



DECIDING WHAT'S NEWS

Chapter 2

“All the News: Writing and
Reporting for Convergent Media”

Multimedia Reporting Course

WHAT EXACTLY IS “NEWS”???

- ▶ Anything that's new
- ▶ What people are talking about
- ▶ What people want to know
- ▶ What people need to know
- ▶ Information that affects us
- ▶ For our purposes, news is a product of credible news organizations attempting to present an accurate and fair look at stories and issues that have importance and relevance in the lives of readers, listeners and viewers
- ▶ Our perspective is that news plays an important role in the successful functioning of our society

UNDERSTANDING/IDENTIFYING NEWS

- ▶ Before you can write the news, you have to understand what news is
- ▶ Studying the news will help with this understanding
- ▶ To better see how different media define news check out, every day, a variety of radio, television, print and online sources
- ▶ Doing this (especially noting how the same story is covered and presented by different media platforms), you will notice how stories develop over time and the different writing and presentation styles of various news media
- ▶ Staying current on the news will give you ideas for stories you may want to do yourself
- ▶ If you do not know what happened before, you are less likely to be able to understand where and how things fit into the grand scheme
- ▶ Four factors to consider when assessing newsworthiness and values: audience, medium, competition and editorial judgment

FOUR FACTORS IN GAUGING NEWS

- ▶ **Get to Know Your Audience-** At its most basic, news is a report of something new. And there is always something new going on. But what journalists attempt to do is determine what's truly important to their audience. The audience for news is much more fragmented so it must be determined what is important to the particular and perhaps specialized audience(s) you desire to engage.
- ▶ **The Medium's Impact on Your Message-** Some stories are better suited and more engaging to the audience on television because of strong visual elements. Radio relies on good soundbites and natural sound. Print can go into more depth and analysis. Online news can have an inviting mix of these other media elements plus interactivity. Deadlines and time and space availability also factor into how news stories are covered.
- ▶ **The Role of Competition-** Reporters always aspire to break stories, get scoops. Often, though, something has already been reported so you should seek to advance the story by adding new details and perspectives, updates and local angles. Don't plagiarize source material! Make the story your own story.

AGENDA-SETTING MEDIA

- ▶ A handful of major news organizations set the national agenda for news in the U.S., which local and other news media often emulate
- ▶ This agenda-setting media include:
 - ▶ Major national newspapers (and their websites): New York Times, USA Today, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, Los Angeles Times
 - ▶ Major newsmagazines: Time, Newsweek , U.S. News and World Report
 - ▶ Major broadcast news networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Fox News, MSNBC
 - ▶ A variety of “insider” newsletters, specialized broadcast programs, websites and blogs: Drudge Report, Huffington Post, Rush Limbaugh radio program, for example

Journalists benefit from keeping up with the major stories coming from these agenda-setters. But the most important thing is to give your audience relevant news it cannot get anywhere else.

EDITORIAL JUDGMENT (PAGES 26-29)

WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR AUDIENCE, MEDIUM AND COMPETITION, YOU ARE READY TO ASSESS A GIVEN EVENT OR ANNOUNCEMENT TO DETERMINE ITS NEWSWORTHINESS. AND YOU ARE READY TO DECIDE WHAT STORIES TO PURSUE AND REPORT. HERE IS A LIST OF TRADITIONAL NEWS VALUES:

- ▶ **Timeliness**—Journalists stress current information—stories occurring today or yesterday, not several days or weeks ago (unless there is new information to report)—and try to report it ahead of their competitors. Remember what the first three letters of “news” spell: NEW
- Impact**—Reporters stress information that has an impact on their audience and stories that affect, involve or interest thousands of readers or viewers- topics should not be too narrow or obscure
- Prominence**—Even routine events can become newsworthy when they involve prominent individuals or prominent places and locations
- Proximity/Localizing**—The closer an event is to home, the more newsworthy it becomes; look for opportunities to “localize” national and international stories; seek local impact and experts
- Conflict or Controversy**—Two people arguing about their divergent philosophies on a social issue is more newsworthy than two people who agree on everything. The tension between the subjects creates the conflict that often makes a story dramatic and interesting to read, hear or watch.
- Unusualness/Singularity**—Deviations from the norm—unique, unusual, unexpected events, conflict or controversy—are more newsworthy than the commonplace
- Currency**- When something unusual happens it often focuses attention on similar events and underlying conditions. This “currency” is a direct tie to stories already in the news.
- Affinity**- People are interested in other people who share characteristics or have an affinity with them, based on religion, nationality, race, geography, etc.
- Human Interest**- Stories that have strong emotional content are said to have “human interest.” These features are often not as time sensitive as regular news. Look for uplifting stories about people overcoming obstacles, beating the odds, achieving the remarkable

REAL WORLD PRESSURES

- ▶ Audience fascination with celebrity/trivia- Journalists must not avoid covering important stories to feed the public's fascination with the rich and famous
- ▶ Ratings pressures- People will pay attention to well-reported, well-written serious stories, and such stories will enhance your and your organization's reputation. Be careful with sensational but relatively unimportant stories
- ▶ Bias toward the status quo- Avoid temptation to support keeping things as they are, especially if the public seems OK with the status quo (Lexington, Ky. page 30)
- ▶ Advertiser pressures- Separation between news and advertising should be maintained and reporting should not be quashed in fear of upsetting advertisers
- ▶ Ownership pressures- In this age of convergence there can be more pressure to do more with less people and resources, and pressure to homogenize news coverage, to not offend, or to not put time into in-depth, time consuming research and reporting (such reports that are often more important/substantial)
- ▶ Newsmaker pressures- Politicians, PR people, lobbyists and business leaders may try to manipulate journalists and their managers. Treasure independence and don't be beholden to special interests.