



# Certified News Editor Sample Material

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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### 1.1. Definitions of News and Current Affairs

There is a vacuum in key media legislation on the definitions of ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’. Industry codes of practice offer a range of definitions of news and current affairs, with the Commercial Television Industry’s Code of Practice definition of ‘current affairs’ being extremely broad.

The definitions of the terms ‘news’ and ‘current affairs’ are nebulous, with a variety of meanings emerging from regulations and industry experts. Despite their lack of clarity in defining news and current affairs, industry codes of practice make specific stipulations about programs containing news and/or current affairs.

Industry groups and expert interviewees variously distinguish current affairs from news in terms of: the length of the item, whether it interprets and comments upon the news, depth of coverage, and “that which is not news”.

The term ‘current affairs’ in television has become confused by evening commercial ‘tabloid’, lifestyle, consumer-oriented programs such as A Current Affair and Today Tonight, relaying mixed messages about the definition and credibility of the genre. Current affairs is generally regarded as a television broadcast phenomenon, while the print media use the terms ‘features’ and ‘analysis’ to describe a similar concept. Radio current affairs is strongly associated with talkback programs

William S. Maulsby defined news as

News is an accurate, unbiased account of the significant facts of a timely happening that is of interest to the readers of the newspaper that prints the account.

William G. Bleyer defines news as

News is anything timely that interests a number of people; and the best news is that which has the greatest interest for the greatest number.

Hence, we will define news as an accurate, unbiased account of a current, timely event, which is reported in the mass media and is significant to a large number of people in a locality. Furthermore, in contemporary thinking, today’s news is about real life, real people, real events, real places or real issues in a real world reported in real time using any available means of communication.

### 1.2. Elements of News Values

While definitions of news vary, the main determinant of what can be considered as news is “INTEREST.” To be news, an account of an event must be of interest to the readers, listeners or viewers. Interest in a story is determined by the news values. The elements that determine news values may be subdivided into two groups, which are determinants and components

## Determinants

A determinant is a factor that sets the character of something, in this case, news. The determinants of news are as follow.

- ✓ **Timeliness** - Today's news may be stale tomorrow. Therefore, to attain that reader - viewer or listener interest or appeal, facts must be fresh. However, some issues of great impact are timeliness. Therefore, the best time to tell an important story is as soon as it happens or as soon as possible.
- ✓ **Proximity/Geographic Location** - Distance between the news item's place of origin and its place of publication determines its degree of reader - appeal, and the limits of reader - interest. Usually, the nearer an individual is to the location of a news event, the more relevant it becomes for him/her. This is referred to as geographic proximity. There is another type of proximity, i.e. proximity of interest and an example of it is students' unrest in a city will definitely interest students in adjacent cities than a businessman of that city.
- ✓ **Prominence/Personality Involved** - All men may be created equal, but some are more equal and more newsworthy than others. In fact, "names make news" goes a cliché. However, names do not always make news. Still, happenings that involve well-known people or institutions are likely to be interesting even if not very important.
- ✓ **Consequence/Impact/Significance/Magnitude** - How many people an event or idea affects and how seriously it affects them determine its importance as news, as well as the extent to which the information may be useful. Again, an item or event may give rise to thought not because of itself but because of its probable consequences - its significance.
- ✓ **Human Interest** - Interest in human beings and events because they concern men and women in situations that might confront anyone else, is called human interest. In a general way, human-interest stories might be defined as those stories that arouse an emotion in the reader/ listener/ viewer and evoke emotional response.
- ✓ **Novelty** - This sounds like human interest but shows some differences. The unusual makes news. The bizarre makes news too. Remember the-man-bite-dog principle. The principle applies here. The first flight to the moon was big news, so was Sandra Day O' Connor's appointment as the first woman Justice of the United States Supreme Court. The day a female becomes the Vice President of the US it will be the biggest news around the globe. "Firsts," "Lasts," and "Only" have always been newsworthy. So also are stories of freak occurrences and scientific or pseudoscientific phenomena.
- ✓ **Conflict** - Nearly every story on each of our front pages is a report of conflict. Conflict is a central feature of most news. Sometimes it is physical, as in wars or sports. Sometimes it is more subtle and sophisticated like political conflicts.
- ✓ **Necessity** - The seven earlier discussed news values involve people, events and situations that call out for coverage. The value of necessity is, however, the journalist's making (Mencher, 2010). According to the Mencher (2010), the journalist has discovered something he or she feels it is necessary to disclose. The essential element here is that the journalist considers a situation to be something everyone should know about and usually it is a situation that needs to be exposed and remedied.

## Components of News

A component is a constituent part of something. They tend to have more news values or higher news values than stories that lack them. The more of news components you find in a story, the higher the news worthiness of such a story.

Many items could easily fall into the components of news. However, we shall discuss eight that always sell a story anytime it is a content of such story. The eight components of news are:

- ✓ Age
- ✓ Animal
- ✓ Sex
- ✓ Conflict
- ✓ Money
- ✓ Children
- ✓ Beauty
- ✓ Human interest

### 1.3. News Virtues

Reporters should strive to make the news they publish or broadcast win the credibility and confidence of their readers and listeners by adhering firmly to the triple news virtues. These triple news virtues are

- ✓ Truth - All news stories must represent factual events and personalities. The reporter should also ensure that the facts of the News are truthful to the best of his/her knowledge before publishing or broadcasting such story.
- ✓ Objectivity - Objectivity presupposes that the reporter presents the reader with all sides of an issue, presents all the facts and allows the reader to decide what these facts mean. For a story to be objective, it must be devoid of a reporter's biases and prejudice. It must not also be slanted or editorialised.
- ✓ Accuracy - This is the last news virtue. Accuracy is a pillar on which every story rests. A news story can be regarded as accurate if all names, ages, addresses and direct quotations in the story are accurate or correct. The only way to meet this requirement is for the reporter to check, double-check or even triple-check his facts before going to the press.

### 1.4. Qualities of the News Editor

Some of the major qualities that make a good news editor are

- ✓ S/he must have a mastery of the written or spoken language of the medium of expression: This will enable him/her to interact easily with news sources, eyewitnesses or even the victims of events.
- ✓ S/he must be current and keep abreast of events and happenings: In the media industry, yesterday's news is stale and no more needed. To remain relevant in the industry, therefore, the reporter must keep abreast of happenings in and around him/her.
- ✓ A good reporter must be fair, accurate and objective in his news writing and reporting job. Fairness, accuracy and objectivity are news virtues, which the profession thrives on. Any

attempt to compromise any of these values makes a mess of the reputation and credibility of the industry. These qualities of a reporter must be jealously guarded.

- ✓ A good reporter must have perseverance: Perseverance is having the staying power and refusing to give up even when the situation calls for giving up. A good reporter must have the ability to stay longer and under stress or pressure.
- ✓ A good reporter must have the ability to embark on creative risk and courage especially in reporting coups, wars, conflicts, crime, disaster etc.
- ✓ S/he must have the ability to ferret out news through the process of monitoring people and events.
- ✓ S/he must also possess good observatory skills and have an eye for details: Poorly trained reporters look without seeing. The good reporter is able to see leads and news worthy situations by merely observing people and situations. Whenever the good reporter looks, he/she sees. He/she is also able to taken in a lot of details by mere observation.

### 1.5. General Rules for News Writing

- ✓ Do not pass a verdict or make a judgment: It is not your duty as a editor to pass a verdict or make judgment. Just gather the facts of the story, present them to your audience and let them decide on whose side they will want to go.
- ✓ Do not editorialise: Leave editorialising to the editorial writers. News reports must be as straightforward and objective as possible.
- ✓ Avoid the use of unfamiliar jargon: Do not assume that your audience understands the meanings of the unfamiliar jargons you are using. Always use familiar words.
- ✓ Keep yourself and other reporters out of the story: Keep yourself and other colleagues out of the story unless you and them are an essential part of the news.
- ✓ Avoid the use of “told me,” “told this writer” or “told our reporter: The phrase “in an interview will serve your purpose.
- ✓ There must be perfect accuracy in writing and reporting: When in doubt, leave it out.
- ✓ There must be no willful distortion of facts in either news or headlines: Never tamper with the facts of a story no matter the benefits that may accrue to you as a result. This is an unforgivable offence in journalism. Any reporter who tampers or fabricates the so-called facts of a story is “finished” in the industry. You become leprous, untouchable and unemployable.
- ✓ Always use simple words: News writing and reporting are not the platforms to impress anybody with long sounding and big words. Always use the nearest simple word. A good news report is the one the average reader reads and understands.
- ✓ Start your story halfway down the first page: You must give enough space for your superior editorial staff to work on your copy.
- ✓ Leave at least one-inch margin at left, right, top and bottom of each page: Do not overcrowd the pages. Leave appropriate margins as required, stories from the bottom without losing any substance of the story.
- ✓ You must quote accurately: Use quotes only where necessary to brighten up your story. Please, do not overdo this in your copy.
- ✓ Use “said” if you want to write in the present tense and “said that” if it is reported speech: This style helps the copy retain currency and life.
- ✓ Always read your copy carefully and connect all typographical spelling and grammatical mistakes before turning it in: This is a primary rule even in ordinary or everyday writing. No amount of haste could justify a badly written copy.