



UNIT-07

Investigative Journalism and Watchdog Journalism

Learning Outcomes

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

- ✓ Provide a detailed definition of watchdog journalism and investigative reporting, while understanding the purpose and significance of each
- ✓ Discuss the most important elements of investigative reporting and know how to conduct an investigative report
- ✓ Understand the advantages and disadvantages of interviews, along with the different types of interviews conducted to extract information

Unit 7

Investigative Journalism and Watchdog Journalism

Investigative Reporting: A Definition

Being a civic watchdog is one of a journalist's main responsibilities, and achieving this often necessitates investigation and in-depth reporting. As a result, all stories are investigative stories in the sense that they involve research, digging, interviewing, and writing.

All reporters are trained to ask probing questions, unearth information, and write the most comprehensive stories possible. Nonetheless, some journalists focus solely on investigations into wrongdoings. They deal with reporter-adversary relationships that aren't typically seen in beat reporting or other in-depth reporting. Their mission is to extract sensitive information from hostile sources. This allows them to be creative, to become a part of their readers' emotional lives, and, on occasion, to uncover and correct an injustice.

Investigative reporting is a type of watchdog journalism that aims to expose the abuses of those in positions of power and wealth. It exposes wrongdoing so that it can be rectified, not so that journalists and their backers can profit from it.

Investigative journalists "strike through the mask," exposing the lies and hypocrisy of those in positions of power beyond what is publicly declared. They've covered topics like government corruption, crime, corporate wrongdoings, environmental destruction, exploitation of women, children, and minority groups, and abuses perpetrated by churches, criminal gangs, private armed groups, and even nonprofits and charities.

Investigative journalists typically report on how laws and regulations are broken. They contrast how organisations operate with how they should operate. They reveal how and why people and organisations fail. When things go wrong, they report on who is to blame, how the wrongdoing was carried out, and the consequences.

The best investigative reports reveal systemic failures as well as individual flaws. They demonstrate how individual wrongdoings are linked to a larger pattern of negligence or abuse, as well as the systems that enable it. They look into where the system went wrong and who was harmed as a result of the errors. They look into not only what is criminal or illegal, but also what is legal and ethical but causes harm.

Elements of Investigative Reporting

It entails delving deeply into a problem or topic: Simply relaying a 'bite' of information – "A cattle fair will be held in X village next month" – cannot be considered investigative journalism, as the term implies.

The problem or topic must be of public concern: "Public interest" means that a community will be harmed if it does not have access to this information, or that it will benefit (either financially or through

better decision-making) if it does. What benefits one community may be detrimental to another. Forestdwellers can demand higher prices if they are aware of the global market value of the trees that logging companies want to cut down. The logging industry, on the other hand, may not want this information to spread because it will increase the cost of logging. Reporters must have a clear understanding of their mission and who they serve, which can lead to heated newsroom debates. The term "public interest" refers to the interests of the affected community. It is not necessary to include the entire country, and 'public interest' may differ from 'national interest.' Governments have been known to use the phrase "my country, right or wrong" to justify illegal, dangerous, or unethical acts, or to discourage journalists from reporting on real issues.

Investigative journalism is a process, not an event: there is no such thing as an instant story in investigative journalism. It follows a set of procedures for planning and reporting, and it must adhere to accepted standards of accuracy and evidence.

It is unique and proactive: Investigative stories must be the result of the journalist's and (where resources allow) his or her team's efforts. Although an investigation can begin with a tip, it is not investigative journalism to simply report the tip or print the document that is anonymously sent to you. In fact, doing so could be considered both careless and lazy. It carries a lot of risk because you haven't checked your source's identity or motives, or the evidence's authenticity. You could end up defaming someone, publishing false information, or being framed by someone's agents. Instead, you'll need to come up with hypotheses about what the tip means, plan further research, choose relevant questions, and go out and ask them. You must see proof, hear and analyse answers for yourself, and do more than simply verify the tip.

It should either generate new data or reassemble previously available data in a novel way to reveal its significance: What exactly are you looking into, if the information or understanding of its significance isn't new?

It should be multi-sourced: A single source can provide fascinating revelations as well as access to insights and information that would otherwise be hidden (depending on who the source is). However, no real investigation has occurred until the story from that source is cross-checked against other sources – experiential, documentary, and human – and its meaning is explored.

It necessitates more resources, teamwork, and time than a typical news report due to its in-depth nature: The majority of the investigative reportage case studies presented are the result of team investigations. Small local and community publications, on the other hand, with small staffs and limited time, money, or specialised skills, face difficulties. A journalist may need to apply for grants to fund an investigation and learn to enlist the help of others outside the newsroom for specialised knowledge.

What Is the Difference Between Investigative Reporting and Other Types of Journalism?

The fact that investigative reporting is presented in an in-depth format rather than a feature or hard news format is a significant difference between it and hard news reporting. Because of this characteristic, investigative reporting necessitates more research and, as a result, more writing time. Hard news, on the other hand, is presented in a pyramid format, with the most important items

appearing in the first few sentences.

A feature article differs from an in-depth article, in that in-depth articles include extensive interviews, whereas feature articles do not. Nonetheless, research is required for both types of journalistic reporting. Investigative reporting differs from many other types of feature reporting and in-depth reporting found in print and broadcast media, despite the fact that it is presented in an in-depth format.

The main differences are the themes and goals of the articles. For example, a feature article might focus on fashion, music, films, health, or even technology and science, whereas an in-depth article might focus on people and their individual accomplishments, or on people who are behind institutions.

The purpose of these types of reporting is for the writer to gather information on the selected themes in order to further educate and bring the consequences of these themes to the attention of a specific audience. Investigative reporting, on the other hand, aims to uncover information about a news event that is not readily apparent to the general public, but could lead to revelations that the organisation or individuals involved do not want to be made public.

As a result, it provides a deeper understanding of the news, and it is frequently linked to newspaper campaigns for better protection of people's rights from individuals, organisations, or authorities. It may entail a thorough investigation by the newspaper, which may uncover evidence of neglect and publish it in support of the victims. This is, of course, a highly sensitive issue that will necessitate extensive verification of all facts, eyewitness accounts, and interviews presented for or against a group of people, in order to ensure accuracy.

The Importance of Investigative Journalism in Today's Society

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of investigative reporting. The traditional view of journalists as "watchdogs" whose mission is to sniff out wrongdoings, point fingers at those responsible, and report in a way that causes change, has given rise to the definition of investigative journalism. When reporters succeed in their efforts to ensure this, people's lives may genuinely improve, and public understanding of the value of a free press is strengthened. Investigative journalism's value to society is based on its ability to:

- Trigger changes in policy, spark developments in the political, social, economic, and other spheres of society
- Encourage public officials to be more transparent and accountable, forcing them to stay on their toes.
- When the media exposes injustice and the negative effects of government policies and actions on the people, it increases the credibility of the media in the eyes of society.
- Aid the media in its role as a watchdog by assisting it in its painstaking efforts to investigate and expose corruption in society.
- Increase media competition as the public becomes more interested in news organisations that are known for thorough investigative reporting.
- Increase sales because people prefer to listen to or read well-researched reports. Advertisers will be drawn to this interest.

- Increase the scope of journalistic freedom by allowing the reporter to investigate various areas and locations in search of facts
- Encourage journalists and media companies to improve their skills in order to stay relevant in today's society, where media companies must go above and beyond to keep their audiences and advertisers.
- Ensure that public funds are not embezzled and that public officers are dedicated to their work, while bringing the needs of the public to the attention of the current government.

This is compounded by the fact that investigative reporting lacks the constraints of the deadlines and routine beats that characterise hard news production. The journalist has more time to double-check information obtained, reducing the number of errors that occur in daily hard news production and ensuring that the information conveyed to the audience is accurate.

Information Gathering for In-Depth Reporting

Creating a Goal for Your Story

When a journalist sets out to write a story, the goal is to gather all of the necessary information in order to write an accurate and meaningful piece. The main purpose of the research is to write a story, but the goal should be to uncover information that is important to the public.

According to Harcup (2008:75), any journalist's need to conduct an investigation should be motivated by the public's interests, which should include the following:

- detecting or exposing a serious crime or misdemeanour
- safeguarding the public's health and safety
- preventing the public from being misled by an individual's or organisation's statement or action
- exposing those in power's corruption, conflicts of interest, corporate greed, or hypocritical behaviour.

Information from Primary Sources

A primary source, according to Levin (2000), is an expert or someone who is recognised as a leading authority on a topic. A primary source can also be a person who has first-hand knowledge of a subject. A person, a written document, or an official report on a topic can all be considered primary sources. A journalist obtains first-hand information about an issue by using primary sources of information.

Primary sources of information are those that provide direct evidence or describe first-hand experience, whereas secondary sources provide context, background, or second-hand information. Primary sources are crucial in the development of a story because they are the original source and can provide detailed information about the event under investigation. Sensitive questions about abstract emotions like anger, joy, disappointment, and so forth. Secondary sources may not be able to adequately express these ideas.

Secondary Information Sources

Library research, Internet searches, searches of media house morgues, archives, books, public and private records, as well as the journalist's own private observations and documentation, are all examples

of secondary sources of information. Yearbooks, almanacks, encyclopaedias, and biographical references are also included in this classification. Internet sources are included in this category, as they provide journalists with quick access to information ranging from public to private documents. Secondary sources can be used to add authority and weight to your argument.

As a journalist, you are frequently exposed to a variety of information from the beat you are assigned to or from tips. Written materials are essential for gathering background information about the subject you are reporting on. The following are examples of written materials:

- past newspaper articles
- books
- magazines
- journals
- legal documents

Online Sources

Reporters must master a variety of new technical skills to succeed in today's newsrooms, including building computer spreadsheets, mining online databases, searching the Internet, and collaborating and interviewing via e-mail and chat rooms. The Internet can be a good source of information in and of itself, with information that is hard to come by on one hand, and incorrect information on the other. Both primary and secondary sources can be found and used on the Internet.

Digital Sources: Classifications

Online Newspaper Archives: With a growing number of newspapers now available online, journalists can access past and current newspaper stories without having to visit the newspaper's offices. A journalist can quickly access the necessary information in the development of a story using online newspaper access, making news gathering faster and less difficult.

E-mail: E-mail allows the reporter to send personal messages to specific people, allowing for greater privacy. It's also a good way to communicate with people who are difficult to reach. Longer information can be added to this, and responses can be sent more quickly. The responses can be cut and pasted into a reporter's story, avoiding misquotes and other accusations that primary sources frequently level at journalists.

Online chat: This method entails having real-time typed 'conversations' with other people who are online at the same time. A journalist can conduct online interviews using this method.

Social Media: Social media has become the go-to for journalists worldwide looking to gain important information and tip-offs in real-time. The benefit of social media lies in its popularity, with more than half of the world's total population now owning at least one social media account. However, it is practically impossible to verify the accuracy or authenticity of anything published on social media. If anything, social media in general is rife with misinformation and 'fake news', making it a fairly or unreliable source for accurate and impartial information. Social also brings potential security issues, as nothing published is guaranteed secure or anonymous in nature.

Websites: Standard websites can also be good sources of information, particularly when looking into the background of a brand or business. A website can also be a useful resource for finding things like company contact information, details on directors and so on. Direct contact with a business may also be possible via its website.

Search Engines: The overwhelming majority of all online activities now begin with a web search. The major search engines like Google are responsible for channelling the vast majority of web traffic worldwide. Hence, a journalist looking to learn anything about almost anything online will almost always start their research with a web search. Search engines return results and suggestions based on relevance, though do not offer any assurances regarding the quality, authenticity or reliability of the information published online.

Interviews with Investigators

What is the definition of an Interview?

Interviews are frequently conducted from the outside in by investigative reporters and interpreters of issues and events, starting with the least important and working their way up to the most important players in a story. This circle is encircled by larger circles that grow in size as they move away from the centre. This is similar to an "onion ring," which consists of a small ring in the centre and wider rings on the edges. The outer rings of the investigative reporter's information gathering strategy start with people and documents that provide the reporter with foundational and important information about the central figures or issues being investigated and interpreted. This strategy allows the reporter to gather as much information as possible before meeting with the individual in question.

It facilitates good interviews by indicating to the interviewee that the questions being asked are based on previously gathered information. When the reporter starts the interview with questions he/she already knows the answers to, this strategy gains even more traction. If the interviewee gives a different answer, the interviewer can probe further with more fact-based questions, forcing the interviewee to reveal more information.

For the journalist, interviews are based on two major goals: trust and information. Journalists rely on the trust of those they interview for their work. In order to positively respond by giving honest and sincere information, the interviewee must feel at ease answering the questions asked.

A journalist can use an interview to quickly get answers to specific questions about a previously unknown topic. A journalist is given an example of a government issuing a large official document on which he or she wishes to write a report. The journalist will not be able to read the entire document, digest it, and derive enough meaning from it to interpret the document's implications for the public and their overall well-being. To do so, the journalist may need to interview members of society who are experts in the field, as well as those who have some authority in the field and can thus provide a meaningful analysis of the document, its history, and potential future implications. The journalist can quickly gather information from primary sources by asking specific questions. The journalist can effectively be the link between the dominant group who initiated the document and the receivers who are affected by the action by linking the responses.

Interview Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

There are numerous advantages to conducting interviews, some of which are as follows:

- Compared to written documents, interviews are current.
- Interview quotes are given more credence than quotes from a written source by journalists.
- The journalist can ask direct questions and thus obtain direct answers to the problems he or she is trying to solve.

Disadvantages

Some of the disadvantages of interviews as a primary source of information can be classified according to the interviewee's or journalist's limitations as an interviewer.

The following are some of these drawbacks:

- The journalist can never be certain that the data gathered from the interviewee is correct. He/she can't be sure what the interviewee thinks about a subject based solely on what he/she hears.
- The interviewee could be a deceptive source of information with a different agenda than the journalist. The interviewee's agenda may be to sway the journalist away from the major issues and toward something more agreeable to the interviewee.
- As an interviewer, the journalist may use leading questions to compel the interviewee to respond in a way that furthers the journalist's agenda.

Based on their assumptions or preconceived notions, the interviewee may provide inaccurate information. This can be done with no malice in mind. This limitation can affect both the journalist and the interviewer, as preconceived notions and assumptions can lead to the journalist misinterpreting the interviewee's statements.

Different Types of Interviews

Interviews follow one of two patterns, according to Itule and Anderson (2007: 150), which are determined by the subject matter and the type of person being interviewed. They divide interviews into the following categories based on this:

The Funnel Interview Pattern is the most common interview method, owing to the fact that it is relaxing for both the reporter and the source. The interview begins with background questions about how, when, and where the interview will take place. Following these background questions are open ended questions, which are then followed by closed ended questions.

Funnel interviews, according to Itule and Anderson (2007: 150), are most useful when:

- The source isn't used to being questioned.
- It makes no difference how long the interview is.

- The journalist is dealing with a sensitive topic and must ask closed-ended questions

Inverted funnel interview pattern: The key questions are asked right away in this interview pattern. This type of interview is used with people who are used to responding to closed-ended or adversarial questions from reporters, such as law enforcement officers or government officials.

When there isn't enough time to ask questions, this method of interviewing is also used in breaking news stories.

Smoking gun interviews are another interview method described by Itule and Anderson (2007). This type of interview is based on a method in which the interviewer arrives at the interview with video tapes or other physical evidence of the interviewee's wrongdoing. Direct questions about specific incidents are asked during the interview, and if the source denies the allegations, the reporter displays the incriminating evidence for public viewing, in the hopes that the source will admit guilt and be forced to make amends for the sake of making the public's lives better.

Television broadcast media reporters are better suited to this type of investigative reporting. However, some editors and reporters have criticised this method of conducting investigative interviews for the simple reason that the interviewee could be innocent and thus has the right to defend themselves.

Information Documentation and Interpretation

Correcting the Facts

More than one source is necessary when writing an investigative report item to ensure the story's credibility. Most reporters try to avoid using unnamed sources when writing a story. However, some important stories could not be told unless the reporter relied on confidential sources. Even if unidentified sources provide crucial information for a story, some investigative reporters rarely quote them.

People are less likely to believe unidentified sources, but they are more likely to believe a document that is backed up by evidence. It takes a lot of extra effort on the part of the reporter to locate and obtain the documents that will prove a story.

Objectivity and Bias

Reporters working on investigative reports are not under the same time constraints as those covering breaking news stories. This extra time is designed to allow the reporter to double-check the information obtained from their sources. Unlike breaking news reporters, who may develop a story based on a single source, investigative reporters develop a story based on multiple sources. An investigative reporter should base his or her stories on two or more sources and double-check the facts. Furthermore, the investigator must always make an effort to distinguish between facts and opinions, and attribute opinions to those who expressed them. The facts should be presented in a balanced manner, so that if allegations are made against a person or organisation, it is only fair to give them the opportunity to respond.

Any investigative report's goal is to produce a fair and accurate, well-balanced, impartial, and

informative report that serves the public interest. As a reporter, you should be aware of the benefits and drawbacks of human, paper, and digital sources. With only paper and digital sources, a comprehensive, accurate story can be produced, but it risks being lifeless. While human sources are susceptible to pressure and may be influenced by conscious or unconscious bias, these are the voices that give your story life and immediacy. As a reporter, you must let go of previous assumptions, in order to make room for the facts discovered during the investigation. Holding on to preconceived notions can lead to bias and misinterpretation of newly discovered facts.

Undercover Reporting

When a reporter is working on an in-depth story, they may go undercover and not reveal their identity to the story's sources. Many editors believe that going undercover is a deceptive practise that is detrimental to a news organization's credibility. They do not support investigative journalism as a result of this.

Despite the fact that undercover news gathering can be risky, it is an important method for gathering information from reluctant sources. When such information is obtained, the journalist must be careful to use it for the benefit of society rather than solely for the advancement of his or her own personal advancement. When angry sources learn that such information has been obtained, they frequently seek justice through the legal system. Getting secondary sources to back up the details obtained from undercover investigations is critical to avoiding such messy situations.

Following Up in a Systematic Manner

A reporter must follow up on the information gathered in a systematic manner. If the information comes from a written source, it's critical to identify the author and ask questions that will help the reporter understand the article's goals and objectives. Phone calls, personal visits, and virtual connections can all be used to accomplish this. The reporter may obtain the information from other media sources, or from the need to follow up on the news item presented by the media house. When following up on a story, the reporter should remember the following basic guidelines:

1. Double-check that the names, locations, and addresses of the major sources that provide the context for the information you've gathered are correct. Ensure that you double-check and confirm the spellings during human or document interviews.
2. Make sure you have a diary where you can record all of the information you've gathered for the story. This diary can be used to record systematically obtained information such as the date, time, address, names, observations, and so on. Important appointments, as well as dates, times, and addresses, should be kept in this diary. Avoid writing on small pieces of paper that can easily be misplaced or lost.
3. When doing follow-ups, always keep time in mind. If you've been given an appointment, make sure you stick to it. This also applies to tracking other news items in the media.

How to Write an In-Depth Investigative Report

In most cases, investigative reporting takes the form of a written feature story, with the understanding

that it is essentially a presentation of facts about an event, issue, person, or place. As a result, the news behind the news – the presentation of facts and background information – is a common feature of an in-depth investigative story.

A well-researched, well-thought-out in-depth story, on the other hand, could be "destroyed" by poor presentation, or the way it is written. Writing an in-depth report is critical to achieving the story's goals and maintaining the audience's interest throughout the piece. Poor presentation, poor sentence construction, lengthy or boring paragraphs, incorrect spellings, incorrect word usage, incoherent sentences and paragraphs, and so on irritate readers. The primary goal of writing an investigative story is to convey information about wrongdoings in society, such as corruption, to readers in a way that they will understand.

Researching for an Investigative Report/Story

The first step in writing a good investigative piece is to conduct thorough research, and the main goal of this research is to gather information and ensure that your facts are correct. This is true because if you get the story wrong, you risk being sued for libel. Libel suits can be costly, and people will want to know why you misreported the story.

Making initial phone calls may be a good place to start when conducting research for an investigative piece. Even when you feel like losing your cool with someone for being so deliberately obstructive, you must develop a credible and firm telephone manner while remaining polite. Always be determined, but never lose your cool. You may find that you've hit a brick wall and the person you're speaking with, or attempting to speak with, is unwilling to assist you. Think. What other way is there to get to the story without having to speak with this specific person? There will be an alternative – you just have to look for it. If you find yourself in this situation, before you hang up, ask if you can contact them again if you learn anything else. If you find someone to back up your story, you'll have a way back in.

Investigative journalism necessitates logical thinking. Even before you start making phone calls, you'll need to use a lot of lateral thinking. Sometimes you'll get a few facts that don't add up on their own. You'll have to look around them to see if there's anything there that isn't immediately obvious. This could entail obtaining a few pieces of information from someone else. Never assume that one person knows everything. You'll have to piece the information together like a jigsaw puzzle until you get a sense of what the final version of events will be. Remember that even if you believe you've discovered the final story, you'll need someone to confirm it. It's no good if you're the only one who can tell the story. You'll need evidence to back up your suspicions, as well as people willing to go on the record.

However, getting people to speak on the record is not always easy when conducting an investigation for a variety of reasons, including security. Only after you've exhausted all other options will you consider other options. While researching a story for an investigative report, you may be required to go undercover. However, before you do so, consider whether the story is important enough, and whether the outcome is in the public interest.

The Story/Report of the Investigation

The process of writing an investigative report is similar to that of writing any other news story. Following the preliminary preparations, there is an outline, especially for beginners, before the story begins, with

the caption, the lead, the body of the story, and the conclusion. A straight news report or a feature article format could be used to write an investigative report. The investigative reporter may choose to tell his story in a traditional news format. Once a new fact has been gathered, a new perspective on the current events is presented.

The majority of investigative stories, on the other hand, are presented in feature format. The feature format allows you to incorporate all relevant facts and perspectives into one complete story, making the development flow more smoothly and giving the audience a better platform to read, understand, and digest the report. The reporter works from the preliminary preparation through the writing of the story caption and lead to the body of the story when writing an investigative report.

Preliminary Planning

Preliminary preparation simply means that you do not jump right into the story without first setting the scene. At this point, the documents, transcribed interviews, and other relevant materials are gathered and studied. This includes information gathered during the investigation. Irrelevant ones are separated from those that are relevant. This step is critical because the writer must have the materials or documents (press releases/statements, doctors' reports, committee reports, speeches, and so on) on hand in order to know when to use them. This will also ensure that the documents are used when and where they are supposed to be.

The preliminary stage is when you weigh your materials and mentally prepare yourself for the difficult task of creating a good piece that will captivate your audience. You go over all of the documents you gathered during the investigation, transcribe the relevant interviews, and sort the materials you'll use from the ones you won't, or you'll get lost while writing the story. You may end up including irrelevant materials or portions of relevant materials that are irrelevant. To prepare your mind for how to think out a coherent story, look over the selected materials/documents.

The Basics

In order to write a coherent story, you must first organise your thoughts so that they can be presented in a chronological order in your report or article. An outline is a list or description of the important facts or points in a story. It acts as a guide for writing the story, ensuring that you do not stray from the central theme or focus on issues that are unrelated to the discussion topic.

It is used to create a skeletal framework for the feature piece before weaving the outline into a full-fledged in-depth piece using available information and good sentences and paragraphs. The length of an outline is determined by how the facts will be handled. However, the outline should not be too long in order to avoid including issues that are not relevant to the piece.

An outline should be written in sentences, with each sentence representing a single thought line. Depending on your needs, each sentence in the outline could be treated in one, two, or three paragraphs. It is up to you whether or not to use an outline, but it is recommended that you do so when necessary to direct the flow of the article, your line of thought, and to aid in the writing of a coherent feature piece. Any lead type can be chosen, depending on its suitability.

The Title/Caption

The use of appropriate titles or captions is also important in the writing process. Because it is the first point of interest for the reader, the caption or title is an important part of the entire piece. The title frequently has something to do with the story or reflects the piece's central theme. Misleading captions should be avoided as much as possible. Captions could be in the form of a question, such as "Who killed Mr. Divid?"

Although most stories begin with a caption, some journalists prefer to write their lead before the caption when writing their story. This will allow them to create a caption based on the lead. However, it is recommended that the caption be written before the rest of the story because the caption directs the writer's thoughts toward the content and information to include in the story. It maintains the reporter's focus. He is on track with the content of the write-up as he writes and looks at the caption. In most cases, the caption provides a subtle hint or a direct indication of the story's content. It could be a single word, a short phrase, or a summary statement.

Developing the Story

You must first determine the story's purpose before you begin. In general, the goal of in-depth investigative stories is to reveal something. Your research and story organisation aid you in achieving this goal. The theme should be central to every aspect of the story, including the beginning, middle, and end. As a result, once the theme has been established, all research, interviewing, and writing should be done in support of it.

Is the story already written? Your goal here should be to reveal the unknown to the public's benefit. You can always take a different approach to the story.

The audience: The story should pique the audience's interest. People must be able to relate to your piece; otherwise, no matter how well written it is, they will not read it.

Holding Power: The audience should not only be interested in the story, but the story should also hold the audience's interest. In this case, the story's emotional appeal may be crucial.

Is this story worth anything at all? Is the theme too narrow or too broad to be useful? Writing about 'Cancer,' for example, would be far too broad a subject.

Creating a Lead

What exactly is a lead? A lead is simply an introduction to a news story, as it refers to the writing of news reports. To put it another way, it's the beginning of the story. When reporters cover a breaking news story, they frequently summarise what happened, to whom, where, when, why, and how in the first paragraph of the story. The first paragraph contains the most important of these six elements (5Ws and H), while the second and subsequent paragraphs contain the less important elements. The summary, also known as the summary lead, is made up of the first or lead paragraph. It's a brief first paragraph that summarises the plot and invites readers to continue reading.

The most common leads on investigative stories that reveal wrongdoing or break news for the first time

are summaries and narratives. Other special leads, on the other hand, are not summaries. A strong lead captures the reader's attention and draws them into the body of the story. The lead is the neck that connects the head (headline or caption) to the body (body) (entire story). Because there are several options for in-depth report writing, the best one should be chosen to start a good piece. Descriptive leads, narrative leads, quotation leads, question leads, direct address leads, staccato leads, summary leads, and so on are examples of these lead types. These are the most basic lead types that could be used to start a good investigation. You should choose the one that best fits the story or that you can use to start a good piece. Importantly, you should research these lead types and know how to use them in a good piece.

Special Types of Leads

To begin your in-depth investigative story, you can use a narrative, contrast, staccato or direct address, and so on. Use the lead that you think is best for the story. This can be accomplished with a lead block of two or more paragraphs. Rather than putting the story's news elements in the lead, you can use the first two or three paragraphs to set the tone, arouse readers, and invite them in. The third or fourth paragraphs contain the news peg or significance of the story (the nut graph). The nut graph, also known as the 'so what' graph, is a crucial paragraph in a story or report because it explains the story's raison d'être. Narrative, contrast, staccato, direct address, question, quote, and other non-summary lead types include: narrative, contrast, staccato, direct address, question, quote, and so on. Let's take a look at the story's main character. You should familiarise yourself with the various types of leads by reading up on them.

Elements of the narrative lead: A narrative or anecdotal lead is popular for non-breaking news feature stories. An anecdote or scene is used by the narrative lead to draw people into the story by placing them in the middle of the action.

Lead block: Though the narrative lead, or any other lead, can be written in a single paragraph, it is more commonly written as a lead block, as described above. That is, two or more paragraphs leading up to a paragraph that summarises the story's main points.

Furthermore, because a narrative lead frequently involves a person, using that person's name in the first paragraph is acceptable. Using a name right away in a narrative allows an audience to identify with a major player in the story more quickly. This is usually not done in summary lead unless the person is well-known, but using a name right away in a narrative allows an audience to identify with a major player in the story more quickly.

Nut graph: The next paragraph after the lead block is the 'so what' paragraph, which tells readers exactly what the story is about. (It's important to remember that narrative is used to entice readers; it shouldn't take over the story.) The explanatory paragraph that follows the introductory narrative is known as a nut graph. This paragraph explains the story's importance or provides a news peg, which connects the story to previously reported news. The nut graph should appear in the third, fourth, or fifth paragraph of the story. In stories that start with other special leads, a nut graph would also be used high.

Creating a Lead

Asking yourself, "What is my story about?" is a good way to start writing your lead. This is especially useful when dealing with complicated material. Then, as Melvin Mencher suggests in his book, *News Reporting and Writing*, 2nd Edition, ask yourself these questions: "Who was involved – who did it or said it?" "What was unique or the most important or unusual thing that happened?" "What is the subject of the story, and what verb will best draw the reader in?"

It's also crucial to put your lead to the test. As a reporter, you must devise your own method for determining whether a lead is adequate after it has been written. Asking and answering four major questions with key words that spell out the acronym NEWS is one way to do this.

N – Newsworthiness – Does it make a newsworthy statement?

E – Emphasis – Is the most interesting fact emphasised?

W – The Ws, and H – Are the essential Ws and H in the first paragraphs, but not in the first paragraph itself?

S – Source – Does the source of this information in this story get mentioned?

Further Reading:

- ✓ *The Financial Crisis and the Disappearance of Investigative Journalism (Columbia Journalism Review), Part of: Columbia Journalism Review (14 Books) | by Dean Starkman | Jul 15, 2020*