

Basic Reporting Techniques

CLA 105



*University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development*

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Vice-Chancellor's Message

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple plat form for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfilment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Abel Idowu Olayinka

Vice-Chancellor

Foreword

As part of its vision of providing education for “Liberty and Development” for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

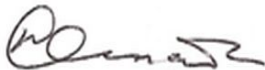
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre's provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.



Professor Bayo Okunade

Director

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About this course manual

Basic Reporting Techniques CLA 105 has been produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. All course manuals produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre are structured in the same way, as outlined below.

How this course manual is structured

The course overview

The course overview gives you a general introduction to the course. Information contained in the course overview will help you determine:

- If the course is suitable for you.
- What you will already need to know.
- What you can expect from the course.
- How much time you will need to invest to complete the course.

The overview also provides guidance on:

- Study skills.
- Where to get help.
- Course assignments and assessments.
- Margin icons.

We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your study.

The course content

The course is broken down into Study Sessions. Each Study Session comprises:

- An introduction to the Study Session content.
- Study Session outcomes.
- Core content of the Study Session with a variety of learning activities.
- A Study Session summary.
- Assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.
- Bibliography

Your comments

After completing Basic Reporting Techniques we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this course. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Course content and structure.
- Course reading materials and resources.
- Course assignments.
- Course assessments.
- Course duration.
- Course support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.)

Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this course.

Course Overview

Welcome to Basic Reporting Techniques CLA 105

This course is an introduction to the study of the methods of news gathering and reporting for the mass media with the treatment of the news environment and the basic components of the news story. The course is both theoretical and practical in orientation. Part I, which is what this lecture material deals with, is theoretical and will take approximately fourteen lecture hours to treat. Part II is practical and will involve students in practical news gathering and reporting. Students will be grouped into teams of reporters and assigned beats to cover. Each team must submit a minimum of two reports every week for at least seven weeks.

This course is professional. Therefore, some basic professional expectations are set to prepare students for the real profession challenges they are likely to meet after school. One, attendance at lectures/interactive sessions is encouraged. Two, students must be punctual. Punctuality is a golden principle in journalism. No student saunters into the class when the lecture/interaction is already in progress, as no reporter saunters into the event venue anytime he wishes. If you are to cover an event at which the State Governor is to be present, you cannot go late. Once the Governor enters, no one else is likely to be allowed in. That is the protocol. In our own case here, the classroom will be shut five minutes after the commencement of lecture/interaction. Three, students must be properly dressed. We would not allow flying shirt tails by boys and provocative attires by girls. Boys (men), at least, must wear ties while coming for the lecture/interaction.

Course outcomes

Upon completion of Basic Reporting Techniques CLA 105 you will be able to:



- *evaluate* journalism as a profession.
- *write* a news report going through the stages of journalistic process
- *highlight* the qualities that you should have as a good journalist.
- *point out* sources of information.
- *outline* what constitutes news.

Timeframe



How long?

This is a 15 weeks course. It requires a formal study time of 45 hours. The formal study times are scheduled around online discussions / chats with your course facilitator / academic advisor to facilitate your learning. Kindly see course calendar on your course website for scheduled dates. You will still require independent/personal study time particularly in studying your course materials.

How to be successful in this course



As an open and distance learner your approach to learning will be different to that from your school days, where you had onsite education. You will now choose what you want to study, you will have professional and/or personal motivation for doing so and you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic responsibilities.

Essentially you will be taking control of your learning environment. As a consequence, you will need to consider performance issues related to time management, goal setting, stress management, etc. Perhaps you will also need to reacquaint yourself in areas such as essay planning, coping with exams and using the web as a learning resource.

We recommend that you take time now—before starting your self-study—to familiarize yourself with these issues. There are a number of excellent resources on the web. A few suggested links are:

- <http://www.ucc.vt.edu/stdysk/stdyhlp.html>

This is the web site of the Virginia Tech, Division of Student Affairs. You will find links to time scheduling (including a “where does time go?” link), a study skill checklist, basic concentration techniques, control of the study environment, note taking, how to read essays for analysis, memory skills (“remembering”).

- <http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php>

Another “How to study” web site with useful links to time management, efficient reading, questioning/listening/observing skills, getting the most out of doing (“hands-on” learning), memory building, tips for staying motivated, developing a learning plan.

The above links are our suggestions to start you on your way. At the time of writing these web links were active. If you want to look for more go to www.google.com and type “self-study basics”, “self-study tips”, “self-study skills” or similar phrases.

Need help?



You may contact any of the following units for information, learning resources and library services.

Distance Learning Centre (DLC)
University of Ibadan, Nigeria
(Student Support Officers)
Tel: (+234) 08077593551 – 55
Email: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng

Head Office
Morohundiya Complex, Ibadan-
Ilorin Expressway, Idi-Ose,
Ibadan.

Information Centre
20 Awolowo Road, Bodija,
Ibadan.

Lagos Office
Speedwriting House, No. 16
Ajanaku Street, Off Salvation
Bus Stop, Awuse Estate, Opebi,
Ikeja, Lagos.
Tel: (+234) 08077593574

For technical issues (computer problems, web access, and etcetera), please send mail to webmaster@dlc.ui.edu.ng.

Academic Support



A course facilitator is commissioned for this course. You have also been assigned an academic advisor to provide learning support. The contacts of your course facilitator and academic advisor for this course are available at the course website: www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc

Activities



This manual features “Activities,” which may present material that is NOT extensively covered in the Study Sessions. When completing these activities, you will demonstrate your understanding of basic material (by answering questions) before you learn more advanced concepts. You will be provided with answers to every activity question. Therefore, your emphasis when working the activities should be on understanding your answers. It is more important that you understand why every answer is correct.

Assessments



There are three basic forms of assessment in this course: in-text questions (ITQs) and self assessment questions (SAQs), and tutor marked assessment (TMAs). This manual is essentially filled with ITQs and SAQs. Feedbacks to the ITQs are placed immediately after the questions, while the feedbacks to SAQs are at the back of manual. You will receive your TMAs as part of online class activities at the UI Mobile Class. Feedbacks to TMAs will be provided by your tutor in not more than 2 weeks expected duration. Schedule dates for submitting assignments and engaging in course / class activities is available on the course website. Kindly visit your course website often for updates.

Bibliography



Reading

For those interested in learning more on this subject, we provide you with a list of additional resources at the end of this course manual; these may be books, articles or websites.

Getting around this course manual

Margin icons

While working through this course manual you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to “signpost” a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this course manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

			
Activity	Assessment	Assignment	Case study
			
Discussion	Group Activity	Help	Outcomes
			
Note	Reflection	Reading	Study skills
			
Summary	Terminology	Time	Tip

Study Session 1

History of Journalism

Introduction

Every profession across the world has its own history and peculiarities; and to perform successfully, every professional is expected to understand the history of his profession. Without any exemption, it is a fundamental requirement that as a student of Communication and Language Arts, you are familiar with the historical background of journalism and what the profession (journalism) itself entails. Therefore, given the fact that one of the core objectives of this course is to prepare you for the real professional challenges you are likely to meet as a journalist, we shall open our discussions with a brief stride into the history of journalism. In doing so, we shall trace the historical evolution journalism both at the global and local levels .



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 *evaluate* journalism as a profession.
- 1.2 *outline* the history of journalism.

1.1 Meaning of Journalism

Journalism

An activity or profession of writing for newspapers or magazines, or of broadcasting news on radio or television.

Journalism is the art of collecting, sorting, editing and writing of news or news articles (features) for public consumption through the mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television internet). It is a profession or an occupation of gathering information from daily events and making such pieces of information available to the mass audience through publication in newspapers and magazines, or broadcast on electronic media.

However, with advent of the Internet, journalism has now incorporated sharing of information through Internet-enabled news media (i.e. the Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook, Blogspot, Twitter, Wikis, Tumblr, Weibo, RSS). As Niles (2017) describes it, journalism is a form of writing that tells people about events that really happened, but about which the public might not have known before it is reported.

Those who practise journalism are journalists. They gather, edit and write news for the mass media.

**Tip**

Journalists gather, edit and write news for the mass media.

Journalism covers both the print media (for example newspapers, magazines, newsletters) and broadcast media (radio, television and the Internet). Although journalism is governed by some general principles, which we shall discuss later in the course of our study, each of the scopes (print, electronic and online) of journalism has its demands and peculiarities.

There is no doubt that journalism is a profession. Before one becomes a practising journalist in most countries of the world including Nigeria, one must have gone through some formal professional training. In Nigeria, for instance, at least a Diploma in journalism, mass communication or related discipline is mandatory for a person who wants to practise journalism. Besides, all journalists in Nigeria, like other professionals such as medical doctors, lawyers, and engineers, have professional code of conducts (ethics) that guides their activities. Violation of any of the provisions of this code always attract specified sanction by the appropriate professional bodies such as Nigeria Union of Journalists, Nigerian Press Organisation, Nigerian Guild of Editors, or Nigerian Press Council.

Journalism is a profession of all profession because it was the weapon that many developed nations such as America, France and the Great Britain used to establish their stable and just societies (Duyile, 2005; Carlson and Lewis, 2015). It was the same weapon that many African countries used to fight and win the war of independence.

ITQ**Question**

Journalistic reports include all but one of the following:

- A. News.
- B. Letter to your friend.
- C. Feature
- D. Headlines.

Feedback

- If you have chosen option B, then you are correct. A letter to your pal is not a journalistic report. It is a correspondence between two persons. Journalistic reports, however, are watched, listened to or read by many different people at the same time. Options A, C, and D are actually journalistic reports because news and features are both broadcast and published in the media. The titles given to stories that are both feature and news are called “headlines”.

1.2 History of Journalism

The word **journalism** was derived from the French word *Journal*. Originally, the French *Journal* came from the Latin word *diurnal* meaning *daily* (Wikiquote, 2012). Journalism is an old profession which predates printing, however, the advent of printing enhanced journalism as a profession. Before the advent of printing, there had been a kind of journalism where handwritten decrees, edicts, royal declarations and bits of information were disseminated. Such items of information usually originated from the kings and were directed at their subjects. Examples were the instances of town-criers in some traditional African settings, and the cases of king Xerxes in the Book of Esther; and King Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Daniel of the Holy Bible.



Tip

The first journal that could be regarded as the pioneer newspaper in the world, *Acta Diurna*, was published in 69 BC by the Roman General and Statesman, Julius Caesar. He used the newspaper primarily to report issues such as festivals, marriages, government affairs, and conquest in battles.

What we have as the professional journalism today metamorphosed through some phases or stages of development. To achieve clarity, we shall enumerate some notable segments of this historical track starting from the global level to the Nigerian context:

Movable Type

A printing technology through which fonts (letters of the alphabets, numbers, etc.), used for printing texts, are changeable, instead of the permanent fonts earlier used in printing

- In 868 A.D., the oldest preserved block printed book, *Diamond Sutra*, was published.
- In 1454, Johannes Gutenberg invented the **moveable type**. This marked the beginning of more permanent, writing/printing.
- In 1476, modern printing came into being through the pioneering effort of William Caxton, a renowned British printer, who invented the printing press in Europe.
- In 1638, printing began in America.
- In 1690, America published her first newspaper, *Public Occurrences*. It was published by Benjamin Harries, and it lasted only one issue.
- In 1702, first daily newspaper in English, *The Daily Courant*, was published in London.
- In 1784, first successful daily newspapers in America, *The Pennsylvania Packet* and *Daily Advertiser*, Philadelphia, were published.
- In 1846, the first printing press in Nigeria was introduced in Calabar by Rev. Hope Masterson Waddell, a Presbyterian from the Church of Scotland. The printing press was used to propagate religious and educational matters. Later in 1885, he published a vernacular newspaper *The Umana Efik*.
- In 1857, the first African newspaper, *African Herald*, was published in Ghana.

Nigeria's first Newspaper, *Iwe Irohinfun awon Ara Egba*—the newspaper for the Egba people—was established in 1859 in Abeokuta by a Scottish Reverend gentleman, Henry Townsend. The newspaper was initially published in the Yoruba Language, but the English version was introduced in March, 1860. The newspaper was primarily used to promote Christian evangelism, European

lifestyle, and campaign against slave trade, but it later expanded its coverage to political matters. Between the early age and now, journalism has undergone a tremendous metamorphosis, moving away from being a mere king mouthpiece to that of a hobby and that of a full profession. Technologies have expanded the scope of journalism (which started as the business of the print media) to radio, television and the Internet.

ITQ

Question

Diamond Sutra was published in

- A. 1897
- B. 868
- C. 1454
- D. 1857

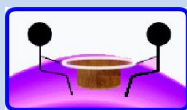
Feedback

From what we have studied in this segment, the publication was not in 1857 or 1897 or 1454. It was published in 868, option B.



Tip

Nigeria's first Newspaper, *Iwe Irohinfun awon Ara Egba*—the newspaper for the Egba people—was established in 1859 in Abeokuta by a Scottish Reverend gentleman, Henry Townsend.



Discussion

Online Discussion Activity

Groups with dissenting views on sexual morality, for instance, have used journalism to promote as well as argue their sexual ideologies. In France and South Africa, for instance, Lesbians and Gays, through journalism, argued their way to gaining freedom to same sex marriage, which used to be an abomination in such societies. In your view, do you think, journalism has contributed to building stable and just societies in such developed countries?

[Post your response on Study Session One Forum Page on Course website](#)

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we explained the meaning of journalism and who a journalist is. We traced the origin of the word Journalism to the French word, *Journal*, which also came from the Latin word, *diurnal*, meaning *daily*. We finally highlighted the evolution of journalism as a profession.

Assignment



Assignment

1. Identify core activities that are involved in journalism as an occupation.
2. Journalism is solely about newspaper publication. Do you agree with this statement?

Turn in your answer for your course tutor to evaluate at the course website. See course calendar for scheduled date of submission.

Assessment

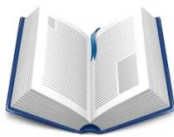


Assessment

SAQ 1.1 (tests Learning outcomes 1.1 and 1.2)

Trace the historical background of journalism.

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Web resources

Wikiquote (2012). *Journalism*.

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Introduction to Journalism - Unit 1 and 2.

www.nou.edu.ng/noun/NOUN_OCL/pdf/pdf2/JLS%20601.pdf

Study Session 2

The Journalistic Process

Introduction

In the previous Study Session, we looked at the meaning of journalism, and traced the evolution of journalism as a profession. Our explanation of journalism shows that the profession involves some activities that the professional journalist must carry out systematically before he can bring the news to the public realm through the appropriate mass media. These activities are described as the journalistic process because they are performed in a logical sequence. In this Study Session two, we shall discuss the journalistic process, which includes information gathering, preparation of the story, writing the story, and production.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

- 2.1 write a news report going through the stages of journalistic process.

2.1 Stages of Journalistic Process

Journalistic process
the process of reaching mass audience with clear, factual and unbiased information.

Professional journalists have the basic task/objective of reaching mass audience with factual, accurate and unbiased information that is easily understood. To do this effectively requires the journalist to apply several professional skills and activities which are usually woven into a multi-stage process called the **journalistic process**. The journalistic process contains four different parts/stages.

2.1.1 Information Gathering

Beat

Either a territory or an area of focus, which is the primary concern of a journalist. For example, a journalist may have the Governor's office (a territory) as his beat. Any event on crime (an area of focus) could

This is the first stage of news writing procedure (Alo and Osifeso, 2009). This stage requires the journalist to make observation, conduct interview, make research and embark on report finding. The journalist should go out to scout for news. The reporter can get the raw materials (information) for his news stories by visiting his regular **beat(s)**, by following **newsworthy events** anywhere they happen, through interviewing, or by bumping into an unexpected event (accidental reporting). News events do not just happen: people make news; news is about people; news affects people. An event that makes news must have a specific venue and time of occurrence. All these are the core variables that guide the journalist and lead him to get a newsworthy story. The journalist should understand that sources of news are either human or physical (non-human). Therefore, the journalist should visit the right venue at the right time; consult the appropriate human sources, examine and read relevant materials

also be a journalist's beat. A beat, therefore, provides journalists with their individual primary concern(s), from where they get newsworthy events.

Newsworthy events occurrences that can make news in the media, by being broadcast or published. "News", however, is any occurrence that is reported (broadcast or published) in the media.

(physical sources) that would provide a rich background for his story. Reporters can obtain information from their human sources by face-to-face interviews, by telephone conversations, or by any other means.

Before the reporter goes out to gather information, he has to ask himself three basic questions. These questions, as explained by Agbese (2008) are:

- *what and why?* (That is: What am I looking for? Why am I doing this story?)
- *what information exists on the story?* (That is, is there any background information on the story that would take the audience get nearer to the truth?);
- *what weight does the story carry?* (That is, what personalities are involved? What impact/consequence does the story have on or for the mass audience? Does the story contain some **dramatic angles** beyond mere statistics?).

When these questions guide the reporter in his quest to gather information, he is bound to get the raw materials that would produce interesting news stories.

2.1.2 Preparation of the Story

The pieces of information the journalist has collected remain a jumble of trash until they are well processed and refined into a finished product—news story. This is the stage where grains are separated from the husk. Here, the journalist (reporter) checks his facts and figures, sieves the facts from the less relevant details, verifies information to ensure accuracy, and plots the structure of the story. This stage deserves an intense weighing and a critical analysis of every bit of the body of information gathered. The reporter deploys his routine experiences and reportorial craft to discern facts from public relations information that have no real impact or significance for the public than to sell the selfish interest of some person or a group. He also decides from which angle to approach the story: Does he use a WHO-Lead or a WHAT-Lead? Does he write the story as a hard news or as a soft news (feature), or he complements the soft news with a feature story? Which quotations are most striking and relevant to accurately tell the story? All these decisions are fundamental at this stage before embarking on the actual writing of the story.

Note

"Public relations information" has no real impact or significance for the public (news consumers) but only sells the selfish, or economic, interest of some person or a group

2.1.3 Writing the Story

At this stage, the reporter writes his story in a style that is interesting, clear, lucid, unambiguous and succinct, and in a format that conforms to the peculiarity of media type for which the story is being written for publication or broadcast. News design for electronic media is different from that of the print media. Radio news has a format that is different from television news while newspaper stories are distinct from magazine news stories. In fact, the house style of a media outfit would be different from another.

At the stage of writing, the reporter must always remember that he is always working under the deadly tyranny of deadline. Time is never sufficient, and it does not wait for anybody including the reporter. Therefore, the reporter must be

very fast at writing. As he writes, he edits and proofreads because he does not have the luxury of time to come back at a later time to edit his work.

ITQ

Question

A journalist who wants to engage in information gathering must ask all but one of the following.

- A. Why am I doing this story?
- B. What information exist on the story?
- C. Will the story fetch me money?
- D. What weight does the story carry?

Feedback

Which of the options did you choose? If you chose any of options A,B, or D, you have just chosen options that convey questions to be asked by a journalist before information gathering. Option C is odd because it is not a question to be asked before information gathering.



News writing is communication. The reporter has the duty to inform the public in the simplest way possible. Therefore, he must choose the appropriate words and style that are simple, lucid and communicative. He writes news stories basically to inform but not to impress.

The reporter writes news stories basically to inform but not to impress. As Duyile (2005:13) puts it,

“any newspaper reporter who does not understand the principle of simplicity in news writing is not communicating. He is writing above his audience’s frame of reference”.

The principle of simplicity also calls for block paragraphing where the reporter presents the news story in simple, short and clear paragraphs. However, while writing features, the reporter is at liberty to vary his styles in such a manner to inform, educate and entertain the audience. But this should not be abused. It should be added that the emergence of technologies and their deployment in the newsroom has changed the newsroom tradition and operations and compelled the reporter to be computer literate. In most cases, the reporter is expected to type, edit and send his story directly to the Sub-Editor.

ITQ**Question**

A reporter writes a story for all but one of the following.

- A. Impress
- B. Inform
- C. Educate
- D. None of the above

Feedback

Which of the options did you choose? Well, it is a given that a reporter reports for the purpose of informing and educating. Hence, options B and C will not be right. It will however be wrong to assert that a reporter writes to impress. Hence, option A is odd. What this means therefore is that option A is the right option.

2.1.4 Production

This is the final stage where the news story is fitted into the newspaper or the newscast for onward dissemination to the public. The journalistic process is a system which is followed in a procedural chain. The success of one stage depends on the success of other stages. The overall success of this process depends, to a very great extent, on the journalist (reporter) who is expected to possess certain professional qualities. We shall discuss these qualities in the next Study Session.

Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session, you learnt that journalistic process consists the various phases of activities that the reporter performs to get the news story to the public domain. First, he has to gather the information from relevant sources. Second, he has to process the information by separating facts from mere opinions and public relations information that have no significance for the mass audience. He decides the structure and format of his story before proceeding to the stage of actual writing. He should write the story to meet the deadline and satisfy the house style and peculiarities of his media organisation, and prepare his piece in a simple, clear and communicative language bearing in mind that his duty is to inform, not to impress. The final stage is where news stories are made available for public consumption through the appropriate mass media. The stories are published (if it is print media) or broadcast (if it is electronic media).

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 2.1 (tests Learning Outcome 2.1)

Outline and discuss the stages of journalistic process.

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Study Session 3

Qualities of a Good Reporter

Introduction

News and feature writing for the mass media is an art. It demands the journalist to have some training and qualities that would prepare him adequately for the job. Besides, the success of the journalistic process, which we just discussed in Study Session two, depends largely on the extent to which the reporter is able to demonstrate some journalistic qualities. In this Study Session therefore, we shall examine qualities that a professional journalist should possess and deploy at all times.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

- 3.1 *present* the features of a reporter.
- 3.2 *highlight* the qualities that you should have as a good journalist.

3.1 Who is a Reporter?

Reporter

A person who report news or conduct interviews for newspapers or broadcasts.

A **reporter** is a person who is professionally trained to gather, write and report factual and accurate news for the media organisation he works with either as a regular staff or as a freelancer. Alo and Osifeso (2009) describe the reporter as person who carries out the (reportorial) assignments that have been prescribed by the news editors-in-conference with managing editor and the publication adviser. The description by Alo and Osifeso implies that the news reporter works in collaboration with other editorial staff members who are probably his superior and to whom he is always accountable as far as his job as a news gatherer and writer is concerned.

Note

A news reporter gets news instructions from his superiors—editors-in-conference, managing editor and the publication adviser—who are editorial staffs of the media.

The reporter (or correspondent as the case may be) serves as the ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ of the media house he works with. He works in the Editorial Department, in the case of print, or in the News and Current Affairs Division, in the case of broadcast media. The reporter’s work is concerned mainly with the editorial matters and he ends his day in the news room—the *Mad House* of beehive activities as described by Ufuophu-Biri (2006).

3.2 Qualities of a Good Reporter

A good reporter must possess certain qualities that distinguish him/her as a professional (Karlis, 2010). Some of these qualities are discussed as follows:



A reporter must be educated.

3.2.1 Educational Qualification

A reporter must not be an illiterate; he must be educated. The NUJ prescribes a minimum of diploma in journalism, mass communication or other relevant disciplines. However, a higher degree in relevant disciplines will be of a great advantage for the reporter.

3.2.2 Language Proficiency

A good reporter must have a considerable proficiency in the language in which the media he reports for publishes (newspapers and magazines) or broadcasts (Radio/TV). This apart, he should be able to communicate effectively in the language of the area or community he covers. Without this ability, he cannot interact effectively with the local people and get relevant information from them.



A reporter must possess a good personality.

3.2.3 Decent Personality

Being the image of his organization, a good reporter must possess a good personality both physically and socially. Physically, he must be good-looking, well and neatly dressed, with a good carriage. This has nothing to do with his natural appearance. He must be neat, attractive and presentable. He should always dress appropriately to suit each occasion. Socially, a reporter must not be of a doubtful or notorious character. He must be credible, reliable, sociable and friendly.

3.2.4 Resourcefulness

A reporter who knows his onions must be highly curious, creative and resourceful. He must have nose for news. He must be highly sensitive to issues around him so that he creates events from what looks ordinary (Ufuophu-Biri, 2006). He must not allow newsworthy events to pass by him unnoticed. What other sees as an ordinary event would always present some news opportunities for a reporter who is curious and resourceful (Agbese, 2008). The reporter should be able to ask probing questions that bring out the best of responses from the sources; and raise questions the reader will want answered in the context of the story (Rich, 2010). A resourceful reporter approaches his story from “a recognisable angle. It must be meaningful and rich in details containing the important points of developments” (Duyile, 2005:18).

Note

Sources are people from whom a reporter gets information, which is used in writing news. Sources are also referred to as “eyewitnesses”, “interviewees”, etc.

3.2.5 Persistence and Ability to Meet the Deadline

A good reporter does not give up easily. He continues to endure and be persistent until he gets the information he needs. He should not be discouraged by any

funny reaction from his source. Apart from this, the reporter must be capable of working under the pressure to meet the deadline. A reporter who does not always meet the deadline is of little or no relevance to his media organisation no matter how knowledgeable, hardworking or resourceful he may be.

ITQ

Question

A reporter works in the ----- department.

- A. Marketing
- B. Security
- C. Human Resources
- D. Editorial

Feedback

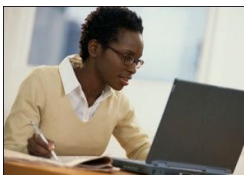
We have already said it in this segment of the session that a reporter works in a specialized department in his media house and that is the editorials. The right option is D.

3.2.6 Currency

A good reporter must be abreast of the latest event. He must be dynamic and up-to-date always. He must keep up with trends in the society. Journalism does not encourage stagnancy. To be current, the reporter must be a good reader and an avid consumer of other media contents. He must have an insatiable appetite for knowledge and information.

3.2.7 Versatility

The reporter must be versatile. That is, he must be a good learner who knows at least something about everything. He should not always claim ignorance of what is happening in other disciplines. If he is going to conduct an interview with an expert, say, a professor of medicine, the reporter is expected to have read around the subject so that he is not completely ignorant of some basic issues that may be raised during the interview.



Computer literacy can enable you to be updated

3.2.8 Computer Literacy

This form of literacy is necessary today as the world has reached the age of computer. Computer literacy will help the journalist to keep his job by remaining relevant in the ever-changing and complex world.

3.2.9 Faithfulness to the Facts

The reporter must be factual in his report. He must observe the golden rule: “the public has a right to know the truth.” Whatever the consequence, a good reporter must be faithful to the facts by telling the truth always. He should try as much as possible to dig beneath the surface to find the real story and select the appropriate words to present the story. He should be neutral and fair while presenting his news stories. He should always be guided by the journalistic cliché: *Facts are sacred, but comments are free*. For instance, if a Local Government Chairman mildly scolds his secretary, the reporter should not say

“the Chairman *axes, slaps, bashes, or hits* his secretary”. It is unethical for any journalist to twist the fact.

3.2.10 Confidentiality and Dependability

The reporter, on no account, should reveal a confidential source of information. If he does, not only does he gamble with his personality and the reputation of his organisation, but he also risks the danger of blocking completely sources of information in the subsequent encounters. He must keep secrets. If a source tells the reporter that a matter is “off-record”, the reporter should not publish such an issue. It is a contract that must be respected. Besides, the reporter should be dependable. Editors are always happy when they work with reporters who do not assume or wait to be corrected before they do the right thing. The reporter must always check for correctness of names, figures, spellings, dates, and addresses.

3.2.11 Good Temperament

The reporter must be able to control his emotion. He should be calm and be able to work steadily no matter the situation. He should not flare up unnecessarily. He should maintain high friendliness with his mates and sources.

The Basics that the Reporter Should Master

The most challenging aspect of a reporter’s work is that he should know something about everything. He may be sent to interview a medical pathologist today and, the next day, he may have to cover a court ruling. Therefore, the reporter is expected to be familiar with most disciplines as he cannot predict what would be his next assignment. Little wonder the reporter is called a warehouse of knowledge. Few of the basic things that a news reporter should master are discussed here.

A | The Reporter Should Know His Beat

Beat is the physical (geographic) and topical axis from where the news reporter is expected to gather information for his daily news reporting. The beat may be a courthouse, a police station, military formation or Defence Ministry, government house, local government secretariat, educational institution, a local market and other places where events of public interest take place regularly. The reporter should know, not just the location, but also how things work, the human characters at the beat, the meaning of actions, symbols and so on.

The courtroom reporter, for instance, should be familiar with how a Senior Advocate (SAN) dresses and whether or not he can appear in a court unaccompanied; the process of prosecution from arrest to trial and sentence; what it means when a judge appears in a red robe. If you are deployed to cover Defence Ministry, you should know who is superior to whom and be able to identify an officer’s rank by looking at his dressing. You should know little details such as who uses a blue, black, red or green pen among officers and men. If you cover the Senate Building of the University of Ibadan, you should identify and know the names of the Principal Officers of the University, and be familiar with the sitting order of the Senate members at a Senate meeting, or the order of procession during a matriculation or convocation ceremony of the University.

B | The Reporter Should Know the Press Law

There are two reasons for the reporter to know the press law. One, *a thorough knowledge of what constitutes libel, slander, sedition, law of privacy, official secrets, obscene publication, fair comment, or contempt of court among others will save the reporter from avoidable legal suits.* Two, the journalist who knows the press law is more courageous than the reporter who is not familiar with the press law. The journalist should know his rights under the law, and should know when he is stepping out of the provisions of the law.

C | The Reporter Should Be Abreast of the Current Trends

Every day, new things are happening, new discoveries are being made and new socio-political exploits take place around the world. The availability of modern information technology (Lincoln and Robards, 2014; Liu, 2014) makes it easy for the journalist to learn about these new events in near and far places. When the journalist is abreast of the current trends, his reports too will be current and he will be respected by the audience.

D | The Reporter Should Know Press History

When the reporter knows the history of the press in his country, he would have a clear understanding of certain normative factors that can guide his action as a journalist within the context of his country. Also, the knowledge of press history will help the journalist to understand the peculiarities of the press systems in different countries of the world, and how these influence the press system in Nigeria.

E | The Reporter Should Know the Theories and Practice of Communication

Journalism is communication; therefore, it is important the reporter be well familiar with the various theories and practice of communication especially the various means of human communication. More specifically, the reporter should be conscious of various non-verbal communication cues (kinesics, proxemics, paralanguage, and artifacts), their various manifestations and meanings.

The reporter, to know all these, is expected to be a perpetual learner. Mencher (1989) quotes veteran reporter, Joseph Galloway Jr. as saying that a good reporter is a student throughout his life. Each new assignment has to carry out requires a crash course in the theory and practice of yet another vocation or system. From the State house to the court-room, the reporter has to be familiar with the official conduct and culture of his beats. He has to learn consistently if he wants to know.

ITQ**Question**

The ability of the reporter to be creative and curious bothers on the quality of

- A. Versatility
- B. Confidentiality
- C. Resourcefulness
- D. Language proficiency

Feedback

Which of the options did you choose? The qualities of curiosity and creativity are not elements of the feature of confidentiality, versatility, or language proficiency. Rather, they are elements of resourcefulness. The right option is C.



Tip

A body of basic knowledge that enhances a reporter's performance is referred to as "reporter's circumference of experience".

Study Session Summary



Summary

We opened this Study Session by examining who a reporter is. After that, we discussed the qualities that a good news reporter (journalist) must possess. These qualities include educational qualification, language proficiency, good personality, resourcefulness and curiosity, persistence and ability to meet the deadline, currency, versatility, faithfulness to the facts, confidentiality and dependability, good temperament, and computer literacy.

Assignment



Assignment

1. Outline how this Study Session has helped you display some (if not all) of the qualities of a reporter in your news reporting assignments.

See scheduled date for submission on course calendar.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 3.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 3.1 and 3.2)

Outline and discuss what makes a good reporter.

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Study Session 4

Sources of Information for the Reporter

Introduction

News sources are very crucial to the reporter's job as he cannot perform his reportorial duties without these sources. The quality of the news stories that the reporter gives to the audience is determined, to a large extent, by the nature of the sources available to him. A reporter, who is mindful of remaining secure and relevant by submitting good and timely reports to his editor, will always maintain good relationships with his human sources. In this Study Session, we shall identify and discuss these various sources that the journalist relies to get most of the information he needs to write his stories.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

4.1 point out sources of information.

4.1 Sources of Information for News Stories



Sources of information can be human beings such as a security officer, a clerk, a driver, a messenger, a doctor, a military officer, a cleaner, a pilot, or a manager. There are also other non-human sources open to the reporter. We shall now examine these sources as listed below.

1. Direct personal observation
2. Interviews
3. Records
4. Agency report
5. Stories in other Newspapers
6. Unsolicited calls
7. Spontaneous events

These sources are briefly discussed below:

4.1.1 Direct Personal Observation

Of all the sources of information opened to the reporter, *direct personal observation is the most authentic, reliable and authoritative*. It makes the story to come alive, especially a news feature. However, it is almost the most dangerous and tasking because the reporter has a direct contact or observation with the news event, especially in events such as war, civil unrest, students unrest, political campaigns, legislative proceedings, court proceedings, sports, life in a refugee camp, a flood, or rehabilitation of displaced victims of disaster. On many occasions, reporters have been embarrassed, harassed, brutalised or even killed. Despite the enormous danger this type of source poses, it remains the best because it makes a story, especially a news feature, come alive.

4.1.2 Interview

The reporter can use interview to get more information especially when the events had occurred before he got to the scene. He can approach some eyewitnesses who were at the scene when the event really happened. Events such as war, religious riots, robberies, bomb explosion, flood, plane crash, and some other natural disasters do not announce that they would occur. Since the reporter is not a seer, he could not foresee them coming. It is only by stroke of luck that he has direct personal observation of such natural events. Therefore, the best option the reporter has in order to get to the root of the event is to interview eyewitnesses. However this demands some professional skills on the part of the reporter because it is not everybody that is available that could be interviewed. Many times, the most available or easily accessible person may not be the most appropriate individual to interview. Some people may not even be willing to grant the interview.

4.1.3 Records

Records are publications, police records, references, books, clippings from other newspapers/magazines/journals. It may also be files that the reporter keeps as his repository for notices, programmes, lectures, seminars, symposia or other future events. However, records may not serve as the sole or primary sources of information for the journalist; they can only serve as complements.

4.1.4 Agency Reports

Examples of news agencies that serve as sources of information for the journalist are: *The News Agency of Nigeria* (NAN). This is a local example, of course. Some of the international news agencies include: United Press International (UPI); Agence France Presse (AFP); Reuters; Pan African News Agency (PANA); and Associated Press (AP). To get direct information from most of these news agencies, the reporter through his organization may have to subscribe. However, the major weakness (which is also their strength) of these agencies is that their focus or scope is so wide that they tend to overlook or miss the minute, rural or grassroots events that really affect the majority of the reading/listening audience. Unfortunately, as studies have confirmed, conventional media organisations in Nigeria also follow this pattern by neglecting the grassroots issues in pursuit of commercial interests in the urban centres (Ojebuyi and Kolawole, 2016).

4.1.5 Stories in other Newspapers/Media (Radio/TV)

A smart reporter who is abreast of the trends and current events may get information from other media especially Radio/TV that are capable of reporting instantaneously (on the spur of the event). A good reporter must follow up such reports from other media as these may serve as sources of further information. However, the reporter must attribute any information he gets from other sources so that he is not accused of intellectual theft (plagiarism).

4.1.6 Unsolicited Calls

The reporter can also get news hints from voluntary callers. Some may identify themselves while some may remain anonymous. If a reporter receives an unsolicited call especially from an anonymous caller, he should be very careful and verify the authenticity of the information before rushing to the newsroom.

4.1.7 Spontaneous Events

These are events/occurrences that the reporter does not anticipate. They are not pre-planned and they do not announce that they would happen. Examples are road accidents, plane crashes, natural disasters, boat/ship mishaps, violent political changes, civil unrest, and armed robberies. A good reporter must be alert to get **scoop** from such events.

It should be noted that a good reporter does not depend solely on one source of information. Rather, he makes use of multiple sources as the situation demands. Appropriate use of multiple sources makes the news story rich and interesting.

Scoop

An exclusive news story either broadcast or published by a media house before any other media organisations.

ITQ

Question

A journalist got an unsolicited call from an anonymous person. The reporter got some information that would make a great scoop. However, some of the pieces of information got from the caller are invalidated. What do you think the journalist should do?

- Publish the story since it would make a great scoop.
- Publish the story and include the phrase “an anonymous source” so as to forestall any trouble.
- Publish only the few pieces of information that are validated.
- Throw away the whole information and threaten the caller never to call again!

Feedback

- The correct answer is option “C”. Journalism thrives only on facts, and facts can always be verified.
- If you chose option “A” you would be wrong because most of the bits of information cannot be validated.
- Option “B” is also wrong because of the reason option “A” is wrong. In addition, the use of the phrase “an anonymous source” is no more popular in journalism.
- Option “D” is also wrong. Although it is true that most of the

information supplied is wrong, a reporter who published the few authentic part of the information would have got a scoop for his media outfit unlike another reporter who unprofessionally rejected the whole information. Besides, a journalist should never be rude to people, who are his potential human sources of information.



Discussion

Online Discussion Activity

If you arrived at the scene of an event some moments after it occurred, demonstrate in written form how you would get appropriate information for your story?

Post your response on [Study Session Four Forum Page on Course website](#)

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, you learnt that one of the fundamental factors that determine the quality of a news story is the source of information. It provides the raw materials for the reporter. Sources of information for a reporter's news stories are diverse, and the reporter should learn how to explore and use the sources to complement one another.

Assignment



Assignment

1. Discuss which of the sources of information for news reports you would consider as the most reliable?
2. Records may not serve as the sole or primary sources of information for the journalist, yet they have their relevance. Discuss

Turn in your answer for your course tutor to evaluate at the course website. See course calendar for scheduled date of submission.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 4.1 (tests Learning Outcome 4.1)

Outline the various sources of information from where the reporter could get information for his news stories.

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Study Session 5

Meaning and Concept of News

Introduction

Adequate knowledge of what constitutes news and its types would prepare us fully for the practical exercise of news gathering and reporting from our different beats. We shall therefore devote this Study Session to discussing the meaning of news. We shall also discuss the types of news (hard news and soft news).



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

- 5.1 explain what constitutes news.
- 5.2 distinguish between hard news and soft news.

5.1 What is News?

It is a difficult task to answer the question raised above because news is a concept that has taken up so many identities. As Duyile (2005:11) posits, “nobody has yet come up with a precise, universal definition of news, but we have a lot of journalism principles that can be examined and put together to answer the question”. Any occurrence that has significance for the public, and is reported is news. Various scholars, based on the individual perspectives of viewing news have given it various definitions. Joel Librizzi cited by Mencher (1989) says that news is a departure from the expected, a shift from what we consider the usual, the average, and the ordinary (commonplace or normal). But when an event is so unexpected, when it deviates significantly from the possible; then we have the bizarre. And the bizarre makes good features.

Agbese (2008:21-25), while attempting to explain what constitutes news, cites a number of notable journalists, who have described news in different ways. One of them is Stanley Walker, one of the great city editors of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, who defines news simply as something “more unpredictable than the winds”. Another individual that Agbese cites is Joseph Pulitzer, one of the great American journalists. He uses some exclusive attributes to describe news as anything that is “original, distinctive, romantic, thrilling, unique, curious, quaint, humorous, odd and apt-to-be talked about”. Also among those journalists that Agbese cites is Charles A. Dana of the *New York Sun*, who defines news in a more pragmatic fashion as “anything that will make people talk”. According to Agbese, news is news because it compels people to talk about it. He further corroborates this assertion by quoting Arthur McEwan, editor of the *San Francisco Examiner*, who defines news simply as “Gee, whiz!” a local Nigerian equivalent of which is the expression as “*Na wa o!*” or “*O ga o!*” (that is, “this is serious,” or “this is unbelievable!”).

Akinfeleye (1987) defines news as an account of unusual (extraordinary or abnormal) events which more or less compel reporting; an account of what the public (the mass audience) want to know, what they must know, what they ought to know, and a commercial proposition.

Willis cited by Ufuophu-Biri (2006:11) defines news as “a report of what is happening now in the local community, in the state, in the nation and throughout the world. It does not seek to interpret the significance of events as does the analysis, the editorial or documentary. It states the facts as they are”.

From the foregoing definitions, it can be understood that news often concerns with issues that are odd, unusual, bizarre, and compelling. News is what newspapers print/publish, what newscasters announce/broadcast. News is made up of facts; however, not every fact is news. News is usually about people; but not every man makes news. News is about events; but not every event is newsworthy. It is not enough that events took place, what matters is that such events are recorded and reported by the people or appropriate mass media; and such events must affect or have significance for the public or a considerable segment of the mass audience.

Based on the universality of news, it has been described as a timely report or an account of events as they happen from the North, East, West and South (NEWS). As a summary, news is what little or none has been previously known about, but which is now reported. News is universal (from within & without). News is entertaining, informative and educational. News may be pleasant or unpleasant. News is published, transmitted/broadcast, or reported.



Tip

Based on the universality of news, it has been described as a timely report or an account of events as they happen from the North, East, West and South (NEWS). As a summary, news is what little or none has been previously known about, but which is now reported.

News is relative (Henshall and Ingram, 2017). This is because the interest of the media; the interest of the reading audience; the reporter’s experience and interest, and the socio-political peculiarities of the society, where the journalists operate, are the basic factors that determine how and why certain events are reported, published or broadcast as news at the expense of others.

One important ethical issue about news reporting is that “news (fact) is sacred, (but) comments free” (Duyile, 2005:11). This implies that the reporter should not attach himself to the news. He should only present the news as it is; he should not give any comment, unless he is writing a feature, editorial comments, opinionated articles or news commentary. He should not tamper with the facts. Rather, he should report the facts straight, accurately and objectively. He should get only the facts and be truthful (Willis, 1967; Wainwright, 1978; Henshall and Ingram, 2017).

ITQ

Question

The opinion of a reporter can be reflected in

- A. News report
- B. Clarified news
- C. News commentary
- D. No comments report

Feedback

- The correct answer is option “C” because opinions of journalists can only be allowed in reports such like features, news commentary, opinions, etc.
- If you chose options “B” and “D” you are wrong because there are neither “clarified news” nor “no comments” reports in journalism. Option “A” is also wrong because no form of comments from a journalist is permitted in a news report.

5.2 Types of News

Basically, there are two types of news. These are *hard news* and *soft news* (features). However, some schools of thought believe that there is third type of news. This is enterprise or investigative stories, which Niles (2017) describes as “stories that uncover information that few people knew” We shall focus our attention to on only the hard and soft variants of news here.

5.2.1 Hard News

Hard news

timely report.

Hard news is the core of a newspaper’s contents. It is the most important subjects of a newspaper. Hard news (also called **straight news** or **breaking news**) includes reports of a timely nature that happened the same day or the previous day before its publication on a newspaper, or broadcast on radio/TV; accounts of events or conflicts that have just happened or about to happen, such as crimes, fire disaster, meetings, protest rallies, speeches, testimony in court cases, accidents, sports and other events that have immediacy (Rich, 2010). Hard news is the type of news that is devoid of sentimentality and **editorialisation**. Hard news is basically to inform or educate, not to entertain. In hard news, the reporter is not expected to be involved emotionally. He does not include his personal opinion, emotion, views, judgement or comments. The reporter leaves these for the audience. He presents just the bare facts as they are; nothing more.



Hard news is basically to inform or educate, not to entertain. In hard news, the reporter is not expected to be involved emotionally. He does not include his personal opinion, emotion, views, judgement or comments, which may be

Tip

subjective. The reporter leaves these subjective responses for the audience. He presents just the bare facts as they are; nothing more.

Hard news adopts the traditional/conventional inverted pyramid style which involves the use of the **five W's** and **one H (SW+H)** – meaning *what, who, where, when, why* and *How* (Nordquist, 2017). The facts contained in a hard news are presented in a descending order of relevance and importance. That is, the news starts with the most important element(s) of the news story and goes on to discuss the less important details in a descending order. The first and most important element comes in the first paragraph known as *the lead*, while other elements in the news story come one after the other in a hierarchical order of relevance.

In hard news, the reader does not need to read to the last paragraph before he/she gets the gist of the story. The climax of the story comes in the lead – the first paragraph. Orthodox newspapers present most of their stories in hard news format. Unlike the soft news, the lead of a hard news is short, precise, captivating without trying to create any unnecessary suspense. An example of hard news is presented below.

BREAKING: Atiku defects to PDP

Former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar has announced his defection to the Peoples Democratic Party.

Atiku who recently resigned as a member of the All Progressives Congress said in a live video broadcast on Facebook, on Sunday, that he is joining the PDP.

Explaining why he left the APC, he said, “While other parties have purged themselves of the arbitrariness and unconstitutionality that led to fractionalisation, the All Progressives Congress has adopted those same practices and even gone beyond them to institute a regime of a draconian clampdown on all forms of democracy within the party and the government it produced.”

Source: The Punch[Online] (3 December 2017)

The news story above is a hard news. It is the report of an event that happened on the very day it was reported. The incident occurred on Sunday, 3 December, 2017, and the newspaper reported it on the same day. If the story waited for a day or two more, it would lose its immediacy. It could only be reported then as a soft news, not as a hard news again.

ITQ**Question**

A hard news is not _____.

- A. also called breaking news
- B. news that happened that same day or the previous day.
- C. Straight news
- D. A news that is difficult to tell.

Feedback

5.2.2 Soft News

Soft news is often regarded as features. It does not follow descending ordering of events or facts. Its scope is wide and it sometimes *neglects the tyranny of urgency or immediacy* as applicable to hard news. Most times it presents human interest or dramatic stories such as natural disaster or bizarre. Rich (2010:17), while describing soft news says that:

Soft news is defined as news that entertains or informs, with an emphasis on human interest and novelty and less immediacy than hard news. For example, a profile about a man who designs model airplanes or a story about the effectiveness of diet would be considered soft news ... Soft news can also be stories that focus on people, places or issues that affect readers' lives. These types of stories are called 'feature stories.' A story about the growing number of babies suffering from AIDS could be considered a soft news. It isn't less important than hard news, but it isn't news that happened overnight. Instead of being just a factual account of the event, it features or focuses on a particular angle, such as human-interest reactions.

As can be seen in Rich's explanation above, soft news has some elements of sympathy and human sentiments. The reporter may attempt to entertain by bringing in his creativity: he may add his comments, views or judgements. The lead of a soft news attempts to create suspense. It does not start with the climax. The most important part of a soft news does not necessarily come in the first paragraph. The summary of the story may come somewhere in the middle of the story. Usually, soft news adopts an unconventional start such as quote, question or narration.

Soft-sell magazines which specialise in reporting non-topical issues write soft news. Even some orthodox magazines (such as the *TELL*, the *Newswatch*, and *The News*) that treat topical issues present most of their stories in soft news (news features). Television stations in Nigeria also present some of their stories as soft news. For instance, the *News line* and *EyeWitness News* on NTA network service are good examples of soft news on TV broadcasting. Below is an example of a soft news that presents a crime story. The story starts with a quotation and progresses to build up the story-line in such a manner that suspense is likely to be created in the mind of the reader.

Police must fish out my son's killers, says father of slain 23-yr-old student (Headline)

"I know that my life too is in danger, as those who killed my son might be planning to come after me. But I will not succumb to despondency or intimidation

in my bid to get justice over the killing of my son.”

July 17, 2012 is a date that will linger in the memory of 50-year-old Mojeed Oyebola. It was the day some heartless men gruesomely killed his promising 23-year-old son, Rasheed Oyebola.

The deceased student, according to findings, was abducted from their home in Lemode near Ijoko, Ogun State by some unknown persons. His abductors were said to have sedated him with some drugs before whisking him away to a riverside in Ilaro, Ogun State where he was allegedly killed. His lifeless body was then tied to a stationary canoe near the shore and pushed into the river.

Forty days after, Oyebola is still reeling over the loss of his son, even as he pleads with the police to find his killers...

Speaking with our correspondent over the death of his son during the week, Oyebola intermittently clapped and shook his head. “I pity those who masterminded my son’s death, because anyone who murders the son of the sun will know no peace,” he said.

Recalling the unfortunate incident and the difficulty in tracking down his son’s killers, he said: “I never knew I was seeing Rasheed my son for the last time on July 17, when he left for a private computer college on Ibaragu Road where I had registered him to acquire computer literacy....

As the day turned into night without Rasheed in sight, his parents became worried. They also could not sleep throughout the night. At about 2 am, Oyebola got a strange phone call telling him that his son had not only been kidnapped, he had also been drowned in a river in a neighbouring community in the state....

(Source: The Nation August 25, 2012—Online version:
<http://www.thenationonlineng.net/2011/saturday-magazine/crime-diary/58930-police-must-fish-out-my-son’s-killers>).

Unlike the earlier example provided earlier above to illustrate hard news, this example of soft news reported an event that had happened several days before this report was done. The story must have been earlier reported as hard news a day after the incident occurred. It does not express any immediacy, but it presents the story from the human interest angle.

ITQ

Question

Soft news _____

- A. Provides one with the ability to understand news stories by giving interpretative details about such news stories.
- B. Expands and develops hard news reports
- C. Is good news brought by a friend who informs you about a lottery you won!
- D. Equals options “A” and “B”.

Feedback

- The correct answer is option “D”, which succinctly buttresses some of the key ideas about soft news that can be inferred from this Study Session.

- If you chose either option “A” or “B” you would not be completely correct because both options describe soft news. Option “C” is definitely wrong because news in the media, either soft or hard, is never relayed by a person, physically, to another person, though its content may be about somebody who has won a lottery—maybe you.



Activity

Online Discussion Activity

- Attempt the question and task below.
- Forward your submission to your academic advisor.
 1. It is argued by some scholars and journalists that soft news is not inferior to hard news. Do you agree? Give your reasons.
 2. Appraise any significant event in your community or area and report it as hard news.

[Post your submissions on Study Session Five Activity Page on Course website](#)

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we observed that news is a concept that is difficult to define. However, in our attempt to explain news, we looked at some definitions and descriptions by scholars and journalists. We could highlight that news is an account of any occurrence that compels reporting because of its significance for the public or a significant proportion of the mass audience. We also identified and discussed the two categories of news (hard news and soft news). We further cited examples of news stories to illustrate the differences between hard news and soft news.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 5.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 5.1 and 5.2)

News come in two different forms. Discuss.

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Study Session 6

News Credibility

Introduction

In the previous Study Session, you examined the meaning of news. In this Study Session, you will focus on news credulity. You shall examine what constitutes news credibility. You will do this by exploring two relevant concepts to news credibility. These are the concepts of “eye-witness”, and the concept of “I-witness”.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:
 6.1 *highlight* what constitutes credibility in news writing and reporting.

6.1 What is News Credibility?

News Credibility

The extent to which a news-story is reliable or true.

News Credibility is a term used to refer to the extent to which a news-story is reliable or true. Credibility combines two cardinal factors: the first factor hinges on the reporter’s consistency in his truthfulness. The other factor has to do with the ability of the reporter to patiently and diligently source for news. The ability of the reporter to report/publish the bare facts as he has seen or witnessed them has raised a serious ethical issue. Sometimes, some reporters usually depend on news covered by colleagues, while some media houses get bulk of their news stories from local and foreign news agencies. This has raised credibility questions. Therefore, in discussing the credibility of news-story, two concepts are relevant. These are (a) the concept of “eye-witness”, and (b) the concept of “I-witness”. We shall discuss these two concepts in the next part of this Study Session.

6.1.1 The Concept of “Eye-Witness”

This concept, usually, is used to indicate a secondary source of information. In most cases when a reporter was not at the scene of an event, he may need to rely on those people that really witnessed the event. Thus, references to eye-witness accounts are usually reports of what others, rather than the reporter himself, have witnessed. In this case, the reporter is unable to credit himself with a news item because he did not witness the events himself. The usual reporting phrases in this case include:

“According to an **eye-witness account**...”

“An **eye-witness** has it that ...”

An **eye-witness** that talked to our reporter said that.....”

“According to a **reliable source** that witnessed the incident ...”

“**Eye-witness** told our reporter that....”

“The gunmen **reportedly** took the worshippers by surprise...”

“A **source** said that...”

These foregoing phrases apparently show that the reporter was absent from the scene of the event, and whatever he reports would be as true as his so-called “reliable” source is willing to present facts of the facts. That is, the truthfulness of such a news story depends on the nature and the amount of information the eye-witness is willing to make available to the reporter because the reporter was not at the scene of the event himself. This usually raises serious questions of credibility or reliability of such news stories coming from reporters who solely rely on eye-witness accounts.



Do you think unsubstantial reports of an eye-witness should be reported by a journalist?

6.1.2 The Concept of “I-Witness”

In contrast to the concept of “eye-witness”, the concept of “I-witness” enhances the credibility in news reporting. The usual reporting phrases used in such reports based on “I-witness” accounts include:

“According to **our reporter**...”

“**Our reporter** who witnessed the incident said that ...”

“**Our correspondent** reported that ...”

In an interview with **our reporter**, the Director said.....”

A claim of ‘I’ or ‘our reporter/our correspondent’ indicates that the reporter was present when the event being reported occurred. This gives the reader a good confidence that the story is more reliable because the reporter was at the venue of the event. Of course, The use of the “I-witness” accounts enhances credibility of the news story and adds to the integrity of the media organisation.

However, it is not suggested here that the reporter is forbidden from getting information from sources who witnessed an occasion. What is important is the tactfulness on the part of the reporter. He should be highly professional in handling eye-witness accounts. He should try to verify the veracity of any account he gets from people who witnessed or claimed to have witnessed an event. The reporter should save himself and his media organisation the risk of public embarrassment by not rushing to the newsroom as soon as he gets information from his so-called “reliable” sources. Rather, he should go some extra miles to check and re-check the authenticity of such eye-witness accounts.

ITQ**Question**

Which is more credible between the 'Eye witness' account and the 'I-witness' accounts in news reportage.

Feedback

From what you have learnt in this session, you will agree that while the eye witness account is considered a secondary source, the 'I-WITNESS' account is considered a primary source of information. Naturally, a primary source should be more credible than a secondary source. Hence, 'I-WITNESS' account is the more credible of the two.

Study Session Summary

**Summary**

In this Study Session you learnt that credibility is an essential factor in news writing and reporting. In fact, it is one of the most important news ingredients. A reporter who intends to build a strong integrity for himself and his media organisation, and consistently win the hearts of his readers (audience) must continually report the basic facts. His stories would be more reliable if he is lucky to be at the scene of the event and present his reports from the angle of “I-Witness” accounts. However, it is not naturally possible for the reporter to be at the scene of events, especially breaking events such as crises, conflicts, social unrests, armed robberies, wars, accidents, and natural disasters. The most practical option open to the reporter in any of these phenomena is to rely on the “eye-witness” accounts to write his stories. Getting information absolutely from those who claimed to have witnessed the event always raises some suspicions. The reporter should always verify the claims of the eye-witnesses in order to ensure credibility of his news stories.

Assignment

**Assignment**

1. Outline how you would collect information you need to report a bank robbery that happened shortly before you got to the bank premises.
2. Write a hypothetical news story using the “eye-witness” accounts.

Assessment

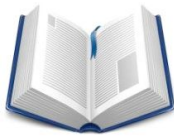


Assessment

SAQ 6.1 (tests Learning Outcome 6.1)

Discuss the concept of 'eye witness's and 'I-witness' within the context of news credibility.

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Study Session 7

Qualities of News/News Judgement Factors

Introduction

Out of millions of events that happen daily, just a fragment is reported as news by the mass media while about 99.99999% of such events are left unreported (Paul and Elder 2006). Many factors account for this massive omission of facts. One is the limited space in the media. Another is that not all such events meet the expectations of the reporters who gather news stories, and the editors who do the final selection of the news items that would finally get to the mass audience. While selecting items for media contents from the competing events, reporters and editors apply some criteria to gauge the newsworthiness of these competing events. These criteria are called news values, *news judgement factors*, or *qualities of news* (Schwarz, 2009; Zeh, 2009; McGregor, 2010). In lectures eight and nine, we shall identify and discuss these *news values* otherwise called qualities of news.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 *present* the right approach towards news writing and reporting exercise.

7.1 Qualities of News

The factors that constitute the worthiness of a new story are the exclusive prerogative (preserves) of the journalists and media editors. Stories are selected based on the judgement of the key actors in news selection and preparation processes. Certain factors which relate to geographical, historical, personality and contingency (uncertainty of events) also govern selection of news stories. Therefore, for any occurrence to qualify as news, it has to possess certain qualities (Elders, 2006; Shoemaker, 2006; Karlis, 2015). These qualities are:

1. Impact or Consequence
2. Oddity/Bizarre
3. Prominence/Personality
4. Conflict
5. Proximity
6. Magnitude
7. Human interest
8. Entertainment
9. Timelessness

10. Commercial Proposition



Criteria used by the media to gauge newsworthiness of competing newsworthy events are called *news values*, *news judgement factors*, or *qualities of news*.

7.1.1 Impact/Consequence

This has to do with the determination of consequent function or the effect of an occurrence on the people or audience of a media. Impact refers to the extent of significance of an event for the public and by extension the number or percentage of people affected by such event. The higher the impact of, and the number of people affected by, an event, the larger the number of media audience who would be eager to read the story. Thus, editors of a Nigerian newspaper would act on this logic and place as a front-page story the occurrence of an epidemic or a national strike action by oil workers in Nigeria ahead of a story about the presidential delegates attending the burial of a late Ghanaian President. The former would naturally attract the Nigerian audience more than the latter would do.

7.1.2 Oddity/Bizarre

Some events are naturally strange and unusual. They deviate from the ordinary, the usual and the average in their nature, formats, times, or locations (Joel Librizzi cited by Mencher (1989)). They prove to be unimaginable. These types of events make good news. For example if a sane human being is reported to have bitten a dog; a pregnant woman delivered of reptile; a young man of 18 years gets married to an octogenarian woman; a woman beheaded by her only son; a dying millionaire that bequeaths or wills his property to his only pet; or if a dog impregnates a woman, it is newsworthy. Each of these makes a good news story. By nature they attract the attention of a good editor because of their apparent deviation from what is natural and normal. Of course, if a plane belonging to *Kenya Airways* takes off from Lagos, Nigeria, and after about five hours of a smooth flight, it lands safely in Nairobi, Kenya, it is no news. But if the same plane is delayed in the air for 10 hours because of a bomb scare at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport, Nairobi, and the plane is eventually diverted to Ethiopia to land, it is news!! The following news story is an illustration of oddity or bizarre as a news factor: It sounds odd that a robbery suspect is among the potential law enforcement officers.

Police find robbery suspect among recruits (Headline)

The Nigeria Police College, Kaduna State, on Thursday said it found a robbery suspect among recruits undergoing training in the college.

The commandant of the college, Alhaji Sanusi Rufai, told newsmen in Kaduna that the suspect was named by members of his gang after they were arrested by the police in Abuja.

The commandant said details of the suspect's identity were forwarded to the college, which withdrew, arrested and transferred him to the appropriate police unit for investigation.

Rufai said the suspect was among 25 recruits the college disqualified for various

inadequacies during training, *News Agency of Nigeria* reports.

The commandant said some of the students were found to have presented forged school results and others had criminal records, “while some were withdrawn on health grounds.”

“Some of the recruits have sight or hearing challenges, while a few others did not attend the schools whose certificates they presented,” he added.

Rufai said the college would continue to screen “unfit persons” out to ensure that only those with good character were allowed to train as policemen and women.

7.1.3 Prominence/Personality

Some people, as a result of their power, wealth, fame, success, or office are prominent. They attract public attention naturally. Artistes, celebrated sportsmen or models (celebrities), public office holders, successful businessman, great politicians, diplomats, administrators, etc. will always make news anytime they speak, act or refuse to act when should. Things that these people do, or that affect them readily make news. If former President Olusegun Obasanjo, or President Goodluck Jonathan boards a commercial bus in Oshodi Lagos, or the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ibadan is seen on an *okada* (commercial motorbike) along *Amina* Way, UI, it makes a good news story. Yet this is what every ordinary *Lagosian*, or UI students and most staff do every now and then without any notice. If Bill gate visits Nigeria, it makes news, but if an ordinary average citizen from Ghana visits Nigeria on an excursion, this may go unnoticed unless the person does what is unusual or special. Editors would always consider stories about prominent figures in society because people want read or hear about them. Below is an example of a news story that is reported from the angle of prominence or personalities. The editor considered the story newsworthy, not because of the Carnival, but because of the Governor. If an ordinary citizen had made the same comments, the incident might not have been reported by the newspapers.

Carnival: An Avenue to create Jobs, boost Revenue – Ambode



Gov. Akinwunmi Ambode of Lagos State, on Sunday said that hosting of carnivals and others entertainment shows had served as an avenue to create job opportunities for people of the state and also to boost government Internally Generated Revenue (IGR).

Ambode, represented by his Deputy Governor, Idiat Adebule, disclosed

this at the second edition of Lagos street carnival held in Oba Akran Avenue, Lagos, on Sunday.

Ambode said that the one-day carnival had fetched some people huge revenue, created job for them, ranging from the people that designed and sowed the costumes and those that displayed during the carnival.

“I congratulate the people of Lagos state for coming out en-mass to participate in this year’s carnival.

” We thank God for his grace, It is eight solid hours of fun and entertainment, ” he said.

He said that the purpose of the carnival was to resonate with the people of the state love to do.

“We are keeping our campaign promises that with entertainment and arts, we will give the best to the people of Lagos state, ” he said.

Ambode said that the carnival had had its economy and social impacts to the host state and community.

“Today, you can see that it is a parade of different colours from different groups.

” This event is to usher in the festive period we are into. The reason why we are in government is to make people to be happy, ” he said.

He assured the people of Lagos State befitting and fun filled festivities.

“Lagos festival will soon commence, we urge everyone to come out en-mass to participate, ” he said.

Ambode commended the media, security agents and the organisers of the carnival for their laudable initiatives in making the event a colourful and memorable one.

Source: *The Nation* [online] (3 December, 2017)



I am the World’s Most Criticized President— Jonathan

President Goodluck Jonathan on Monday said he was the most criticised President in the whole world and vowed to become the most praised before he left office.

Jonathan however absolved himself of any blame for the country’s problems for which he said he had become an object of criticism.

“I think I am the most criticised President in the whole world, but I want to tell this audience that before I leave I will be the most praised President,” he said at the opening of the 52nd Annual General of the Nigerian Bar Association at the International Conference Centre in Abuja.

(Sources *The Punch* Newspaper, August 28, 2012—online version)

7.1.4 Conflicts

If it bleeds, it leads. Factors such as damage, man-made disaster, conflict, and negative consequences enhance the chance of an event to be selected as news by journalists and editors. This is what is called **Reference to something negative** (Watson, 2003; Schwarz, 2009). Always, conflicts make news. Events about war, civil unrest, political riots, parliamentary disharmony; mutiny in a military barracks, interpersonal crises, etc. would naturally attract editors and make good news that will attract wide readership or audience. The story below is an example of a conflict-related event:

Ondo APC Crisis: Boroffice, Kekemeke, And Ilori Can't Return To APC, Says Adetimehin

Ade Adetimehin, the embattled Acting Chairman of the crisis-ridden All Progressives Congress (APC) in Ondo State has said the era of indiscipline and impunity in the governing party is over.

Mr. Adetimehin added that the leadership of the party will not also tolerate any act capable of causing disunity and disaffection among the members and those who had already left the party.

He disclosed that those who worked against the interest of the party during the 2016 electioneering period and governorship election should be magnanimous to tender an unreserved apology.

The APC Acting chairman who spoke to journalists on Friday after addressing members of the State Working Committee of the party in Akure, the state capital, said some 'forces' that worked against the party while in opposition are now returning to cause a division.

He mentioned that the ousted Chairman of the party, Mr. Isaacs Kekemeke and Senator Ajayi Boroffice, representing Ondo North Senatorial District strategically left APC to work for Mr. Olusola Oke as the candidate of the Alliance for Democracy (AD).

The duo, according to Adetimehin, also plotted with Mr. Bola Ilori who served as the Director General of the Olusola Oke Campaign Organization with the intention to weakening the chances of the APC during the 2016 gubernatorial election.

Sahara Reporters correspondent reported that Mr. Adetimehin was speaking in a reaction to a purported statement credited to Senator Boroffice, claiming that the letter recognizing the former as Acting chairman of APC in the state was fake, and did not emanate from the party's national secretariat....

Source: *Sahara Reporters* (7.1 December, 2017)

7.1.5 Proximity

Proximity has to do with nearness of an event to the people or the news organization. The basic logic behind proximity as regards news judgement is that things that happen close to the audience would have more impact on them and interest them than what happens in far or remote distance. Proximity has three dimensions as discussed below.

- **Topical Proximity:** This refers to nearness of events or subjects of discussion to the reader's daily or selected experiences. The topicality of an event determines its readership or acceptability. A Nigerian national newspaper that reports on its front-page cases of rigging and stolen ballot boxes during the presidential election in Nigeria, suicide bombings in some parts of the country will attract the Nigerian reader's interest much better than another Nigerian national newspaper that reports on its front page Nigerian Supers Eagles' performance at the last Nations Cup, during the same period of presidential election or incessant threats to national security by deadly ethno-religious crises.
- **Physical Proximity:** This explains that editors consider events in a near location to be more significant to the local people than events in a remote setting. Ten Nigerians killed in an auto-crash in a Nigerian village is nearer and more important to Nigerians and the Nigerian media than 50 Iraqis killed by suicide bombers in far Baghdad. When events get more distant to the people, such events become less relevant and less important to the people.
- **Social Proximity:** This holds that people are more interested in affairs that concern those whom they know or those who are close to them. When a house collapses in America and kills 10 Nigerian this would interest Nigerians and the Nigerian media than a train mishaps in Nigeria that kills 50 Cubans. This is also called psychological proximity. An individual reacts to an event according to how it affects his psychology or social well-being and those people close to him.

ITQ

Question

Read the headline below [of a grassroots newspaper] and state its news quality.

Two traditional rulers in Itori, Ewekoro Local Government Area of Ogun State on Tuesday engaged each other in fisticuffs on the premises of the Divisional Police Headquarters in the area.

- A. Oddity
- B. Conflict
- C. Prominence
- D. All of the options

Feedback

- The correct answer is D. Some news stories are selected by editors because they have more than one quality of news. The headline above is one of such stories. First, it is shocking as well as unusual (**oddity**) that two traditional rulers, who are prominent [news] personalities (**prominence**) should be engaged in a fight (**conflict**) in

a police station. The people of the community would want to read about the occurrence.

- If you chose any other option you would not be completely right.

7.1.6 Timeliness

News is a new event that is reported or announced. Stale news is no news. According to John Delane (1852) the first duty of the press is to obtain the earliest and most correct intelligence of the day, and instantly, by disclosing them, to make them the common property of the mass audience. Andre Gide, a French novelist says that “everything that will be less interesting tomorrow than today, that is news”.

Thus an event that happened last week is potentially less newsworthy than one of the same nature that occurred last night or just a few hours ago. Journalists and editors, by their training and routine experiences, work on the logic that when what is reported as news is fresh and immediate, the story, by nature, would attract a larger segment of the audience than when the story is about an old event that is already known by the public. According to Rich (2010: 12), “timeliness answers this reader’s question: Why are you telling me this story now?” This implies that the reader wants to know if the story is about an event that has just happened, or that is just about to happen, and about which little or nothing has already been known by the public. If the case is the contrary, then the story is no more news, and a good editor would not include it in the news contents of the day.

For example, on Monday, October 1, 2012, unknown gunmen stormed the Federal Polytechnic, Mubi, Adamawa State’s second major town, and killed no fewer than 40 students of the institution. Almost immediately, the sad news broke. Major national and international broadcast media reported the story as hard news while some print media quickly posted the news online via their Internet platforms as news update. On the following day (Tuesday October 2, 2012), almost all the major national newspapers reported the incident on their front pages. This is an example of stories that must not wait. No reasonable editor of broadcast media would wait till the following morning before his station would report the story. Similarly, editors of print media that knew their onions would report the story as hard news latest the following morning. However, reporters can conduct more investigations and after a few days, write news features on the incident (this is soft news).

7.1.7 Timelessness

Certain categories of events are constant. They are of continued relevance. People are likely to talk about them always irrespective of the passage of time. Such events, when handled by a creative and clever reporter, make good news. Examples of such events that can

time that claimed one life. The two events may be reported because of their potential impact, but the former would probably make a front-page story while the latter may be remotely reported in the same newspaper.

7.1.9 Human Interest

Events that touch people’s hearts, psychology or emotion are sources of good news. People are sensitive to experiences of joys and sorrows that concern them

or their neighbour. Human interest news may relate to non-human issues but if they are considered touching enough, they are reported. Events about child trafficking, ritual killings, fraud, kidnapping, fatal accidents, natural disaster (such as earthquake, floods and fire outbreak), catastrophe in families or human settlements, personal or collective tragedies, unmerited favour/success, a stroke of luck (narrow escape from death/tragedy) and so on, make good human interest news.

7.1.10 Commercial Proposition

One definition of news according to Akinfeleye (1987) is that news is an account of unusual (extraordinary or abnormal) events which more or less compel reporting; an account of what the public (the mass audience) want to know, what they must know, what they ought to know, *and a commercial proposition*. If we go by the foregoing definition by Akinfeleye, we would understand that apart from events that meet the nine criteria that we have already discussed, editors also select as news events that meet the commercial interest of the proprietors.

The emergence of media liberalisation and commercialisation (Olorunnisola, 2007) has engendered stiff competitions in the media industry. More media houses are now operating in a rather saturated market. For a media house to compete favourably with others and continue to survive, it must be able to generate money, and one of the best ways to do this is to court the advertisers. Therefore, editors always include in the day's reports events that have significance for the advertisers or potential advertisers, and that generate money or have the potential to generate money for the media organisations irrespective of whether the stories have significance for the general public or not. This commercial dimension of news may sound unethical and unprofessional, but it is the reality. Most of the media contents today are stories selected not on the criteria of their newsworthiness but because they can generate revenue for the media proprietors. Events such as Annual General Meetings of big corporations, book lunch, commissioning of new plants, conferment of chieftaincy titles, press releases, birthdays, obituaries, wedding anniversaries and appointments are examples of what usually become parts of the media contents—not necessarily for their significance for the audience—but because they generate revenue for the media outfits.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, you learnt that the news editors always base their editorial decision of news selection on a number of criteria. These criteria were consequently discussed.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 7.1 (tests Learning Outcome 7.1)

Outline and discuss the qualities of a news.

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Study Session 8

Approaches to Writing News Story

Introduction

Approach to writing is centrally based on the order in which news story is presented. There are several approaches to presenting/writing news stories. However, what determine which approach a reporter adopts are the story itself and the preference of the reporter. In terms of the nature, stories can be hard (breaking/straight) news, or soft news (features). Writing each of these news formats requires a different approach. In our Study Session here, we shall discuss these different approaches to writing news stories.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

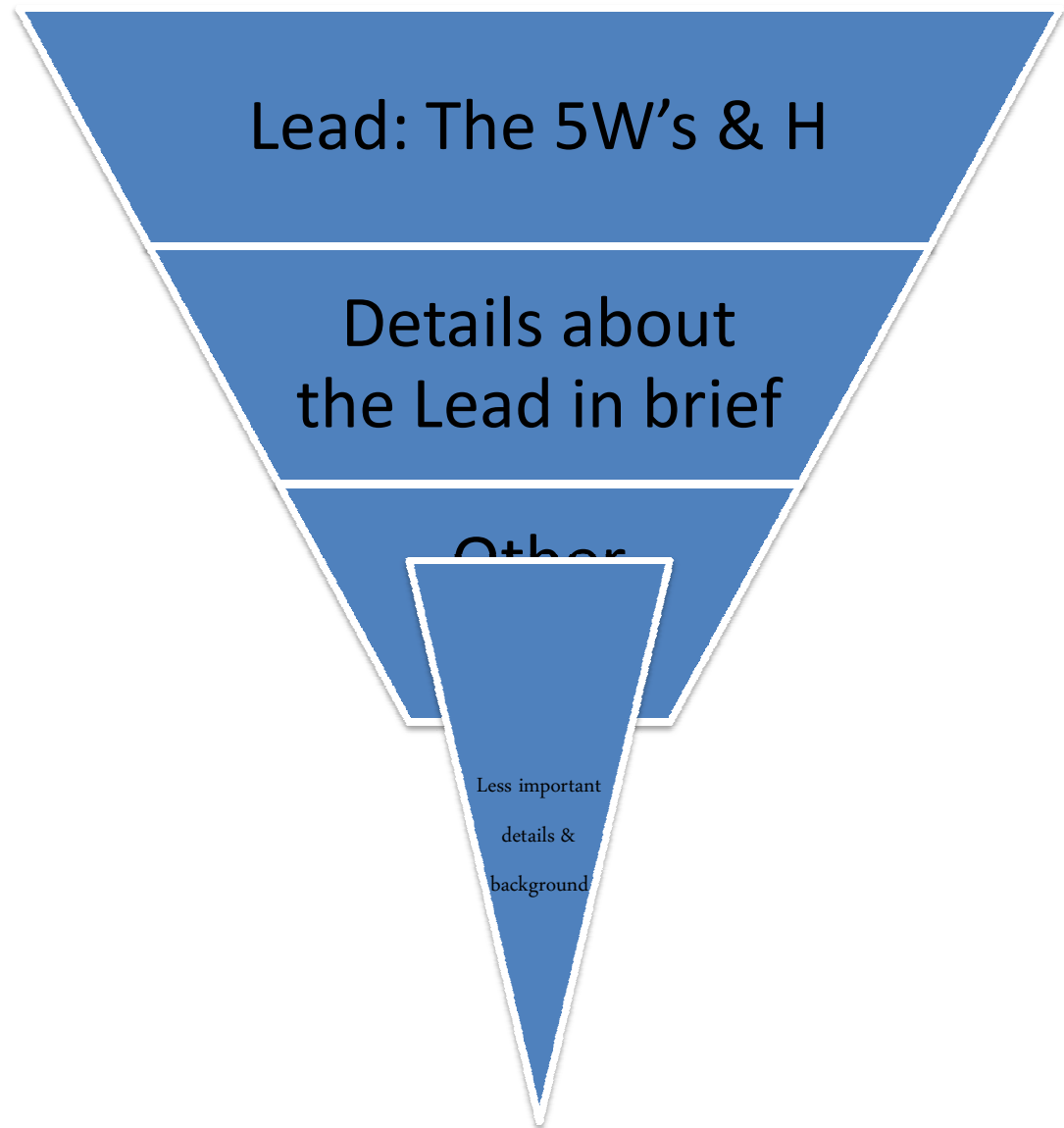
8.1 *apply* approaches appropriately while writing news.

8.1 Approaches to News Writing

Hard news is predominantly informative, while news-features are both informative and entertaining. Each of the genres demands different approaches as appropriate. Basically, there are three approaches to writing news-stories. Let us now examine each of these writing approaches.

8.1.1 The Inverted Pyramid Approach

This approach has to do with the hard (breaking) news. It is used mostly to present hard news stories (Rich, 2010). It is the oldest approach to news writing. This approach deviates from the normal sequential or time-order approach. Its basic feature is the presentation of the most important aspects of the news at the beginning of the news story. Unlike the conventional writing which starts from the least important aspects of the story to the most important, the inverted pyramid approach starts the news story with a lead that contains some or most of the news elements called the 5W's and an H (who, what, where, when, why and How). Most times, the lead does not contain all these six elements, but it must contain at least, the *who* and or the *what* element. The lead presents the most important part (climax) of the story, and it affords the editor or sub-editor to expunge any part of the story at the bottom without distorting the basic facts in the story (Ufuophu-Biri, 2006). The lead is then further developed briefly and supporting details follow in descending order of importance. This is illustrated thus:



Tip

The basic feature of the inverted pyramid style of writing news is the presentation of the most important aspects of the news at the beginning of the news story.

This approach is the oldest, yet, it is in use today especially in reporting hard news. It is considered most appropriate for writing hard news because it enables the news readers to get basic facts about a story from the first two or three paragraphs as they may not have enough time to read the entire story. An example is given below. *Note that the lead in the following story is in the passive voice because the story is within the 35 words limit for a good lead.*

Headline:

Explosion destroys missionary school in Umuahia

The Lead (25 words: What happened to whom, when, why and where):

A huge fire from an explosion at Saclux Paints Industry in Umuahia, the Abia capital, on Sunday destroyed a missionary school building in the neighbourhood.

Details (in the order of importance):

Mr Emeka Okereke, the owner of the school, known as Love for Africa Mission, told Newsmen that a tanker, allegedly bearing 'black oil' exploded inside the company's premises around 1 pm.

He said that the fire started with an explosion shortly after they ended the Sunday service at the school.

"We ended the Sunday service around 12:15 pm and I was trying to lock up the gate, when I heard a heavy explosion, accompanied with billows of heavy smoke and fire moving up the sky.

"The incident caused panic and stampede as everyone of us scampered into different areas, including the nearby bush, for safety," he said.

He said that the fire later spread into the school building, which doubles as his family residence, when oil from the exploded tank spilled into the compound.

He said that as the fire raged, some youths in the area made attempts to move into his building in order to rescue some valuables.

Okereke said that he restrained them because he feared that they might be trapped inside the building.

"But when they insisted and attempted to pull down the entrance gate, I gave them the key with which they entered the compound," he said.

He said that the sympathisers succeeded in pushing out the two jeeps that were parked in the compound.

He said that he could not ascertain the extent of damage, saying that no other property was recovered from the building.

An eyewitness account said that a firefighting equipment from the state fire service came to the scene but could not control the fire due to insufficient water in the machine.

It was gathered that the fire fighters returned to the scene and eventually put out the fire with the assistance of a commercial water tanker driver in the area.

Some residents of other buildings close to the factory evacuated their belongings for fear that the inferno would spread to their houses.

One of the fire fighters, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that they encountered logistics problems in their efforts to put out the fire.

The Police Public Relations Officer of the state, Mr Geoffrey Ogbonna, confirmed the incident to NAN on phone.

Ogbonna also said that no life was lost in the incident and that the fire had been successfully controlled.

Source: The Vanguard [online] (December 3, 2017)

Headline: Presidential Committee Members Arraigned for Bribery

The Lead (What happened to whom, when & why):

Six people and a company were arraigned in Lagos yesterday for their alleged complicity in fraudulent conduct over oil subsidy.

Details: Messrs Buhari Ganiyu and Oni Oluwashola, members of the Presidential Committee on Fuel Subsidy Verification (PCFSV) were charged with conspiracy and receipt of bribe from a company, Integrated Oil and Gas Limited and its senior officials.

The company, its Managing Director, Anthony Ihenacho; Assistant General Manager, Humphrey Okoh and Financial Controller, Mrs Alalade Abioye, were charged with conspiracy and offering of bribe of N1.5m to the PCFSV officials.

They were arraigned before Magistrate Martins Owumi of the Magistrates' Court, Tinubu on a three-count charge of conspiracy, offering and receiving of bribe.

The accused persons were said to have committed the alleged offences on August 30 in Lagos. They were accused of violating sections 63(1) (a)(b), 64(1) and 409 of the Criminal Law of Lagos State, 2011.

The accused persons were, in the charge marked: J/93/2012, said to have acted with some others yet to be apprehended by men of the Police Special Fraud Unit (SFU), Ikoyi, Lagos, saddled with the investigation and prosecution of the case.

They all pleaded not guilty at their arraignment and were each granted bail at N500, 000 with two sureties in like some.

Further hearing has been fixed for November 10.

(Source: *The Nation* Thursday Oct. 4, 2012—online version:

<http://thenationonlineng.net/new/news/presidential-committee-members-arraigned-for-bribery/>)

ITQ

Question

The inverted pyramid approach is used mainly with all but one of the following.

- A. Hard news
- B. Soft news
- C. Breaking news
- D. Straight newsletter

Feedback

This question only tried to hatch up what you studied in Session 5. Based on what we have studied here in this session, the inverted pyramid approach is used with hard news alone. However, hard news is same as straight news and

breaking news. Hence, they are one and the same. Option B is the odd item.

8.1.2 The Chronological Approach

This method is suitable for dramatic news story. It may also adopt a summary lead, or in most cases, a delayed lead followed by a “transition period” and then a “turn-back” to the account of how the event in the lead happened. This approach follows the normal sequence in the development of the plot of the story. It follows the time-order where there is a build-up of events in the order that they occurred. It builds up a suspense that may force the reader to read the entire story. Let’s consider this example:

Headline: Gunmen kill 16 at Deeper Life Church during Service

Details: It was like a scene from a war film. A crowd of worshippers in a church—perhaps praying, their eyes shut—and suddenly the eerie sounds of guns, pandemonium, blood, tears and anguish.

But it was no movie. All was real last night in Okene, Kogi State where unknown gunmen stormed a church and opened fire on worshippers, killing no fewer than 16.

Killed were worshippers of Deeper Life Bible Church opposite the Federal College of Education (FCE). Many were injured.

"We are shocked. It is serious," a Pastor told *The Nation* last night.

The gunmen, who were said to be bearing sophisticated weapons, stormed the church during the Bible Study, a Monday programme, at about 7p.m., shooting indiscriminately.

The gunmen reportedly took the worshippers by surprise. They blocked all entrances into the church, preventing people from escaping as they fired indiscriminately at the worshippers.

A source said 15 worshippers died on the spot; one died in the hospital.

"As I am talking to you now, we have just counted 16 bodies. No fewer than nine others have been rushed to the Okene General Hospital Okene," the source said.

Among the dead was the local government area Pastor, according to a source who spoke in Lagos where news of the incident sent members into a shock.

One of the injured is the Dean of Student Affairs of the FCE.

The attack came two weeks after an account officer with FCE, Okene was abducted from his home and murdered. An attack on the Living Faith Church on Lagos Road in Okene was last month repelled by security operatives who stopped an explosive-laden vehicle parked by road side.

(Source: *The Nation* Tuesday, August 7, 2012, pg 1 & 4)

The foregoing story does not start with the account of what happened; it does not start with the climax (nut graph) of the story. Instead, it starts with an opening that paints a bloody scenario before it goes ahead to present how the incident occurred. The main objective here is to create some suspense. This method is employed in writing human interest stories. In most cases, it is adopted to present news features.

8.1.3 The First-Person Approach

This approach is not frequently used in news writing. It is employed only when the reporter is an eye-witness. That is, when he himself witnessed the event and when he relies on direct personal observation materials used for the story. This method is not usually used in hard news writing because reporters prefer to hide their identities. That is why phrases such as “our reporter”, “our crew”, our

correspondents” are always used instead of the first person pronoun “I” to give credibility to the news story. This approach also adopts the use of flash back and flash forward to create a vivid plot structure for the story. It is often used in creative writing and features especially when the story is coming from regular column writers, contributors and, in some cases, other writers that are not staff of the media organisation that publishes the story. Stories in this category are purely for entertainment. Most newspapers and magazines have special columns for these entertainment stories. Examples are Dan Agbese’s Column in the *Newswatch Magazine*, Dele Omotunde’s *Opilogue* in the *TELL Magazine*, and Reuben Abati’s hilarious and indicting column in *The Guardian* newspaper.

The last two approaches—the chronological and the first person Approaches—are not used in writing hard news. They are used in writing news features, features and other forms of creative writings and some broadcast reports such as *News line* on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) national stations.

ITQ

Question

ITQ of these news writing approaches is the most appropriate for writing the I-witness report of the reporter?

- A. The first person
- B. Chronology
- C. The inverted pyramid
- D. Straightjacket

Feedback on ITQ answers

- The correct answer is option “A” because it is used in writing mostly the 'I-witness' account of the reporter. The other options are wrong because they are used for Writing other forms of journalistic writing like hard news and dramatix stories except straightjacket which is not a style of writing news.



Tip

The first person and the chronological styles of journalistic writing are not used in writing hard news. They are used in writing news features, features and other forms of creative writings and some broadcast reports.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we identified and discussed three basic approaches to news writing. These approaches are the inverted pyramid approach, the chronological approach, and the first-person approach. Out of these three approaches, the inverted pyramid approach is mostly used to present hard news. The other two approaches are used for news features and purely entertainment stories.

Assessment

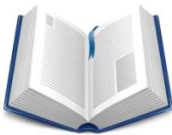


Assessment

SAQ 8.1 (tests Learning Outcome 8.1)

Discuss the various approaches to writing a news story.

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Study Session 9

Writing the News Lead

Introduction

We have already discussed the approaches to news writing in our previous Study Session, and we can now write different types of news stories using the appropriate approaches. But that is not enough. We still need to master the skills of presenting the theme (lead) of our news story. Therefore, in this Study Session, what we will be discussing is the *News Lead*.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

- 9.1 point out the lead of a story.
- 9.2 write leads for any type of hard news story.
- 9.3 present types of hard-news leads.

9.1 What is the Lead?

The **lead** of a story is that statement in the story which captures precisely what the story has to say. It is the most important statement in the story. It is the summary, the gist and climax of the story, especially the hard news. It is written in a clear, short and comprehensive statement that summarizes the central theme of the story (Ufuophu-Biri, 2006, Rich, 2006). As the name implies the lead (formerly spelt as *lede*), comes first in a news story and leads/guides the reader to the story.



Tip

The lead appears in the first paragraph of a news story and leads/guides the reader to the rest of the story.

In news writing, the reporter must always remember and be guided by the **Nut Graph**. The nut graph is a statement or paragraph that identifies the focus of the story. It is also referred to as the focus graph or the point statement. The term—nut graph—was coined over 50 years ago by *The Wall Street Journal*. The concept came from the belief that a news story must contain one central theme that must be presented in a “nutshell summary” high in the story (Rich, 2010). Before you start writing your story, you must first identify the *nut graph*. This is the force that will drive your story.

**Tip**

The lead appears in the first paragraph of a news story and leads/guides the reader to the rest of the story.

When you write your story and your lead presents right in the first paragraph the focus of the story, you do not need a separate nut graph in the story. This is the case in writing hard news. That is, in hard news the lead and the nut graph are combined in the very first statement/paragraph, and by implication, the lead takes the place of the nut graph. Such lead that replaces the nut graph is used in hard news. It is, therefore, called **direct lead**, **hard-news lead** or **summary lead**. The summary lead goes straight to the point.

In some cases, especially in soft news (news features), the lead, which is usually the first paragraph, may be flexible by not necessarily presenting the point statement/nut graph. The nut graph may come in the second, third or fourth, fifth paragraph to present the theme of the story while the lead may be more than one sentence. This type of lead where the nut graph does not come in the first sentence is called **the delayed lead** or **the soft news lead**. Consider the following example of a soft-news lead where the nut graph is not in the first paragraph:

Headline: Gunmen kill 43 Students

40 dead in Adamawa, three in Maiduguri

Security chiefs move to Mubi

Delayed Lead (without the Nut Graph):

THE drums may have been silent on Independence Day. Not so the guns of yet unknown assailants who stormed Mubi, Adamawa State's second major town, on Monday.

The Nut Graph (in the second paragraph):

No fewer than 40 students were killed by the gunmen who unleashed a storm of bullets on a community where students live. But the police said 25 people died.

Further Details:

There are three higher institutions of learning in the town – the Adamwa State University, the Federal Polytechnic and the School of Health Technology.

(Source: *The Nation*, Thursday Oct. 4, 2012—online version:

<http://thenationonlineng.net/new/news/gunmen-kill-43-students/>)

In the above example, the climax (most important information—the nut graph) of the story comes in the second paragraph. In both the hard news and the soft news, the lead comes first. In summary lead, the point statement/nut graph is in the first paragraph; while in delayed/soft lead, the lead comes first and the story progresses to the nut graph in another paragraph. Our focus in this Study Session, however, will be on the hard (summary) lead.



Tip

In summary lead, the point statement/nut graph is in the first paragraph; while in delayed/soft lead, the lead comes first and the story progresses to the nut graph in another paragraph.

ITQ

Question

A kind of lead where the nut graph does not come in in the first paragraph is called

- A. Hard news lead
- B. Summary lead
- C. Delayed lead
- D. Hybrid lead

Feedback

Did you notice something in one of the options? Great! You will notice that the option D does not exist. Having said that, the right option is also not A or B (They both mean the same though) because they pertain to hard news and not soft news which is what this question covers. The right option is C.

9.2 Principles Guiding Summary Lead Writing

1. The lead must be short, complete and clear. Experts say that the maximum length for a good direct lead should be 35 words in one sentence (Bruce and Douglas cited by Ufuophu-Biri, 2006). It is even better to write less; however, clarity is very essential. Thus, brevity should not be at the expense of clarity and completeness. Take for instance, the intro (the first sentence) of the Holy Bible, which is regarded the best and most powerful lead. “In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth”. This lead is very clear and complete, yet in just ten (10) words—one sentence!
2. It should be noted that the summary lead is always a declaration. It gives a clear statement to describe the story at a glance. Conventionally, the active voice is often preferable to the passive voice. This is because the active voice is stronger than the passive voice, and it emphasises who performed, or who is performing the action; while the passive voice stresses to whom the action is directed. However, when what happened is apparently more important than who caused it to happen (especially in police or court stories and in most human interest stories), we may use the passive voice (Rich, 2006).
3. To achieve effectiveness, the summary lead must be a one-sentence paragraph having the S-V-O (Subject-Verb-Object) structure that describes somebody doing something or something happening (who did what or what happened). After these basic elements (S-V-O), other elements such as *complement* and *adjunct* may be present in lead sentence. Let us consider this examples:

Example A:

Lead:

A huge fire from an explosion at Saclux Paints Industry in Umuahia, the Abia capital, on Sunday destroyed a missionary school building in the neighbourhood.

Subject = “A huge fire from an explosion at Saclux Paints Industry in Umuahia, the Abia capital”.

Verb = “destroyed”

Object = “a missionary school building”

Adjunct: in the neighbourhood (*indicating place*)

Explosion destroys missionary school in Umuahia (Headline)

Source: *The Vanguard* [online] (December 3, 2017)

Example B:

Lead:

The Economic and financial crimes commission has arrested an Indian for allegedly defrauding a businesswoman and the British Council of over N24m.

Subject = “The Economic and Financial Crimes commission”.

Verb = “has arrested”

Object = “an Indian”

Adjunct = “for allegedly defrauding a businesswoman...”

EFCC arrests Indian over N24M fraud (Headline)

Source: *The Saturday Punch*, November 18, 2006, P. 9

4. To write a good summary lead, we should look at the theme or the central focus of the story (point statement, focus graph or nut graph), and then build the lead around it (Rich, 2006). In hard news, the nut graph usually becomes the lead. The focus of a story can be:

- a person who has said or done something newsworthy, or a person to whom something newsworthy has happened;
- an event of importance to many people.

When the story focuses on a person, the reporter asks: is he/she a known person that the audience will readily recognise? If yes, the name of such person is used in the lead. If not, an identifying label should be used to describe the person better. On the other hand, “if the focus is on an event, the reporter asks him/herself: What happened that was of great significance or that was unusual?”

Examples:

Event:

At least 17 persons, including two female suicide bombers, were killed while as many as 22 others were injured on Saturday when two explosions went off at a crowded market in Biu town of Borno state, witnesses and police said.

17 dead as suicide bombers attack Borno market (**Headline**)

Source: *Premium Times* (December 2, 2017)

Person:

A. Known Person:

President Olusegun Obasanjo, on Tuesday, said Nigeria might disintegrate if the Peoples Democratic Party collapsed.

No PDP, No Nigeria - Obasanjo(**Headline**)

Source: *The Punch*, Wednesday, Nov., 22, 2006. P. 1).

B. Unknown Person:

Hilda Idowu, the late Funso Williams' widow, led the pack of contenders for the Lagos state Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) governorship ticket in the primaries held at the weekend.

Funsho Williams' Widow Leads in Lagos (**Headline**)

(Source: *The Daily Sun*, Monday, December 11, 2006. P. 4).

Summary

Lead is the summary of the news story. We have the summary lead, which we use to present hard news. We also have the soft lead (delayed lead), which we use the delayed lead to write soft news (news features). While writing the summary lead, we should keep the sentence short and clear preferably in the active voice identifying who did what or what happened.

Event:

Four persons lost their lives in Lagos on Tuesday when the perennial clashes between officials of the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority and commercial drivers reared its head at Ojota.

Four killed during LASTMA, Drivers' clash (**Headline**)

Source: *The punch*, Wednesday, November, 22, 2006, p. 7)

ITQ

Question

_____ is not a feature of a good summary lead.

- A. Wordiness.
- B. Succinctness
- C. Declarativeness
- D. Clarity

Feedback

In this segment, we identified certain qualities which a good summary lead writing must take into consideration. We noted that it must be succinctness, clear, and declarative, among other things. To say that it must be wordy will defeat the desire for succinctness. Hence, option A is the odd one out.

9.3 Types of Hard-News Leads

Having discussed the meaning of lead and the concept of the nut graph in our previous section, we now devote this section to discussing types of **hard-news leads**.

Hard-news lead is also called summary lead. A hard-news lead should be able to proffer answers to some of the basic question(s) that capture the most important angle or element of the story. The concepts of five W's and one H (**5W+H**) constitute the basic angles or elements of news (Duyile, 2005; Agbese, 2008; Rich, 2010). They serve as the perspectives from which a story may be viewed and approached by the reporter; they provide the clues as to the nut graph of the story. The predominant element in the summary lead is usually used to describe such lead. A good summary lead, therefore, systematically establishes the point statement (nut graph) of the news story by attempting to answer one or some of the questions of:

1. Who did what? – WHO-Lead
2. What was done? – WHAT-Lead
3. Where was it done? – WHERE-Lead
4. When was it done? – WHEN-Lead
5. Why was it done? – WHY-Lead and
6. How was it done? – HOW-Lead



Tip

A good summary lead systematically establishes the point statement (nut graph) of a news story by attempting to answer one or some of the questions posed by the 5 W's and H

Based on the above labels, we have six different types of summary leads. Let us discuss some of them in this section.

9.3.1 The Who-Lead

This kind of lead focuses on the personality involved in the news. It is not anybody that makes news. Persons from whose perspective the story is approached should be a person of notable or popular personality. He/she must be important enough such that the audience readily recognise him/her. It is assumed that such persons do not need any or much introduction because they are already known. Sometimes, events of unprecedented nature may confer importance on the personality of the person that is involved in such events. The idea behind such consideration as news focus is that the most significant aspect of the news is the person involved. Examples of such personalities that will attract attention in the media include a Head of State/ President, a Governor, a Commissioner, a Minister, a prominent politician/businessman, a university vice chancellor, a celebrated sport personality, a popular artiste, and a notorious criminal. In the

following examples, the reporters approached the stories not from the angle of what was said, but from the angle of the speakers (Atiku Abubakar [former Vice President] and Olusegun Obasanjo [former President]), who would naturally attract the reading audience. These, therefore, are examples of Who-Lead:

Example A:

I will defeat Buhari in 2019, says Atiku

Former Vice-President Atiku Abubakar, who recently resigned as a member of the All Progressives Congress, has said that he would defeat Buhari should the latter contest against him in the 2019 presidential election.

Source: The *Punch* (December 3, 2017.)

Example B:

Obasanjo Blames oil for Neglect of solid minerals (Headline).

President Olusegun Obasanjo, on Friday, blamed the neglect of the solid minerals industry on Nigeria's over dependence on oil reserves.

Source: *Saturday Punch* Jan, 6, 2007 p. 10)

9.3.2 The What-Lead

This type of lead gives priority to happenings. It focuses on event that is considered more important than the personality involved. The event may be such that has great impact on the reader or the society. Stories that may compel the reporter to approach their stories from the angle of *what* include unprecedented happenings or a ground-breaking event, a long awaited event; a serious crisis or natural disaster, and a bizarre. Here, the event being reported is more important than any other consideration in the story; therefore, the reporter employs the What-lead to present the nut graph of his news story. An example is provided below.

An early morning fire, on Friday, razed about 30 shops and a storey building at the popular Agbeni Market in Ibadan, where traders cost goods estimated at millions of naira.

Fire Guts Agbeni Market in Ibadan (**Headline**).

(Source: *Saturday Punch* Jan 6, 2007 P. 11).

9.3.3 The Where-Lead

The scene (location) of an event could be considered very important and rated higher than the personalities involved and the event itself. If this happens, **the where-lead** is adopted by the reporter. It is, however, always very difficult for a reporter approaching news event from the angle of “where”. That is why this approach is always combined with others such as **who** and **what**. Yet, an experienced reporter can approach his news story from the angle of location

(where) if such location has historical importance or significance or if it has some antecedent of newsworthy events. Examples of such places on which the reporter can anchor his stories include Jerusalem, Saudi Arabia, the World Trade Centre in the USA, Baghdad in Iraq, Bakasi region and the Niger Delta area both in Nigeria, Daffur in Sudan, Liberia, Hiroshima and Nagasaki (two Japanese cities bombed during the World War II), the Zuma Rock in Zuba, Niger State, and the River Oshun in Oshogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. In the following hypothetical situation, the place (Somalia) is considered more important than the event because the country in reference here, given the magnitude of potential risk it portends for visitors, presents an unlikely venue for the meeting of the world leaders. It, therefore, provides a good example of a where-lead:

Somalia, the war-ravaged African nation, has been tipped to host the next meeting of world leaders in February next year.

War-torn Somalia to Host World Leaders (**Headline**).

(Source: Authors)

9.3.4 The When-Lead

The focus of this lead is the timing of an event. For such timing to attract pronouncement, it must have some dramatic significance. Timing in this case is significant when it is unusual, unanticipated or serves as a referent for a previous event of significance. However, it is when other angles are not dramatic or less significant that the reporter chooses the when-angle. In essence, abnormal timing of an event makes news. For instance, it may be considered abnormal when the President or Head of State addresses the nation or meets with the law makers at 2am; it is unusual for students to protest on campus when the university has been closed officially; darkness during midday is unusual. When a Church remains closed during the normal service hours on a Sunday morning, or when a Central Mosque is under lock and key on a Friday afternoon at *Jumat* service period, it becomes a big news story.

In the hypothetical situation below, the unusualness of the timing, not the event itself is really newsworthy. This is why the timing, instead of the actor, is foregrounded:

Drama occurred yesterday at the University of Ibadan when, around 2 a.m., the Vice Chancellor, Prof Isaac Adewole, paid unscheduled visits to the female hostels in the University.

UI VC Pays Nocturnal Visits to Female Hostels (**Headline**)

(Source: Authors)

9.3.5 The Why-Lead

The why-lead emphasizes the reason/rationale for an event or an action. Although it is not a common lead, journalists use it when the reason for an action appears funny and ridiculous, outrageous, incredible or strange. For instance, when a man kills his only child for using his wrist-watch; when a student is lynched/killed for stealing cell phones; when a couple who had remained childless for many years sell their only house to celebrate the arrival of their first

child; when a man is killed for sleeping with a neighbour’s wife; or when a police officer kills a commercial driver for the driver’s refusal to give a ₦20:00 bribe; any of this may produce a good news story anchored on a **why-lead angle**.

FOUR students of the University of Port Harcourt were on Friday lynched in Aluu Community, Ikwerre Local Government Area of Rivers State for allegedly stealing phones and laptops in an off campus hostel.

Theft: Mob kill four Uniport students (**Headline**)

(Source: *The Punch* October 7, 2012—Online Version:
<http://www.punchng.com/news/theft-mob-kill-four-uniport-students/>)

9.3.6 The How-Lead

This lead describes causality. Causality is the relationship among the factors or variables at play in the course of an event. The *how-lead* describes the process or manner of an event. It should be noted that both the *how-lead* and *why-lead* are not the same: The *why-lead* states the reason for an event or action while the *how-lead* presents the manner or process of an event. For instances, the *how-lead* operates thus: A leads to ‘B’, A affects B, ‘A’ prevents ‘B’, etc. This lead is not commonly adopted because of the difficulty and craftiness it demands.

Traffics were obstructed, staff harassed, property vandalized and offices set ablaze as students of the University of Ibadan yesterday protested against the alleged plan to increase their school fees by 300 per cent.

Anarchy in UI as Students Protest against Planned Hike in Fees (**Headline**)

(Source: Authors)

The foregoing hypothetical story presents a good example of a *how-lead*. The lead describes how the protest was carried out and the effect it had on the whole University community.

ITQ

Question

The location of a story is the concern of ----- lead

- A. Who
- B. Where
- C. What
- D. Where

Feedback

The location of an event is not the concern of the Who or What or When lead stories. Rather, it is the concern of the Where lead story. The right option is B.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, you learnt that lead is the summary of the news story. We have the summary lead, which we use to present hard news. We also have the soft lead (delayed lead), which we use to write soft news (news features). While writing the summary lead, we should keep the sentence short and clear preferably in the active voice identifying who did what or what happened.

We consequently examined the various types of summary leads. We have demonstrated with examples how the summary leads answer the basic questions that are always generated by the news elements of who, what, when, where, why and how. These news elements are used to describe the lead types, which answer appropriate questions posed by the news elements. Furthermore, based on the six elements of five W's and one H (**5W+H**), we may have the who-lead, the what-lead, the when-lead, the where-lead, the why-lead, and the how-lead. The nature of the story and the reporter's experience determine the angle (the lead type) from which the reporter approaches the story.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 9.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3)

Writing a hard news lead story, like writing a summary lead story, requires some conditions be met. Discuss.

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Study Session 10

Building Blocks in News Writing

Introduction

By now, you should be able to write news stories with appropriate leads that contain the nut graphs. Yet, your stories may not be good enough if you fail to observe some basic principles of news writing. These principles are otherwise called *the building blocks*. In this Study Session, we shall discuss these building blocks.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

- 10.1 present the basic building blocks in news writing.
- 10.2 apply the principles (building blocks) in your news writing exercises.

10.1 The Building Blocks

Building blocks in news writing are those qualities or requirements that constitute a good news story. They are ingredients, materials and characteristics that are combined to have a good news story. These building blocks prerequisites that a good reporter must always remember and follow religiously as his basic “ten commandments” if he must write a good news story. The building blocks are.

10.1.1 Accuracy

Accuracy means that the reporter must be very accurate and precise in this presentation: Words must be correctly spelt; the correct initials must be used in names; names of persons, places or things must not be wrongly spelt; addresses, places, dates, time etc. must be correctly quoted. Ages, figures and other facts must be checked and double-checked before publishing the story. A good reporter ensures accuracy by giving painstaking attention to every fact and figure. One of the golden rules of journalism is: “if you don’t know or you are not sure, leave out” In some nations—like America—many libel suits come as a result of reporters’ carelessness. However, reporters are no angels, thus, if there is any error, the reporter must acknowledge his fault and promptly write a correction or a rejoinder. This is ethical. Many newspapers have special space/pages for correction. Broadcast stations too also correct their faults.

10.1.2 Attribution

Attribution means acknowledging the sources of a piece of information the reporter gives to the public. In news writing, it is ethical that all information—except the most obvious/very glaring and the personally observed ones—must be

attributed. Events do not just happen; people or certain agents make them. The reporter must not present the facts or stories as if he manufactured them himself. Attribution demands that actions are credited to actors while statements are credited to speakers. Quotations and paraphrased statements must be attributed (Rich, 2010). The news story below is an example of an attributed story:

Bye bye N5000 note • Jonathan orders Sanusi to stop controversial plan (Headline)

President Goodluck Jonathan on Thursday finally bowed to pressure as he directed the Governor, Central Bank of Nigeria, Mallam Lamido Sanusi, to suspend the planned introduction of ₦5,000 note.

The Special Adviser to the President on Media, Dr. Reuben Abati, disclosed the development to State House correspondents in Abuja.

Abati told journalists that Jonathan's latest disposition to the issue was based on the need for more "enlightenment and consultation".

He said, "The introduction of the new note is being suspended for now to enable the CBN do more enlightenment on the issue. Yes, President Jonathan has directed that the implementation of the new ₦5,000 note be suspended for now.

"This is to enable the apex bank to do more in terms of enabling Nigerians understand why it proposed it in the first place. So, for now, the full implementation is on hold."

(Source: *The Punch*, September 21, 2012—online Version: <http://www.punchng.com/news/bye-bye-n5000-note-%E2%80%A2-jonathan-orders-sanusi-to-stop-controversial-plan/>)

In the story above, the news about the order to suspend the proposed five hundred naira single note by President Goodluck Jonathan was credited to the Special Adviser to the President on Media, Dr. Reuben Abati. However, as noted earlier, obvious statements, facts that are on records or are general knowledge, background information established in previous events about the same issue, and personally observed facts do not require attribution (Rich, 2010). For example, any of the following instances, if reported as part of a news story, does not need attribution:

Nigeria was 52 years old last Monday (*general knowledge/fact on record*).

Students of the University of Ibadan embarked on a peaceful demonstration yesterday (*personally observed fact/incident*).

The scene of the blast is about 80 metres from the Force Headquarters (*general knowledge/personally observed fact*)

The state has witnessed several similar attacks in the last six months (*background information established in previous events about the same issue*).

Some reporters prefer to place attribution in the lead. Others cite sources in the second or third paragraph. If the lead of a storey contains an accusation, a charge or any inflammatory statement, such lead, for safety sake, must contain attribution.

The most frequently used reporting verb of attribution is SAID. This verb is not implicating unlike its synonyms like "charged" "pointed out", "whispered", "shouted", "retorted" and "commanded".



Tip

Attribution plays the following three major roles in news reporting:

- a. It helps readers and listeners to decide how serious to take the news story.
- b. It places responsibility on the source(s) thereby freeing the reporter.
- c. It adds authenticity and human presence to the news story.

Some people prefer to give information on condition of anonymity. These are called anonymous sources (informed, reliable, close etc sources). It is unethical for a reporter to go ahead and disclose the name/identity of his source that prefers anonymity. If your editor always insists on knowing your sources, never accept information from anonymous sources. As a rule, the reporter should cite anonymous sources moderately, not always.

10.1.3 Background

Background is the additional materials, facts or information that a reporter unearths (digs up) on his or her own to enable the reader or listener have better understanding of the story. Background moves the reader/listener closer to the truth. Background materials are not really from the story being reported, they come from the reporter's personal knowledge and other secondary sources such as clippings, reference books, or proximate events. Background is used to activate reader/listener's memory. It provides relevant information/materials that usually serve as reference or antecedent to the story being reported. It serves as a flashback to shed more light on the news story. A reporter or presenter can introduce background by clauses/phrases such as: "It would be recalled that...", "Two weeks ago...", "It would be interesting to know that..."

10.1.4 Balance

Balance requires that all parties (persons) involved in a story that has some element of controversy must be given the chance to be heard or read. In a political campaign, all candidates must be given space or air time to present their own points. In a case of allegation, where Mr X accuses Mr Y, and the reporter covers the allegation, it is mandatory for the reporter to get a response from the accused. It is not a balanced story if he writes only the allegation without making any effort to get the side of the accused. However, if the accused refuses to give his own comments, the reporter should let this reflect in his/her report. If after series of attempts the reporter cannot reach the accused, he should include this in his report as well.

10.1.5 Fairness

Fairness means that all parties or sides to an issue or event are treated equally without any element of favour or disfavour. Another element of fairness is honest use of words. The reporter or presenter must be mindful of his choice of words. He must not use judgemental words or expressions. He must not use any negative or praising adjectives (Agbese, 2008) to qualify anybody, either to discredit or eulogize the person. He must not introduce personal bias, hatred or affection. He must not judge, praise, condemn or discredit. His duty is to present the story as it is. The readers/listeners are in the best position to judge.

10.1.6 Relevance

The reporter or presenter must make sure that only information or materials such as quotes, illustration, anecdote, dates, and figures that are relevant to the news story are included in the story. Extraneous materials must not be included. To ensure relevance, the reporter must be precise, simple and clear in his report. He does not write to impress but to inform or enlighten; he does not write to confuse or complicate issues but to clarify. Thus, materials that are not relevant to the story must not be included in the news story.

ITQ

Question

The act of mentioning the source of the information of the reporter is called

- A. Accuracy
- B. Background
- C. Attribution
- D. Relevance.

Feedback

Which of the options did you choose? Relevance has to do with the relevance of the materials to his story. Accuracy has to do with an accurate reportage of information and quotes; background has to do with the personal research of the reporter towards the newstory. Attribution is that which deals with mentioning of source (unless where need not be or to save the informant). The right option is C.

10.2 Keys to Good News Story Writing

Besides the building blocks that we discussed above, there are a number of techniques that reporters must follow in order to write good news stories. Some of these techniques, as identified by Mencher (1998), Agbese (2008), and Rich (2010), are enumerated as follows:

- Begin to write only after you know what you want to say or tell the reader. This means that you must identify the *nut graph* before you begin to write your story.
- Write the way you talk.
- Use action verbs; they bring your story alive.
- Keep sentence short and clear.
- Keep your paragraphs short (write in block paragraphing).
- Show; don't tell (use words that conjure clear pictures in the reader's mind).
- Avoid adjectives and adverbs except when it becomes extremely imperative for you to use them.
- Use good quotes.
- Use words you are familiar with; if you doubt the meanings of certain words, don't use them. If a word looks confusing to you, it is likely to confuse the reader as well.
- Use the S-V-O structure for most sentences.

- Be neutral; do not involve yourself in the story.
- Compose your lead in the active voice except when your story is about crimes or court cases
- Never turn in a story you think you can improve.



Discussion

Online Discussion Activity

In writing a news story, a reporter provides good background information to the story, well attributed, relevant and accurate bits of information. However the news report lacks fairness. Would such a story be regarded as a good journalistic report?

[Post your response on Study Session Ten Forum Page on Course website](#)

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, you learnt that fairness, balance, accuracy, background, attribution and relevance are the building blocks in news writing. They serve as the guides and principles that reporters need to write good news stories. As reporters, you must always observe these principles so that your stories will be credible and free from bias.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 10.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 10.1 and 10.2)

Discuss the building blocks of news writing and explain how a knowledge of this is necessary towards writing a good news story.

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Study Session 11

Interviews

Introduction

Before we round off our Study Sessions in CLA 105, we should discuss interviews. That we have singled interviews out of all sources of information for further discussion at this stage of our interactions underscores the fact that they constitute an important aspect of the reporter's assets. Interviews enrich a news report. They open up a person's personality to the public. They provide more exposition on a story, and give reader or listeners a stronger basis for making judgements about persons and events.



Learning Outcomes

After you have studied this Study Session, you should be able to:

- 11.1 *discuss* the importance of interviews as a source of information for the reporter.
- 11.2 *conduct* different types of interviews effectively.

11.1 Interviews and Their Types

Agbese (2008) explains, the **interview** is the most significant aspect of the journalist's job. The journalist cannot perform effectively without the interview as 80% of his working life is spent on interviewing sources.

Choosing whom to interview is crucial. The categories of people interviewed and the depth of their knowledge about the subject being reported determine, to a large extent, the quality and credibility of the news story. It is ridiculous to interview only the police during a riot. It is deceitful to interview only the management during a strike. It is not for all events that the right person to interview must be the expert. Many times, your story can be enriched by interviewing the ordinary lay person on the street. For instance, when a minister in the Shagari regime was being "welcomed" home from exile during the Abacha regime, all the organisers of the rent-a-crowd welcome event only extolled the virtues of the ex-fugitive, but when someone in the crowd was asked why he braved the hot sun to attend the event, he said "na my garri I dey find o". This showed that most of those at the welcome were rented crowd.



Tip

The categories of people interviewed and the depth of their knowledge about the subject being reported determine, to a large extent, the quality and credibility of the news story.

During an interview conducted face-to-face or on telephone, an interviewee speaks directly to the public through the reporter. This imposes on the reporter the responsibility of asking questions he/she thinks the public would want to ask. As Rich (2010) advises, the reporter must evaluate every item of information for its accuracy, newsworthiness and potential to make an interesting story. When he reports his story, the reporter must look for facts, good quotes, substantiation and answers to the five W's (who, what, when, where, why) and H (how). During the interview, the reporter must be logical and tactical enough to ensure that one question leads to another until he gets the right information.

There are four types of interviews that a reporter can conduct on the focus or format of the story. These interviews are

1. News interviews
2. Theme story interviews
3. Personality interviews
4. Expert opinion interviews

11.1.1 News Interviews

These are used to gather material to augment a news story. Interviewees can be victims, victors, eye-witnesses or actors in an event. Sometimes, news interviews can be unscheduled fire accidents, theft, murder, robbery etc.

11.1.2 Theme Story Interviews

These types of interviews are common with magazines and weekend editions of newspapers. A theme is chosen and several people are handpicked to comment on the theme. Often, only one question is asked. *Weekend Concord* (of blessed memory) asked tens of teenagers and parents the question: *why do youths engage in early sex?* (Weekend Concord, March 22, 1997, p.27). A whole story was built out of the responses of the interviewees with the reporter supplying only the introductory, connecting and concluding comments. Theme story interviews are used in television news too. Cele Eradiri literally quarrelled with drivers on the Onitsha Bridge when they abandoned their lanes and compounded the traffic jam making a five-minute drive last over six hours. She accosted them with her mike and question: *why do you drivers behave like this?* Examples of reports based on theme interviews are found on the pages of most national newspapers of Monday, October 1 and Tuesday, October 2, 2012, when reporters asked Nigerians questions on *Nigeria at 52*.

11.1.3 Personality Interviews

They are meant to cause a high-ranking person in the society open up to the public.

11.1.4 Expert Opinion Interview

Expert opinion interviews are aimed at educating the public. In the latter, an expert is invited and relevant questions are asked to enable him enlighten the public. Most agricultural programmes on our radio stations are expert opinion interviews during which an agricultural researcher is interviewed.

ITQ**Question**

An interview that is woven round a topic is called a/an ----- interview.

- A. News
- B. Theme story
- C. Personality
- D. Expert opinion

Feedback

From the definition of each of the types of interview you have come across in this segment, this type of interview is a theme story interview. The right option is B.

11.2 Tips for Conducting Effective Interviews

Interviewing requires mastery of certain skills and observation of some do's and don'ts. Some of these are enumerated as follows:

- ✓ Be clear of what you want to get from the interviewee. If you're interviewing an expert or a personality, first do your research. Experts are pleased to notice that you know what you are asking about. Tony Iredia of NTA's Point Blank and Amanpour of the CNN often stun their interviewees by how much these journalists know about their guests.
- ✓ If you are interviewing victims, start by consoling them. Also, it is better to interview victims before they become too grief-stricken to talk. Do not interview a victim in the height of emotion.
- ✓ Start with questions that make the interviewee loosen up—a compliment, a light opener question or comment.
- ✓ Get to the point quickly to avoid losing focus.
- ✓ Be flexible with questions you have prepared in advance. Unexpected angles at times yield amazingly fruitful results.
- ✓ Be enthusiastic, friendly and interested.
- ✓ Frame questions specifically. If you ask: *would you want to tell us...?* You may get a 'No' for answer.
- ✓ Keep the interview on track. Many interviewees will digress, take you along and get lost. Always be in charge.
- ✓ Ask, do not attempt to lecture.
- ✓ Use appropriate body language to encourage your interviewee and assure him that you are part of the conversation.
- ✓ If you intend taping the interview, tell the interviewee before you start. As soon as you finish, play the tape to be sure it worked. Tape or no tape, take copious notes; electronic devices can fail woefully!
- ✓ You should identify your focus, and be prepared.

- ✓ Research the background before you go for the interview. This would boost your confidence and force the interviewee to respect you.
- ✓ Dress appropriately (to match the focus and mood of the interview), and arrive at the venue of the interview on time. It is a sign of gross indiscipline and sheer irresponsibility on your part if your interviewee has to wait for you, or even has to call you and ask if the interview would still hold because you are not forthcoming.

ITQ

Question

In an interview, the interviewer must always lecture the interviewee in the subject of discussion. TRUE/FALSE.

Feedback

This statement is false. An interviewer should not lecture the interviewee.

Study Session Summary



Summary

We have discussed the meaning and types of interviews. We have also identified some fundamental tips for conducting effective interviews. By now you should be able to conduct different types of interviews and write your stories using the information obtained from the interviews.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 11.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 11.1 and 11.2)

What is an interview and what are the tips towards conducting an effective interview?

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Feedback to Self-Assessment Questions

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 1.1

In attempting to trace the historical background of journalism, it is expedient to define what journalism is. In your definition, we expect that you note that journalism is an art of sorting, collection, editing, and writing of news or news articles for public consumption through the mass media. Your trace of the history of journalism should find out the etymology of the word journalism as well as trace its origin from the outset and some notable events that are significant towards the development of the field.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 2.1

You will recall that we identified four stages of journalistic process which include information gathering, story preparation, writing of the story, and the production. It is expected that your answer must explain each of these stages by pointing out what each entails.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 3.1

This question requires you to first define who a reporter is. After this definition, you are expected to identify and discuss some qualities of a good reporter. Some of these qualities which are meant to be discussed include educational qualification, versatility, currency, language proficiency, decent personality, resourcefulness, etc.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 4.1

In answering this question, it is expected that you outline and discuss the sources of information for the journalist. These sources to be mentioned and discussed include Direct personal observation, Interview, Records, Agency report, Stories in other Newspapers, and Unsolicited calls.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 5.1

This question requires you to look at the various definitions of news that we have discussed in this Session. It is also expected that you point out what hard news is as against what soft news is. You should note that hard news is premised on urgency or immediacy, the soft news is more for entertainment or information.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 6.1

It is expected that you will first define what news credibility is. Your definition should note that news credibility bothers on the reliability of a news item. In bifurcating between the eye-witness account and the 'I-witness' account, your discussion of the former must note it is a secondary source, subject to twists, and is necessitated by the fact that the reporter cannot be every when the event happens while the discussion of the latter must note that it is a primary source of information, more reliable, and allows him to do his reportage from various perspective.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 7.1

In discussing the qualities of a news or news judgment factors, we expect you to note the qualities which are: Impact or Consequence, Oddity/Bizarre, Prominence/Personality, Conflict, Proximity, Magnitude, Human interest, Entertainment, Timelessness, and Commercial Proposition.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 8.1

In this session, we identified three different approaches to news writing which are the inverted pyramid which is used to write hard news mainly, chronological order approach which is used in writing soft story, and the first-person approach which is used in writing a story that the reporter is an 'I-witness' of

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 9.1

The first hurdle to cross in this question is to attempt to give us a background of what a lead story. Besides defining what a lead story is, we expect you to look at some related terms such as nut graph, delayed lead, soft news lead, hard news lead, etc.

You will recall that this question talks about the prerequisites for a summary lead writing. These prerequisites to discuss include succinctness, declarativeness, clarity, and one-sentencedness. In the case of writing a hard news lead, the principle of the 5W's and H is key. These are: who did what? – WHO-Lead; What was done? – WHAT-Lead; Where was it done? – WHERE-Lead; When was it done? – WHEN-Lead; Why was it done? – WHY-Lead; and How was it done? – HOW-Lead.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 10.1

This question requests that you look at each of the building blocks that we examines in this study session. These building blocks include accuracy, attribution, relevance, balance, background, and fairness. Asides discussing these building blocks, we expect that you will also show how they are relevant to a news writing. Of importance is the need for you to identify the steps to good news writing which we also discussed in the session.

FEEDBACK TO SAQ 11.1

Tbis question requires that you define what an interview is. By definition, we also expect you to discuss the various types of interviews which include news, theme story, personality, and expert opinion interviews. The second part of this question is to outline the tips towards conducting an effective interview which are highlighted in 11.2 of this session.

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