication takes place in 'a fundamentally different context to communication about personal life. It is also the case that information about the business dealings of corporations (or individuals) has directly commercial value in its own right, in a way that is not true of other categories of information. Business affairs have a specialist press and special pages in most broadsheet media, read by a limited, professionally interested public with a relatively high degree of expertise in that subject matter. The majority of reports about business and financial matters do not transfer from the business pages (or specialist broadcast programmes) to general news pages or bulletins, and those that do are propelled by the news criteria of news pages: the majority of the stories which do cross this threshold appear to be concerned with changes in employment opportunities, major financial impropriety and dramatic new product development. In general, newsroom practices make protracted investigation of (potential) financial malpractice a low priority. News values are ambiguous in this respect, the cost of investigative journalism is high, and the outcomes are rarely certain in advance. At the same time, the risk of litigation is high since any revelations are likely to be damaging to the individual or organization on the receiving end, and the cost of even the threat of litigation is high enough to act as a deterrent (since a defence against a writ for libel has to be produced even if the case never goes to court). 22

Also important is the nature of the business - and in particular the financial - community: a relatively small and relatively homogeneous group of people, with many links between them, and many channels of communication which are of crucial importance in decision-making and whose primary characteristic is their restricted access: the relationship between information flows in these channels and information flows in mass media channels is not necessarily the same as in other domains of activity. Instructive in this respect is the analysis of information flows in cases of 'ramping' - spreading rumours about matters likely to affect share prices in order to manipulate them for personal gain. Because this is illegal, evidence of what has happened sometimes surfaces in law reports. On occasion, newspapers are used to spread the rumour in question, but it is equally probable that the rumour may be an entirely face-to-face matter, in which case evidence of its existence will only come to light if someone brings it to public attention. For example, in a case reported in the Guardian, someone had offered unsolicited information about a potential take-over bid which, if published and
believed, would push up the price of the shares in question; the *Guardian* checked the story and concluded that it was false, but it was published in another paper, and eventually a complaint was made that the false rumour had had the effect of pushing the share price up substantially. Here the role of the media was the crucial element in the 'ramp': spreading the rumour in this way, via the media, gave apparent authority to the false information; it may be assumed that the rumour-monger had already bought the shares in question (or was 'selling short'). In another case, a broker persuaded a company, bidding for a large block of stock in another company, that there were competing bids in place, which encouraged the bidders to increase their bid; in fact there were no other bidders. The defrauded bidders sued for damages, which brought the original incident to light. Here, the media are irrelevant to the 'ramp' tactics. It has recently been shown that interactive information systems such as TOPIC, websites and private newsletters published via the Internet are being used to post similar information, whose origins are difficult to trace.\(^{23}\)

At the same time, there is a dearth of authoritative bodies that would act as alternative sources of information for journalists. The pressure groups which abound in the areas of social policy and criminal justice, and which regularly act as news sources,\(^{24}\) are largely absent from the business and especially the financial community. It is possible that regulatory authorities - who are responsible for 'policing' the financial community - do not have the same status as information sources as apparently comparable organizations such as the police.\(^{25}\) For example, when the DTI finally published its inspectors' report into the Guinness affair (27.11.97), although its conclusions were published as authoritative, several accounts of the publication also quoted the rejection of the DTI version of events by Ernest Saunders, the convicted ex-Managing Director of Guinness whose conduct was at the centre of the events in question; the implication is that Saunders was regarded as an equally authoritative source as the DTI (*Evening Standard* 27.11.97; *Independent* and *Guardian*, 28.11.97, for example).

In the two cases to be examined, it has been well documented since the events in question that things were done which were arguably improper - and in some cases criminal - and which were not publicly reported until well after the sequence of events had been closed off by changed circumstances. Information which became available to law enforcement and regulatory authorities resulted in actions which - had they been carried out earlier - would have prevented the sequences of events reaching the closure that in fact occurred (Kochan and Pym, 1987; Pugh, 1987; Adams and Frantz, 1991; Truell and Gurwin, 1992; *Financial Times*, 1993). In other words, the two financial scandals in question also resulted from a loss of control over information flows by
the perpetrators, but the mechanisms involved in this loss of control are substantially different from the ones involved in the case of sexual scandal.

The ability of the Guinness Chairman Ernest Saunders to place material in the press favourable to the corporate plans he was pursuing is well documented in accounts of the Guinness affair. In both the take-over bid for Bell's Whiskey and the Distillers Company he was able to use business-page news values to place stories concerning various elements of the situation in order to discredit rivals and persuade shareholders that the Guinness offer was the one to accept. At the same time he was able to circulate information through private channels that did not become accessible to journalists until after the intervention of inspectors from the DTI. The information related to the 'share-price support' exercise he organized in order to make possible Guinness' acquisition of a majority shareholding in Distillers. This was possible because of the confidentiality of the relationships. Within these circles, information circulates very easily once participants are persuaded that it is in their interests to pass this information on. For example, in October 1985 a Guinness director let it be known at a lunch that they would be interested in helping Distillers beat off a hostile take-over bid by the Argyll group; word of this remark quickly reached the Managing Director of the Argyll group, who immediately approached Saunders to see if the rumour was true. Saunders denied the truth of the rumour, but a few months later a story was leaked to The Times (4.1.86) to the same effect, and was followed up by other stories in the press, including the speculation that Saunders was being pushed by City institutions to make a bid for Distillers, an interpretation of events that Saunders himself publicly favoured. This suggests that the source of the leak was inside Guinness itself. Argyll again contacted Guinness to enquire about the truth of the story and was again reassured that it was untrue. However, further press stories convinced them that Guinness were lying and they sent someone round to the Distillers headquarters building to see whose cars were parked outside on a Sunday afternoon. The presence of the cars showed them their suspicions were correct. The small scale of the social group involved meant that the ownership of the cars was well known to participants (Kochan and Pym, 1987: 84–5, 94, 100–1, 123–4). At a later stage in the Guinness/Distillers affair, an American journalist working on a story about the take-over was given information about the share-support information by a merchant banker working for the rival bidder, Argyll; the purpose of the gift of the information was clearly in Argyll’s interest – to discredit Guinness and thwart the take-over. However, the journalist could not persuade his (American) editor of the interest of the topic, and shortly afterwards the DTI inspectors made the details public (Pugh, 1987: 124–5).
Similarly, in the case of BCCI, London financial circles had clear evidence that something strange was going on at BCCI five years before the scandal became public in the UK (on 5 July 1991), but nobody in the know made the information public; instead they used it to make a profit from the circumstances (Financial Times, 1991: 17). The Treasury section of BCCI was incurring huge losses on ill-advised speculation which were disguised by various accountancy devices. In 1986 the bank’s UK auditors, Price Waterhouse, penetrated the disguise and confronted management; however, the information was not revealed to wider circles as the auditors assumed it was the result of incompetence rather than fraud. The auditors of the Luxembourg-based section of BCCI, Ernst and Whinney (now Ernst and Young) resigned in 1987; if the resignation was publicly noted, its significance was not (Adams and Frantz, 1991: 98–9; Truell and Gurwin, 1992: 201–6). In 1989, Price Waterhouse realized that what their investigations were revealing was a form of malpractice, and refused to sign off the bank’s annual accounts. If this had been publicly known, it would have been a clear indication of something fundamentally wrong; however, the auditors were satisfied by a fresh injection of capital which apparently restored the bank’s finances to a healthy state and the annual report was duly signed and published (Truell and Gurwin, 1992: 203, 292).

At the same time, attempts at investigation by journalists met with considerable difficulties: as reports of their enquiries reached sensitive ears, lawyers were instructed to hinder the enquiries. Even when reports were published in authoritative publications (May 1990) few journalists followed them up for some time and BCCI was able to counter the negative publicity with its own interpretation of events. An article published in the UK (Observer, 21.1.90), based on BCCI’s guilty plea to money-laundering charges in the US courts, fell on deaf ears (Truell and Gurwin, 1992: 293–6, 357; see also Leapman, 1992: 275–9). In these circumstances, we can see both how permeable the barriers to information flows are in such closed circles, and yet at the same time how easy it is to maintain the barrier between those closed circles and the wider public whose access is limited to the mass media, due to the various institutional factors cited above.

In both the cases reviewed, extensive negative journalistic activity followed public revelations by regulatory and/or criminal authorities: ‘scandal’ was produced by officialdom, and reflected in journalism. In the terms used in this book, what is revealed here is the extent to which differences in information flow between various groups who are potential news sources vary considerably, due (in this instance) to clear differences between their institutional positions. Of course, the extent to which revelations about scandalous behaviour also fit the
interests of the revealer is something which must be taken into account. In the case of BCCI, it seems clear from published accounts that the Bank of England - which launched the public career of the scandal in the UK by deciding to close down the bank - did so unwillingly and as a last resort, since it feared severe knock-on effects on the banking system as a whole, and would have preferred an unpublicized rescue of the bank (Financial Times, 1991: 3). Subsequently, the Bank was criticized for not acting sooner, a charge which its officers refused to accept (Truell and Gurwin, 1992: 356–7). The Bank was effectively forced to act by the mounting scale of the revelations emerging from auditors' accounts, and criminal and regulatory investigations in the US. In the case of the Guinness 'share support' affair the regulatory body was 'tight-lipped' on the nature of their enquiries, but journalists were able to use indications already in the public domain, plus information from organizations which had acted for Guinness and were now ready to speak about events (Pugh, 1987: 126–8). In each case, the public existence of official enquiries meant that the factors inhibiting journalistic enterprise ceased to operate. The official nature of the enquiries made litigation much less likely, and the fact that enquiries were being made meant that the story ceased to be investigatory and became a routine breaking story, even if the enquiries came to nothing, the fact that they existed made a story. The existence of the official enquiry not only breaks a story but also changes all the news values and the meaning of newsroom practices by the same token.

At the same time, we have seen how various factors deriving from the nature of the financial community impact upon journalistic ability and willingness to report the activities of this community In almost every respect, the structure of information flows in the case of financial matters is significantly different from that involved in sexual matters, and as a result even if scandals in these two domains share the feature of loss of control over information flows by the person who has most to lose by revelation, the mechanisms by which information flows eventually reach the mass media are very different.

All the scandals in these categories of action share the common feature of a loss of control over information flows by the perpetrator. However, since many of them involve actions which are either criminal or in breach of a regulatory framework, what constitutes a loss of control over information for one party is the exercise of such control for another: if the police, or some other body in authority over possible breaches of public norms, release information saying that X is under investigation, or being charged with such-and-such an offence, - they do so for their own reasons. Of course, this is also true of the sources of sexual scandal - as is particularly clear in the case of Mary
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Ellen Synon and Rupert Pennant-Rea – but it is often difficult to establish who they are or why they acted as they did. Therefore we should beware of theorizations of the role of the mass media in scandal which assert that its fundamental structure is the revelation of secrets ‘whose form generates an investigative, adversarial search for the content – called truth or reality … [where] TV … manufactures events … through sheer repetition, piquing audience interest, creating experiences and affects which can then be transformed into commodities’ (Mellencamp, 1992: 239).

For example, the famous interview that Princess Diana gave to BBC TV Panorama (broadcast 20.11.95), in which she frankly discussed both her married life with Prince Charles and one of her extra-marital liaisons, no doubt fascinated millions – it had one of the largest audiences in the history of television. However, the opportunity that this predictable interest gave the Princess by no means explains her motives for doing so, which must have been linked to her separation and likely divorce. In particular, the decision to give the interview to Panorama rather than to a more ‘down-market’ outlet must be explained by the Princess’ desire to make the Royal Family appreciate how serious she was in her attempt to continue to maintain her public profile and demand what she thought she was entitled to. She was far from averse to using down-market outlets when it suited her strategic purposes, as can be seen in the incident where she tipped off a photographer from the News of the World that she would be found visiting a hospital late at night, which produced the headline ‘Di: my secret nights as an angel’ (3.12.95). The editorial policy of the News of the World made it unlikely that the coverage would analyse her motives for the incident, whatever individual journalists’ estimation of them might have been; indeed, on the following day both the Guardian and the London Evening Standard published accounts of the event understood as a PR stunt. By the same token, it is an oversimplification to see scandal revelation as a form of investigation: all too often the revelation is entirely due to someone with prior knowledge deciding to offer the information to the media, for their own reasons. Under these circumstances, even if the appearance of hard investigative labour is maintained in the reporting, or if investigative journalism is needed to reveal the full ramifications of what happened, and even if the appearance of the adversarial relationship contributes to the fascination, it does not necessarily explain the process by which the information becomes public.