



UNIT-05

Overview of Reporting

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the main differences between straight news reports and investigative or interpretive reports
- ✓ Discuss how the newsworthiness of a story is determined by several key elements that form the basis of a good news story
- ✓ Explain the concept of 'beat reporting' and provide examples of several different types of important beats

Unit 5

Overview of Reporting

Reporting entails gathering information and presenting it to newspapers and other forms of mass media. Reporters get their information from a variety of sources, including tips, press releases, and personal observation. Interviews, public records, and other sources are used to conduct research. The majority of reporters are assigned a beat or patch to focus on.

The body and the lead are the two most important elements of news reporting. In most cases, a news story is written in an inverted pyramid format, with the most important facts appearing first, followed by other facts in order of importance. This inverted pyramid style has gained popularity over time because it aids readers who don't have enough time to read the entire story. It also aids sub-editors, who can easily remove as much of the story from the tail as they want without compromising readability.

Reporting News

Reporting events — stating who, what, when, where, why, and how, as well as explaining the significance and effect of events or trends — is the main activity of journalism.

Newspapers, television, radio, magazines, and, most recently, the World Wide Web via the Internet, are all examples of journalism. News reporting is a type of journalism in which stories are written or broadcast in a news format. Journalists or news reporters investigate and present the majority of news, which is then distributed to various outlets via news agencies. Newspapers, television and radio programmes, wire services, and web sites are all common sources of breaking news.

A reporter is a type of journalist who conducts research and distributes information through various forms of mass media. Reporters get their information from a variety of sources, including tips, press releases, and seeing events firsthand. Interviews, public records, and other sources are used to conduct research. As opposed to the production part of the job, such as writing articles, the information-gathering part of the job is sometimes referred to as "reporting"

Reporters typically divide their time between working in a newsroom and going out to cover events or conduct interviews. Most reporters working for major news organisations are assigned a beat or patch to focus on.

They are encouraged to cultivate sources in order to improve their data collection. There are two basic types of news reports:

- 1. Straight news Reports**
- 2. Interpretative or Investigative Reports**

Straight news accounts present the events in a straightforward, factual, and understandable manner. They don't come to any conclusions or express any opinions. There is no attempt to delve deeper into the events, nor do they provide detailed background information or even investigate the claims made. Government officials, elite groups, news agencies, eminent people, businessmen, and others are the

primary sources.

Both of these types of news stories simply present the claims without questioning, refuting, or asking why. Investigative reports, on the other hand, would try to dig deeper into the claims to see if they were true. They provide in-depth coverage of events, fairly present all sides of the story in the context of the situation, and generally give meaning to the news so that the reader can better understand and analyse the situation.

Famines and floods, for example, get a lot of coverage in the daily press, and they provide a lot of 'human interest' stories.

Science, industry, and agriculture developments, as well as the exposure of high-level corruption, exploitation of the lower classes and workers, and social injustice and inequalities resulting from social, economic, and political structures, are becoming increasingly interesting news. Of course, not all of the news reported is of the utmost importance to everyone. Politics fascinates some, sports fascinates others, and crime fascinates still others. Newspapers, on the other hand, rarely address the information needs and interests of the poorer sections of society.

'A dog biting a man isn't breaking news. It's a case of a man biting a dog. So goes an adage that is almost as old as journalism. It, like many other sayings, hides as much as it reveals. People watch television or read the newspaper to stay informed about what is going on in their communities. They want to compile all of the information from around the world.

Elements of News

The "newsworthiness" of a story is determined by the elements of news. There are numerous elements to news. However, only a few of these elements are required for a story to be complete.

- **Strange Occurrences.** Surprising news stories will pique people's interest and make headlines. This is where stories about a man biting a dog, as well as other surprising, shocking, or unusual events, appear.
- **Emotion.** How do people feel about it? There will be both good and bad news in these stories. The death of a loved one, a tragedy, is an example of bad news. Positive news stories are far more common than the cynical claim that only bad news is good news suggests.
- **Consequence.** What effect does this have on the reader? The audience considers news stories about issues, groups, and countries to be relevant.
- **Proximity.** You're more interested in what's going on in and around your city than what's going on in a far-flung region. As a result of the proximity factor, newspapers devote more space to local news coverage.
- **Drama.** Dramatic events of any kind can make an excellent subject for a news story.
- **Human Interest.** People doing interesting things or incidents with an emotional component are examples of human interest. These types of stories cover a wide range of human emotions,

including sympathy, joy, sadness, anger, ambition, love, hate, and so on. The majority of people will be interested in news stories about entertainment, showbiz, drama, humorous treatment, witty headlines, and entertaining photographs.

- **Prominence.** Famous people make headlines! Almost all of the actions of famous people are considered newsworthy. A news story can be created simply by mentioning the elite, powerful individuals, organisations, or institutions. Celebrities are constantly in the news, and their every move is scrutinised by the media.
- **Progress.** Technological advancements and new discoveries will always be a topic of debate and a compelling news story.
- **Conflicts.** Man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. machine, and man vs. himself are all examples of conflicts. Conflict has a dramatic element that draws attention, so it is used as a criterion for news selection.
- **Timeliness.** Because it's new, it'll be in the news! The essence of news is its timeliness, which is understandably a criterion for news selection. A recent event makes for a good news story, whereas events from a few days ago are history.
- **Personalization.** Events that can be depicted as individual actions will be more appealing than those that lack such "human interest."
- **Meaningfulness.** This refers to the audience's sense of identification with the subject. Stories about people who speak the same language, look the same, and share the same preoccupations as the audience receive more coverage than stories about people who speak different languages, look different, and have different preoccupations. "Cultural proximity" is a factor here.
- **Reference to World Powers.** Stories about world powers receive more attention than stories about less powerful countries.
- **Reference to the Elite.** Stories about the wealthy, powerful, famous, and infamous receive more attention.
- **Consonance.** Stories that conform to the media's expectations receive more coverage than those that do not (and for which they are thus unprepared). This appears to be at odds with the preceding unexpectedness. Consonance refers to the media's willingness to cover a story. Although today's media savvy audiences are not easily impressed by prepared clichés, the story may still violate the audience's expectations.
- **Continuity.** A story that has already been reported on accumulates a certain amount of inertia. This is due in part to the fact that media organisations are already in place to cover the story, and in part to the fact that previous coverage may have made the story more accessible to the general public (making it less ambiguous).
- **Composition.** Stories must compete for space in the media with one another. Editors may, for example, strive for a balance of different types of coverage, so that if there is an abundance of

foreign news, the least important foreign story may have to make way for a story about domestic news. In this way, the importance of a story is determined not only by its own news value but also by the news value of competing stories.

In a news story, a good reporter should include the following elements:

Accuracy

Every claim, quotation, name, date, age, and address must be backed up by evidence. Furthermore, the accuracy of the overall impression is critical. This refers to how the details are put together and how much emphasis is placed on them. A reporter must determine what is important and what is not, as well as what will be played up or down. The overall article must portray an event or situation accurately, and poor detail selection or overemphasis of details can distort the truth.

In general, accuracy is difficult because reporters deal with a lot of facts; they have to gather information quickly and write quickly, and there are a lot of people involved, from the source to the reporter to the editor. Check and double-check every detail and question source to ensure accuracy. You can't always count on sources to provide complete, accurate information, just as you can't always count on them to "tell" you everything you need to know for an article. Because some sources may purposefully misinform, reporters must frequently consult multiple sources.

Balance

Balance is the selection of significant details as a result of the reporter's informed judgement. It is closely related to accuracy. Giving facts proper emphasis and placing them in proper relation to other facts is what balance is all about. A complete story is one in which the reporter presents both sides of an issue, especially if it is controversial. If you write a sports story for your high school newspaper, for example, every statement may be correct, but if only the home team's actions are reported, the reporter is guilty of writing an incomplete and unbalanced story. You produce an unbalanced article if you cover a convention and write in great detail about a minor speech while giving little detail about a major speech.

Objectivity

News is a factual account of an event, not one as seen through the eyes of a biased person or as a reporter wishes it to be seen. The reporter must be as objective and truthful as possible. In fact, if a reporter has a bias, he or she may decline to cover the story or, more often, bend over backwards to ensure that both sides are equally covered. Is it humanly possible to be completely objective? We all have backgrounds, biases, and emotions that contribute to who we are as people, and it's nearly impossible to turn them off completely. Inadvertently biased reporting can occur when a reporter tries to be clever or make a story more interesting.

Concise & Clear

The reporter can present information in an easy-to-understand manner by writing in an inverted pyramid structure, with the most important information first, beginning with the lead paragraph that tells the entire story in miniature. Consider writing in such a way that the average reader can understand it, even if they have no prior knowledge of the subject. Consider this story whenever you're writing an

article, and keep in mind that you need to explain everything so that no one in your audience gets it wrong. Regardless of the reader's frame of reference or how complex the topic is, you must somehow get them to "see,"

Consider removing any unnecessary words, as well as any words that aren't absolutely necessary to the meaning. Students sometimes complain that writing too succinctly deprives them of creativity and interest. They complain that it will be tedious. Concise writing, on the other hand, is more crisp, immediate, and interesting. Consider your textbooks. According to students, nothing is worse than reading textbooks. Why? Because they're usually overwritten and long.

Recent

In news coverage in general, and news writing in particular, timeliness is critical. When all other factors are equal, an editor will favour one story over another due to its timeliness. However, timeliness does not always imply that events are current. With the assassination attempt on President Ronald Reagan in 1981, there were comparisons and stories about John F. Kennedy's assassination in 1963.

Types of Reporting

There are three types of reporting: objective, interpretative, and investigative. Aside from that, there's a concept known as beat reporting.

Objective Reporting

The term "objective reporting" refers to the straightforward presentation of facts as they occurred. Contextualizing, backgrounding, analysing, and opining are not part of objective reporting. Without any subjective inputs, the reporter simply reports what he or she has seen or observed.

Interpretative Reporting

Facts and interpretation are combined in interpretative reporting. Many times, the reporter must interpret certain events for the benefit of the audience. It entails providing background information on a specific incident or event. Aside from the facts gathered on the ground, the reporter may need to provide background information so that the readers can better perceive and comprehend the news. As a result, the reporter investigates the causes and implications of a particular event and provides information as well as an interpretation of its significance.

Investigative Reporting

Investigative reporting is when a news reporter has to dig deeper than what is stated in the hard news to find out the exact facts of an event, or, in other words, investigates beyond what is visible to the naked eye. Investigative reporting entails looking into any event.

Investigative journalism is in-depth and involves extensive research and reporting over a long period of time. It reveals information that isn't widely known and that others want to keep hidden. Investigations are usually conducted in the event of a major event, when a larger public concern is involved, or when public figures or celebrities are involved. In any type of reporting, the reporter conducts some sort of research to unearth information that would otherwise be unavailable. A sound copy or report cannot be

produced without preliminary investigation.

Beat Reporting

The word 'beat' is one that you might hear a lot in the newsroom. Many people will ask you which 'beat' you cover as a reporter. Reporters must always work in beats. Beats are the specialised areas of operation assigned to reporters by the organisation where they work. Because it is impossible for a single reporter to cover multiple beats due to human and physical limitations, each reporter may be assigned one or more beats. And the reporter is expected to cover all of the events or happenings that occur within the scope of his or her beat.

Examples of Important Beats

Police/Crime:

Criminal activity is a common occurrence in all societies. And newspapers and news channels are required to report on any type of crime that occurs in society.

Legal/Judicial:

The court beat is a major beat for any newspaper because it generates a lot of stories. Because criminal cases are tried in courts, the court beat is linked to the crime/police beat. However, court reporting is about more than just crime.

Entertainment/Culture:

Culture is an integral part of every society, and a society cannot exist without a distinct and unique culture. And, as a member of society, the media must give due consideration to the cultural aspects of the society to which it belongs. Culture's courses, processes, developments, and many other issues related to it must be highlighted in the media so that people can stay informed and understand their own culture. With the emergence of the 'global village,' the significance of cultural reporting has grown exponentially. People are interested in learning not only about their own culture, but also about other cultures.

Political:

For every newspaper and electronic news bulletin, this is also an important beat. Political activities and discourses are prized in every society, and as a result, the media around the world place a premium on reporting on political issues with serious intent.

Business:

In today's society, business plays a critical role. There has been a surge in business, trade, commerce, finance, and other related activities all over the world. Business and financial matters have taken centre stage, especially in today's globalised world. With the rise of the free market economy, "business" has become everyone's business rather than the domain of a select few financial experts. There has been so much in the works in all of these areas that it has become imperative that people broaden their knowledge and strengthen their understanding of the issues and processes that surround these areas in

a way that has never been done before. As a result, the media has begun to take these issues seriously and with great emphasis. In this regard, the business beat is regarded as a very serious and responsible one.

Education:

Due to the large number of people involved in this field — students, teachers, guardians, researchers, and, of course, policymakers — education is another important beat. News about various schools, colleges, universities, and other technical and higher learning institutions, as well as the educational landscape in general, makes for very good, important, and relevant news content.

A good education reporter will cover significant activities in various educational institutions and attempt to uncover stories about unusual developments in the field of education, if any exist. Government policies on education are critical topics that must be addressed. New developments and issues in the field are also important news topics.

Technology and Science:

Every day, science and technology are reshaping and revolutionising our lives. We couldn't imagine our lives without the contributions of scientific and technological advances. As a result, understanding science is a cultural necessity and, like art and drama, is a part of general cultural knowledge. The public has a right to know what scientists are up to and how their work affects society. Science reporting aims to instil a scientific temperament in readers and encourage them to explain various phenomena in their daily lives with a rational and analytical mindset. The latest science and technology news includes notable scientific discoveries about nature as well as all major technological advancements.

Good science reports include discoveries about stars, atoms, the human body or mind, major drug discoveries, fusion research breakthroughs, space shots, and so on. The milestones in the progress of science and technology are usually what a science reporter looks for.

Development:

Development reporting is a very important beat in today's media environment. A development report is one in which the progress or lack thereof in a particular field is highlighted. The improvement in people's, society's, and nation's living conditions is used to measure development.

Accidents/Disasters/Fires:

Accidents, fires, and disasters are all too common in the news, and they make up a large portion of it. Accidents, fires, and natural disasters almost always make the front page of the newspaper. This beat is frequently assigned to newcomers in the field. These are hard news stories that are relatively simple to cover because they do not necessitate any specialised knowledge on the part of the reporter. It is sufficient for the reporter to possess basic reporting abilities. It is necessary to have a keen sense of observation and the ability to interview people in order to obtain information. For these types of stories, eye witness accounts are crucial.

Reporting Mistakes and Issues

Embargo

An embargo (also known as a press embargo) is an agreement or request in journalism and public relations that a news organisation refrain from reporting certain information until a certain date and/or time in exchange for advance access to the information. For example, if a government official is planning a short speech at 1:00 p.m. to announce a policy initiative, the official's staff may send expanded details of the initiative to news organisations several hours ahead of time, with a notice indicating that the contents are embargoed until 1:00 p.m. This allows news organisations to conduct research and prepare complete stories that can be distributed as soon as the embargo is lifted. Press embargoes, in theory, reduce inaccuracy in breaking news reporting by removing the incentive for journalists to cut corners in the hopes of "scooping" the competition.

Embargoes are often imposed in advance as part of a formal or informal agreement by government or corporate representatives working in publicity or public relations. Occasionally, publishers will send reviewers advance copies of a book with the understanding that reviews will not appear until the publication's official release date. Complex scientific news may also necessitate prior notification and an embargo. Governments impose embargoes for a variety of reasons, including to prevent news reports from having an unfair or undue influence on legislative votes. The names of artists and the locations of their performances are sometimes kept under wraps until the tour's official announcement. Unsolicited embargoed press releases are occasionally sent to newsrooms in the hopes that they will honour the embargo date without first agreeing to do so.

News organisations sometimes accidentally (due to miscommunication in the newsroom) or intentionally break embargoes and report information before the embargo expires (to get the jump on their competitors). Breaking an embargo is usually regarded as a serious breach of trust, and the source may refuse to provide advance information to the offending news outlet in the future.

Sources

The majority of sources aren't kept secret

Whether or not anonymous sources are used may be determined by the following factors:

- Is there any other way to get the information?
- If disseminating the information benefits the greater good.
- Whether or not competing news organisations will do so.

Many news organisations require anonymous sources to be approved by someone in the reporter's upper management. Some also require the reporter to reveal his or her identity to a higher-ranking official. A source is referred to as a "confidential source" when they request anonymity.

They may appear as follows:

- With explanations as to why they must be kept private: "One worker, who requested anonymity out of fear of retaliation..."

- "Sources close to the investigation" or "a senior administration official" are cited with authority.
- "Critics say..." as a collective noun
- "Some say that..." as a pronoun

Confidentiality

A number of terms of use, which have evolved over time between journalists and their sources, often government or other high-profile sources, as informal agreements regarding how the information will be used and whether the source's identity will be protected, can govern communications between a source and a journalist. These terms may refer to the entire conversation or just a portion of it. Because some of the terms aren't well defined, seasoned journalists should use them with caution.

A Press Pool

A press pool is a collection of news gathering organisations that pool their resources to collect news. Members of the broadcast pool are then given access to a pool feed, which they can edit or use as they see fit. A written pool report is distributed to all members in the case of print reporters.

Because of the nature of the news event being covered, pool coverage is sometimes required. During a trial, for example, judges frequently allow only one broadcast camera in the courtroom. As a result, interested broadcasters will choose one of their own to serve as the day's "pool camera" with that organisation agreeing to share the footage with all other broadcasters in the pool.

Further Reading:

- ✓ *The Storm Is Upon Us: How QAnon Became a Movement, Cult, and Conspiracy Theory of Everything*, by Mike Rothschild | 2021