THE NEWS MANUAL

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Chapter 1: What is news?

Here we consider what makes one thing worth reporting, while another thing is not. We offer a test for news which can work in all societies. We consider what makes some news stories stronger than others. Finally, we look at how news comes to journalists, and the areas of life where we most often find it.

Life appears to be a shapeless jumble of events, falling over each other, elbowing and jostling each other.

Journalists each day structure this chaos, so that the public receives it sorted out and neatly packaged into stories, the same day on radio, television or online and the next day in newspapers.

It will have been evaluated. The biggest news will be given first in the bulletin or on Page One of the paper, in detail; lesser news will be given in less detail later in the bulletin or on an inside page; and the rubbish will have been thrown away.

How do journalists decide what is news and what is not? How do they distinguish between a big news story and a small one? The answer is that they do it in exactly the same way as everybody else. Everybody makes those same judgments whenever they decide to talk about one event rather than another.

For example, which do you think is more interesting:

a) A girl going to primary school, to high school, or to university?

b) A man aged 25 marrying a girl aged 20, or a man aged 55 marrying a girl aged 15?

c) A car killing a chicken, a pig or a child?

Every one of these events might be news for the community in which it happens, but some are more newsworthy than others.

You very likely answered that the most interesting things were a girl going to university, a man aged 55 marrying a girl aged 15, and a car killing a child. If your answer was different, though, it does not necessarily mean that you were wrong.

The same event can have different levels of interest in different societies, and will be talked about in different ways. If a farm wall has collapsed, killing a cow and a pig, which is more important? Clearly, the answer will vary from one society to another, depending upon the relative importance of cows and pigs.

For this reason, the content of the news can be different in different societies. The way in which the news is judged, though, is the same everywhere.
Criteria of news

The criteria by which news is judged are:

- Is it new?
- Is it unusual?
- Is it interesting or significant?
- Is it about people?

Is it new?

If it is not new, it cannot be news. The assassination of Mrs Gandhi is unusual, interesting, significant and about people, but it cannot possibly be reported in tomorrow's papers, because it is not new.

If some facts about that assassination became known for the first time, however, that would be news. The assassination would not be new, but the information would be. Events which happened days or even weeks earlier can still be news, as long as they have not been reported before. If you are telling a story for the first time, it is new to your readers or listeners and therefore it can be news.

News of the death of Mao Tse-tung, for instance, was not released to the world by the Chinese government for several days; when they did release it, however, it was still very definitely news.

Is it unusual?

Things are happening all the time, but not all of them are news, even when they are new. A man wakes up, eats breakfast and goes to work on a bus; it has only just happened, but nobody wants to read about it because it is not unusual. Ordinary and everyday things do not make news.

Of course, if that same man was 90 years old and was still catching the bus to work every day, it would be unusual!

The classic definition of news is this: "Dog bites man" is not news; "Man bites dog" is news. This definition, though, is not universal. If dogs are eaten in your society (at feasts, for instance) then it will not be news when a man bites a dog - so long as it has been cooked.

What is usual in one society may be unusual in another. Again, we will expect the content of the news to vary from society to society. In every society, though, whatever is unusual is likely to be news.

Is it interesting?

Events which are new and unusual may still not be of general interest. Scientists may report that an insect has just been found living on a plant which it did not previously inhabit. The discovery is new, and the event is unusual, but it is unlikely to interest anybody other than a specialist or enthusiast.

In a specialist publication this could be big news, but in a general news broadcast or paper it would merit at most a few words.

Is it significant?

However, if that same insect was one which had a huge appetite, and which had previously lived on and eaten bush grass and if the new plant on which it had been found was rice, then the story
becomes news, because it is significant.

People may not be interested in bugs, but they are interested in food. If this insect is now threatening their crops, it becomes a matter of concern to them. It is news because it is significant.

Similarly, if a peasant farmer says that the Roman Catholic Church should ordain women priests, that is not news. If an archbishop says it, it is news, because what he says on the subject is significant. It is the views of people such as the archbishop which help to form the policy of the Church.

Once again, what is interesting or significant in one society may not be interesting or significant in another. The content of the news may be different, therefore, in different societies, but the way it is identified will be the same.

Is it about people?

Most news is automatically about people, because it is the things people do to change the world which makes news.

However, news can also be made by non-human sources, such as a cyclone, a bush fire, a drought, a volcanic eruption or an earthquake. It is when reporting these stories that it is important to make sure that the story is centred on people.

The cyclone would not matter if it blew itself out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, away from any inhabited islands; the fire could burn for as long as it likes in bush where nobody lives; the Sahara Desert has a near-permanent drought, but in most of it nobody is there to rely on rains; a volcanic eruption or an earthquake which damages nobody's property and injures nobody is really not news.

All these natural disasters only become news when they affect people's lives. Every story can be told in terms of people. Always start by asking yourself the question: "How does this affect my readers', listeners' or viewers' lives?"

Whenever you have a story which tells of how something has happened which affects both people and property, always put the people first

**RIGHT:**
More than 100 people were left homeless after Cyclone Victor struck Suva yesterday.

**WRONG:**
Seventeen houses were flattened when Cyclone Victor struck Suva yesterday.
How strong a story?

A story which is new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people is going to be a very good story indeed. One way of deciding the strength of a story is to check how many of those five criteria it meets.

There are other factors, though, which make stories strong or weak:

Closeness

The same event happening in two different places can have two quite different news values. A coup d’état in your own country is as big a story as you can ever have (although you will probably not
be at liberty to report it as you would wish!). A coup in the country next door is still a big story, because it may affect the stability of your own country.

However, a coup in a small country in another continent is unlikely to merit more than a few paragraphs.

The appeal of local news is that your readers or listeners might know the people or place involved.

Remember, though, that the word "local" means different things to different people. If you broadcast to a wide area or sell your newspaper in many different towns, you must realise that a small story which interests readers in one place, because it is local, may not be of any interest to readers elsewhere.

Personal impact

The average reader, listener or viewer may be a parent, a person wanting a good education for the children, dreaming of buying a car, looking forward to going home on leave, anticipating the next big community feast or festival. You will need to have a very clear understanding of what your own readers or listeners are like.

So stories about bride-price or dowries, children, land disputes, new schools, cheaper or dearer fares, or whatever else is important and may affect your average reader, will have personal impact.

People can identify with stories about other people like themselves. So those stories with which many people can identify are stronger than those which only apply to a few.

How do we get news?

A lot of news will come to you as a journalist without any real effort on your part. Government handouts, Ministers' speeches and announcements of new developments come into the newsroom after being processed by press officers or public relations officers.

Passing on such information, as long as it is genuinely interesting and informative, is an important function of the media, to provide society with the hard facts of what is happening in the country.

It is part of your job as a journalist to sort out what is interesting and informative from the millions of boring words which may be sent to you.

There is also news which journalists find for themselves and reveal to the public. This need not be a subject which somebody wants to be kept secret. Many people have a story to tell but do not know how to write a media release. It is part of your job as a journalist to find these people and report their stories.

There are also some stories which people want to keep secret but which the public ought to know about. When you hear about such a situation, it is your duty to investigate fairly but fearlessly.

Where does news come from?

Now we know what makes news. The following are the main areas of life in which we expect frequently to find news stories. For each category below, think of at least one event or situation which could make a news story in your own society.

Conflicts: This category includes wars, strikes, revolutions, secessionist groups, tribal and clan fights, elections and the power battles of politics.

Disaster and tragedy: This may include air crashes, train crashes, ships sinking, volcanic
eruptions, earthquakes, or human tragedies like children falling down deep wells from which they cannot be rescued.

**Progress and development:** Development is always news in a developing country. The report should be always of how the changes affect people’s lives, for better or for worse. New ideas or progress in one area may stimulate ideas in another. Development stories may include education, the development of new technology, improvement of farming techniques, road building and irrigation schemes. Citizens of more developed countries may also appreciate stories about developments in things which affect their lives or well-being, such as medical breakthroughs, new technologies or initiatives to make transport easier, quicker or cheaper.

**Crime:** Any crime can be news, whether it is a road traffic offence, break and enter, corruption, forgery, rape or murder - but more serious crimes or unusual crimes generally make bigger news stories.

**Money:** These stories include fortunes made and lost, school fees, taxes, the Budget, food prices, wage rises, economic crises and compensation claims. It is not only large sums of money which make news; the little girl who gives her only ten cents to a huge fund-raising event is more interesting than the businessman who gives $100.

**The underdog:** This is one of the great themes of literature and drama (David and Goliath, the Hare and the Tortoise, Cinderella). One traditional role of the journalist is to defend the rights of the little person - the soldier against the unjust officer, the innocent man against false charges, the poor against exploitation.

**Religion:** There are two types of religious news story. First, there are events involving people’s religious lives, such as the building of a new church or a pilgrimage. Second, there are statements by religious leaders on moral and spiritual affairs, such as contraception or salvation. It is important for the journalist to be aware of the relative numerical strengths of Christianity, Islam and other religions - including traditional local beliefs - in his or her country. The importance of a statement by a religious leader in your society depends both upon the news value of what he has to say and upon the size of his following.

**Famous people:** Prominent men and women make news. What people in the public eye do, the lives they lead and what they look like, are all of interest. It is especially newsworthy when they fall from power, lose their money or are involved in scandal.

**Health:** Many people are concerned with their health, so they are interested in stories about traditional remedies, medical research, diseases, hospitals and clinics, drugs, diet and exercise.

**Sex:** All societies are interested in sex, even if they do not talk about it openly. Many news stories about sex involve behaviour which goes outside society’s generally accepted standards.

**Weather:** The weather may affect the daily routine of people and is of interest when it behaves unusually, with exceptionally high or low temperatures, or exceptionally high or low rainfall.

**Food and drink:** The rich person plans feasts, the poor person wants enough to eat and drink. Shortages and gluts, crop diseases and harvest sizes, prices of food in the market or the launch of a new brand of beer - these all make news.

**Entertainment:** Stories about music, dance, theatre, cinema and carving keep us informed of developments in the arts, who is doing what, who is performing where, and what it is worth going to see or hear.

**Sport:** Many people participate in sport and many others are spectators. They all want to know sports results, news of sportsmen and sportswomen and their achievements.

**Human interest:** There are often unusual and interesting aspects of other people’s lives which are
not particularly significant to society as a whole. Stories about these are called human interest stories. Examples might be a child going abroad for surgery; a pilot recovering from injuries received in an air crash and determined to fly again; or a man with a collection of a million picture postcards.

**News and entertainment**

Most people agree that the purpose of the news media - newspapers, magazines, radio and television - is to inform, to educate and to entertain. However, the purpose of the news itself is to inform and to educate your readers, listeners or viewers.

The entertainment can come from other areas - music and drama programs on radio; cartoons and crossword puzzles in newspapers. It is not the job of news to entertain.

This does not mean that news should be dull. If a news event has an element of humour, you should always try to write the story in a way to amuse your readers or listeners. Nevertheless, the news should only be reported if it is real news. Do not report non-news as if it was news only because the story is entertaining.

As you gain more experience, you may be able to write things which are purely entertaining - such as a humorous look at current events. This is not news, however, and should not be presented as if it was.

Make it clear to your readers or listeners what is news and what is not.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

To decide what you should report, you must sort out news from non-news. To do this, ask yourself the following questions about anything you think may be news:

- **Is it new?**
- **Is it unusual?**
- **Is it interesting?**
- **Is it significant?**
- **Is it about people?**

To decide how to report it, ask yourself the following question:

- **How does this affect my readers', listeners' or viewers' lives?**

If it is not new or unusual, if it is not interesting or significant, and if it will not affect your readers' or listeners' lives, then it is not news. Do not publish it or broadcast it as news.
Chapter 2: What is a journalist?

Here we will discuss: who journalists are and what they do; why people become journalists; and what qualities you need to be a good journalist.

Journalists work in many areas of life, finding and presenting information. However, for the purposes of this manual we define journalists principally as men and women who present that information as news to the audiences of newspapers, magazines, radio or television stations or the Internet.

What do journalists do?

Within these different media, there are specialist tasks for journalists. In large organisations, the journalists may specialise in only one task. In small organisations, each journalist may have to do many different tasks. Here are some of the jobs journalists do:

- **Reporters** gather information and present it in a written or spoken form in news stories, feature articles or documentaries. Reporters may work on the staff of news organisations, but may also work freelance, writing stories for whoever pays them. General reporters cover all sorts of news stories, but some journalists specialise in certain areas such as reporting sport, politics or agriculture.

- **Sub-editors** take the stories written by reporters and put them into a form which suits the special needs of their particular newspaper, magazine, bulletin or web page. Sub-editors do not usually gather information themselves. Their job is to concentrate on how the story can best be presented to their audience. They are often called subs. The person in charge of them is called the chief sub-editor, usually shortened to chief sub.

- **Photojournalists** use photographs to tell the news. They either cover events with a reporter, taking photographs to illustrate the written story, or attend news events on their own, presenting both the pictures and a story or caption.

- **The editor** is usually the person who makes the final decision about what is included in the newspaper, magazine or news bulletins. He or she is responsible for all the content and all the journalists. Editors may have deputies and assistants to help them.

- **The news editor** is the person in charge of the news journalists. In small organisations, the news editor may make all the decisions about what stories to cover and who will do the work. In larger organisations, the news editor may have a deputy, often called the chief of staff, whose special job is to assign reporters to the stories selected.

- **Feature writers** work for newspapers and magazines, writing longer stories which usually give background to the news. In small organisations the reporters themselves will write feature articles. The person in charge of features is usually called the features editor. Larger radio or television stations may have specialist staff producing current affairs programs - the broadcasting equivalent of the feature article. The person in charge of producing a particular current affairs program is usually called the producer and the person in charge of all the programs in that series is called the executive producer or EP.

- **Specialist writers** may be employed to produce personal commentary columns or reviews of things such as books, films, art or performances. They are usually selected for their knowledge about certain subjects or their ability to write well. Again, small organisations may use general reporters for some or all of these tasks.
There are many other jobs which can be done by journalists. It is a career with many opportunities.

**Why be a journalist?**

People enter journalism for a variety of reasons but, money apart, there are four main motives:

The desire to write

Journalists are the major group of people in most developing countries who make their living from writing. Many young people who see themselves as future novelists choose journalism as a way of earning a living while developing their writing skills. Although writing for newspapers and writing for books require different qualities, the aspiration to be a great writer is not one to be discouraged in a would-be journalist.

The desire to be known

Most people want their work to be recognised by others. This helps to give it value. Some people also want to be recognised themselves, so that they have status in the eyes of society. It is not a bad motive to wish to be famous, but this must never become your main reason for being a journalist. You will not be a good journalist if you care more for impressing your audience than for serving their needs.

The desire to influence for good

Knowing the power of the printed or spoken word or image, especially in rural areas, some people enter journalism for the power it will give them to influence people. In many countries, a large number of politicians have backgrounds as journalists. It is open to question whether they are journalists who moved into politics or natural politicians who used journalism as a stepping stone.

There is a strong belief that journalists control the mass media but the best journalists recognise their role as servants of the people. They are the channels through which information flows and they are the interpreters of events. This recognition, paired with the desire to influence, can produce good campaigning journalists who see themselves as watchdogs for the ordinary man or woman. They are ready to champion the cause of the underdog and expose corruption and abuses of office. This is a vital role in any democratic process and should be equally valuable and welcome in countries where a non-democratic government guides or controls the press.

There is a difference between the desire to influence events for your own sake, and the desire to do it for other people. You should never use journalism for selfish ends, but you can use it to improve the life of other people - remembering that they may not always agree with you on what those improvements should be.

There is a strong tradition in western societies of the media being the so-called "Fourth Estate". Traditionally the other three estates were the church, the aristocracy and the rest of society but nowadays the idea of the four estates is often defined as government, courts, clergy and the media, with the media – the "Fourth Estate" – acting as a balance and an advocate for ordinary citizens against possible abuses from the power and authority of the other three estates. This idea of journalists defending the rights of ordinary people is a common reason for young people entering the profession.

The desire for knowledge

Curiosity is a natural part of most people's characters and a vital ingredient for any journalist. Lots of young men and women enter the profession with the desire to know more about the world about them without needing to specialise in limited fields of study. Many critics accuse journalists of being shallow when in fact journalism, by its very nature, attracts people who are inquisitive about
everything. Most journalists tend to know a little bit about a lot of things, rather than a lot about one subject.

Knowledge has many uses. It can simply help to make you a fuller and more interesting person. It can also give you power over people, especially people who do not possess that particular knowledge. Always bear in mind that power can be used in a positive way, to improve people’s lives, or in a selfish way to advance yourself.

**What does it take?**

Most young men and women accepted into the profession possess at least one of the above desires from the start. But desires alone will not make a successful journalist. You need to cultivate certain special qualities and skills.

**An interest in life**

You must be interested in the world around you. You must want to find things out and share your discoveries with your readers or listeners - so you should have a broad range of interests. It will help if you already have a wide range of knowledge to build upon and are always prepared to learn something new.

**Love of language**

You cannot be a truly great journalist without having a deep love of language, written or spoken. You must understand the meaning and flow of words and take delight in using them. The difference between an ordinary news story and a great one is often not just the facts you include, but the way in which you tell those facts.

Journalists often have an important role in developing the language of a country, especially in countries which do not have a long history of written language. This places a special responsibility on you, because you may be setting the standards of language use in your country for future generations.

If you love language, you will take care of it and protect it from harm. You will not abuse grammar, you will always check spellings you are not sure of, and you will take every opportunity to develop your vocabulary.

The news story - the basic building block of journalism - requires a simple, uncomplicated writing style. This need for simplicity can frustrate new journalists, even though it is often more challenging to write simply than to be wordy. Once you have mastered the basic news story format, you can venture beyond its limits and start to develop a style of your own.

Do not be discouraged by a slow start. If you grow with your language you will love it all the more.

**An alert and ordered mind**

People trust journalists with facts, either the ones they give or the ones they receive. You must not be careless with them. All journalists must aim for accuracy. Without it you will lose trust, readers and ultimately your job.

The best way of ensuring accuracy is to develop a system of ordering facts in your mind. You should always have a notebook handy to record facts and comments, but your mind is the main tool. Keep it orderly.

You should also keep it alert. Never stop thinking - and use your imagination. This is not to say you should make things up: that is never permissible. But you should use your imagination to build up
a mental picture of what people tell you. You must visualise the story. If you take care in structuring that picture and do not let go until it is clear, you will have ordered your facts in such a way that they can be easily retrieved when the time comes to write your story.

With plenty of experience and practice, you will develop a special awareness of what makes news. Sometimes called news sense, it is the ability to recognise information which will interest your audience or which provides clues to other stories. It is also the ability to sort through a mass of facts and opinions, recognising which are most important or interesting to your audience.

For example, a young reporter was sent to cover the wedding of a government minister. When he returned to the office, his chief of staff asked him for the story. "Sorry, chief," he replied. "There isn't a story - the bride never arrived." As his chief of staff quickly pointed out, when a bride does not turn up for a wedding, that is the news story. The young reporter had not thought about the relative importance of all the facts in this incident; he had no news sense.

A suspicious mind

People will give you information for all sorts of reasons, some justified, others not. You must be able to recognise occasions when people are not telling the truth. Sometimes people do it unknowingly, but you will still mislead your readers or listeners if you report them, whatever their motives. You must develop the ability to recognise when you are being given false information.

If you suspect you are being given inaccurate information or being told deliberate lies, do not let the matter rest there. Ask your informant more questions so that you can either satisfy yourself that the information is accurate or reveal the information for the lie that it is.

Determination

Some people call it aggressiveness, but we prefer the word determination. It is the ability to go out, find a story and hang on to it until you are satisfied you have it in full. Be like a dog with a bone - do not let go until you have got all the meat off, even if people try to pull it out of your mouth.

This means you often have to ask hard questions and risk upsetting people who do not want to cooperate. It may be painful but in the end you will gain their respect. So always be polite, however rude people may be. The rule is simple: be polite but persistent.

While you are hunting for your story, you may drive it away by being too aggressive. Sometimes you may have to approach a story with caution and cunning, until you are sure you have hold of it. Then you can start to chew on it.

Friendliness

You need to be able to get on well with all sorts of people. You cannot pick and choose who to interview in the same way as you choose who to have as a friend. You must be friendly to all, even those people you dislike. You can, of course, be friendly to someone without being their friend. If you are friendly to everyone, you will also be fair with everyone.

Reliability

This is a quality admired in any profession, but is especially valued in journalism where both your employer and your audience rely on you to do your job. If you are sent on an interview but fail to turn up you offend a number of people: the person who is waiting to be interviewed; your editor who is waiting to put the interview in his paper or program; your readers, listeners or viewers, who are robbed of news.

Even if you are late for an appointment, you will upset the schedules of both your interviewee and
your newsroom and risk being refused next time you want a story. In a busy news organisation, punctuality is a necessity. Without it there would be chaos.

To summarise

There are many reason for becoming a journalist and many type of journalists to become. It is a career with many challenges and rewards.

Journalists must:

- Have an interest in the world around them.
- Love language.
- Have an alert and ordered mind.
- Be able to approach and question people.
- Be polite but persistent.
- Be friendly and reliable.
Chapter 3: The shape of the news story

Here we will introduce the concept of the inverted pyramid, which is the basic shape of the news story. We see why this is a good way to present news.

News stories go straight to the point. In this respect, they are quite unlike other forms of written English, such as novels and short stories, committee reports, letters and theses. All these are written primarily for people with the time to consider and absorb what has been written.

They also follow the usual pattern of spoken language, in which it is generally impolite to jump straight to the main point which you wish to make without first establishing contact. For example, a female student writing home may say:

"Dear Mum and Dad, I don't want you to worry about me, but I have some news for you which you are not going to like. I met a boy here at the start of the semester and he likes me a lot. Well, we have been seeing a lot of each other and ..."

What she is not likely to write home is:

"Dear Mum and Dad, I am pregnant."

But news stories do that; that is why they are different.

In the following example, you will see that the narrative form starts at the oldest part of the story, then tells what happened in the order in which it happened. The news form starts at the most newsworthy part of the story, then fills in details with the most newsworthy first and the least newsworthy last:

**NARRATIVE**

When electricians wired the home of Mrs Mary Ume in Hohola, Port Moresby, some years ago they neglected to install sufficient insulation at a point in the laundry where a number of wires crossed.

A short-circuit occurred early this morning.

Contact between the wires is thought to have created a spark, which ignited the walls of the house.

The flames quickly spread through the entire house.

Mrs Ume, her daughter Peni (aged ten) and her son Jonah (aged five months) were asleep in a rear bedroom. They had no way of escape and all perished.

**NEWS**

A Port Moresby woman and her two children died in a house fire in Hohola today.

Mrs Mary Ume, her ten-year-old daughter Peni and baby son Jonah were trapped in a rear bedroom as flames swept through the house.

The fire started in the laundry, where it is believed faulty electrical wiring caused a short-circuit. The family were asleep at the time.

The flames quickly spread and soon the entire house was blazing.

etc etc

The reader knows the outcome of the drama in the first sentence of the news story. The background information about how it happened, and why it happened, are filled in later in the story.
Top priority

News stories are written in a way which sets out clearly what is the top priority news, what is the next most newsworthy, and so on. This makes it easier for readers and listeners to understand.

In many societies, people read newspapers and web pages in a hurry. They probably do not read every word, but skim quickly through, reading headlines and intros to see which stories interest them. Some which seem at first glance to be interesting may seem less interesting after a few paragraphs, and so the reader moves on.

In other societies, people may find reading a newspaper hard work. This may be because it is written in a language which is not their first language; or it may be because they are not good at reading. They, too, will look at headlines and intros to decide which stories are interesting enough to be worth the effort of reading them.

In either case, the readers will generally read less than half of most stories; there are very few stories indeed of which they will read every word.

Similarly, people do not listen intently to every word of a radio or television news bulletin. Unless the first sentence of each item interests them, they allow their minds to wander until they hear something that interests them.

The way a news story is written therefore has to do two things:

- It has to sell the story to the casual reader or listener.
- It has to give the main point of the story very quickly, so that even if the reader moves on after one or two paragraphs, or if the listener stops listening after the first sentence or two, they will still have a fair idea of what the story was about.

The inverted pyramid

This way of writing a news story, with the main news at the start and the rest of the detail following in decreasing order of importance, is known as the inverted pyramid. A pyramid has a broad base and tapers towards its top; the news story is just the opposite, with a broad top and tapering towards the base. It is therefore called an inverted (or upside-down) pyramid.

This "shape" of the news story, with a "broad" top and a "narrow" base, is in the weight of the news itself. Look back at the earlier example, of the Hohola house fire. See how the first paragraph of the news story is the biggest news, and how the story begins to taper down towards the minor detail.

The first paragraph, which is called the intro, contains the most newsworthy part of the story - the newest, most unusual, most interesting and most significant - told clearly and simply. This is followed by a full explanation and all the details. The most newsworthy parts of the story will be written nearest to the top of the story.

The later part of the story - the tapering point of the inverted pyramid - contains detail which is helpful, but not essential.

Here is an example of a short news story in the inverted pyramid; structure:

A Palauli woman whose body was found in the sea is believed to have drowned.
Police say the 35-year-old woman, whose name has not been released, was an epileptic. Her body was found floating in the sea near Palauli, Savai’i, on Monday. A post mortem examination will be conducted today.

This format has a practical advantage, too. If it is necessary to cut a number of lines, to fit the story into the available space on a page or into the available time in a news bulletin, it is best if the least important facts are at the end. They can then be cut without harming the story.

It will be clear from this that the most important part of any news story is the intro and that intro writing is one of the most important skills of a journalist.

We shall look in detail in the next chapter at how to write the intro.

**Advanced news writing**

The simple inverted pyramid, as described here, is not suitable for all news stories. Later, in Chapter 25, we will look at some more advanced and sophisticated shapes for news stories. However, you should first master the basic inverted pyramid before moving on.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

News stories put the main point first, with other information following in order of importance, finishing with the least important. This helps readers and listeners by identifying the main news and saving them time and effort.
Chapter 4: Writing the intro in simple steps

Here we consider the qualities which a good intro should have. We look at how a reporter decides what information to put in the intro; and offer advice on how to make your intro more effective.

The intro is the most important part of any news story. It should be direct, simple and attention-grabbing. It should contain the most important elements of the story - but not the whole story. The details can be told later.

It should arouse the interest of the reader or listener, and be short. Normally it should be one sentence of not more than 20 words for print media, and fewer for radio and television.

**The perfect intro**

- The intro should be based on the most newsworthy aspect of the story.
- The intro should be kept short, uncluttered and relevant to the main story. It should be simple grammatically.
- The intro should make the reader want to read the rest of the story.
- The intro should be appropriate in style to the story.

Newsworthy

To write an intro, you must first decide what makes the story news. There may be several things which are newsworthy in the story. If so, you have to decide which is the most newsworthy. This will be in the intro.

In this way, your readers or listeners will be provided with the most important information straight away. Even if they stop reading or listening after the first one or two sentences, they will still have an accurate idea of what the story is about.

One simple way to do this is to imagine yourself arriving back at your office and being asked by the chief of staff: "What happened?" Your quick answer to that question, in very few words, should be the basis of your intro.

With some years of experience, you will find that you can recognise the most newsworthy aspect of a story almost without thinking. While you are still learning, though, it is useful to have a step-by-step technique to use. We shall explain this technique in detail later in this chapter.

Short and simple

Your intro should normally be no longer than 20 words. There is no minimum length. An intro of 10 or 12 words can be very effective.

 Usually, an intro will be one sentence. However, two short sentences are better than one long, crowded and confused sentence.

The words you use should be short and simple, and the grammar should be clear and simple.

You should not try to give too much detail in the intro. The six main questions which journalists try to answer - **Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?** - will all need to be answered in your
news story, but they should not all be answered in your intro. Try to remember these questions as The Five Ws and H - WWWWWh.

For each of those six key questions, you will need to ask whether this detail makes the story news. For example, who was drowned? A woman called Mary. Suppose it had been somebody else - would the story have been stronger, weaker or the same? Only if this detail makes the story stronger should it be in the intro.

The golden rule for intro-writing is KISS - Keep It Short and Simple.

Attract the reader

The intro is the most important part of the news story, because it determines whether the rest of the story will be read.

If the intro is dull the reader will not want to read on. If it is too complicated the reader will give up.

Your time and effort in gathering information and writing the story will all be wasted unless you write a good intro.

Appropriate style

Not all possible intros are appropriate. It would be wrong to write a humorous intro for a story about a tragedy. Serious news stories call for serious intros.

For example, if a man was eaten by the pet crocodile he had reared from an egg, it might seem amusing to use the saying about "biting the hand that feeds you", but it would cause great hurt to the man's family and friends for no good reason (apart from trying to show how clever you are).

**Simple steps in writing the intro**

Later, we will look in detail at how you gather information for a news story. For the moment, we will concentrate on how you write your news story based on that information.

You will have in front of you a notebook or a tape with a record of one or more interviews which you have conducted. You may also have information from other sources, such as handouts. Wherever your information comes from, your approach must be the same.

Key points

Before you write anything, you have to decide what is the most newsworthy aspect of the story. To do this, let us remind ourselves of the main criteria for news:

- Is it new?
- Is it unusual?
- Is it interesting or significant?
- Is it about people?

Any fact or opinion which meets some or all of these criteria is what we call a key point. All the key points belong in the news story, but only the most newsworthy belong in the intro. It is your job to decide which.
Go through your notes, go through the handouts and, on a piece of paper, list all the key points.

Now go through the list of key points, ranking them in order of newsworthiness, according to the criteria we have just mentioned. The key point which best meets the criteria will be number one on your list.

Let us do this with the following example.

Information

At 2 a.m. yesterday morning, meteorologists at the Nadi Weather Centre detected a cyclone developing rapidly near Nauru and moving quickly south-west across the Pacific towards the Solomon Islands. They named the cyclone “Victor”. At 3 a.m., they contacted the Solomon Islands government warning of the approach of Cyclone Victor. Government officials immediately put emergency plans into operation. They warned all shipping in the area of the cyclone’s approach. They broadcast warnings on the radio, and alerted the police, who in turn sent officers to warn the people. By 10 a.m., winds in Honiara were blowing at more than 140 kilometres per hour. At about midday, the centre of the cyclone passed directly over Honiara before tracking into the Coral Sea, where it blew itself out. In Honiara, more than 20 houses were destroyed and a number of other buildings sustained considerable structural damage. More than 100 people are now homeless. Six people were killed. Another 18 people have been treated in hospital for minor injuries. Mopping-up operations have started in Honiara. The emergency services are still awaiting news from outlying districts but believe that Honiara has been the worst affected. Police say that of the six people who died, three men drowned when their car was blown off the road into a river, and two women and a man were killed by flying debris.

Analysis

First we go through the story picking out the key points. For the purposes of this exercise, we shall limit ourselves to six or seven of the most important ones. Remember our four criteria and test each of the facts against them.

For example, how new, unusual or significant is it that meteorologists in Nadi detected the cyclone? After all, this is one of their jobs. Also it happened at 2 a.m. yesterday, many hours ago. More significant and certainly more up-to-date is the fact that they warned the Solomon Islands government. Maybe that is not too unusual in the event of a cyclone, but certainly an unusual occurrence in the day-to-day communication between the two nations. We will make that a key point:

a) Nadi meteorologists warn Solomon Islands government of approach of Cyclone Victor.

Now let us look for our next key point. Key point (a) is about meteorologists and government officials. We have to read on a bit further to find facts about the Solomon Islanders themselves, the people most affected by the cyclone. They were first alerted to the cyclone by radio broadcasts and police officers. They would have found this unusual and highly significant. Let us make this our next key point:

b) Solomon Islanders themselves warned of approaching cyclone.

Next we have mostly weather details. These should be reported in our story, but they do not themselves tell us much about the effect the cyclone is going to have on people’s lives. Those people live in Honiara and we learn that 20 of their homes have been destroyed. This is quite new, unusual, significant and about people - another key point:
c) More than 20 houses destroyed and other buildings sustained considerable structural damage.

Key point (c) tells us about "houses", now we learn the fate of the people in them. More than 100 people now have nowhere to live. That is unusual and very significant for both the people themselves and for the government. It is also as up-to-date as we can get:

d) More than 100 people homeless.

The next sentence gives us the real tragedy of the story - six people have been killed. This fact fills all the criteria for news. It is new, it is unusual for a number of people to die so suddenly in such circumstances and it is significant for their families, friends and the authorities. Most important, it is about people:

e) Six people killed.

We could leave it there, because mopping up after a cyclone is not unusual and it appears that Honiara was the worst hit. There are, however, 18 people who will bear some scars from the cyclone, so let's make them a key points:

f) Eighteen people treated for minor injuries.

Right at the end of the information we find out how the six people died. Our readers or listeners will be interested in this, so we will make it our final key point:

g) Three drowned and three killed by flying debris.

Notice that we have left out a number of details which our reader or listener might like to know. We can come back to them in the main body of the story. In the Chapters 6 and 7 we will show you how.

For now, we have seven key points. We cannot possibly get them all in an intro so we must choose one, possibly two, which are the best combination of our news criteria.

News angle

In most events journalists report on, there will be several ways of looking at the facts. A weatherman may take a detached scientific view of Cyclone Victor, an insurance assessor will focus on damage to buildings, a Solomon Islander will be interested in knowing about the dead and injured. They all look at the same event from a different angle. Journalists are trained to look at events from a certain angle - we call it the news angle.

The news angle is that aspect of a story which we choose to highlight and develop. We do not do this by guesswork, but by using the four criteria for news which helped us to select our key points. The news angle is really nothing more than the most newsworthy of all our key points.

With this in mind, let us now select the news angle for our intro from the key points. Keep referring back to the Information given earlier in the chapter.

Key points (a) and (b) are not very new, nor are they really about people (simply meteorologists and governments). Key point (c) is about buildings, and the point is made better in (d) when we translate destroyed houses into homeless people. Key points (e), (f) and (g) are all about people. People slightly injured (f) are not as important as people killed (e). Key points (e) and (g) are about the same fact, but (e) gives the details in fewer words and is therefore preferable for an intro.
We are left with a shortlist of (d), (e) and (f). Because 100 people homeless is more significant than 18 people slightly injured, let us take out (f). We can always use it later in the story to fill in details. That leaves us with (e) as the most newsworthy fact, followed by (d):

Six people killed. More than 100 people homeless.

Here we have our news angle, the basis for our intro, but on their own these eight words will leave our reader or listener more confused than enlightened. This is because we have told them part of what has happened, but not who, where, when, how or why. You should never try to answer all these questions in the intro, but we have to tell our audience enough to put the bald facts - six people killed, more than 100 people homeless - in context. Let us do it:

Six people killed. More than 100 people homeless...

Exactly who the victims were, why they died and what else happened need to be told in greater detail than we have space for in an intro. We will leave that until the Chapter 6.

We do, however, have enough facts to write our intro, once we have rearranged them into grammatical English. Let us do that:

Six people were killed and more than 100 people were left homeless in Honiara in the Solomon Islands yesterday when Cyclone Victor passed through Honiara.

The word count for this sentence is 25, which is too long. We repeat words unnecessarily, such as "people were" and "Honiara", and we should be able to find a simpler and more direct word than "passed through". Let us write it again:

Six people were killed and more than 100 left homeless when Cyclone Victor hit Honiara yesterday.

This is very nearly correct, but it contains a strange expression: "hit Honiara in the Solomon Islands". This sounds too much like "hit John in the face", so it may confuse our reader or listener. (How could Honiara be hit in the Solomon Islands?)

We must simplify this. If we are writing this story for a Solomon Islands audience, then we can leave out "in the Solomon Islands". After all, Solomon Islanders know where Honiara is:

Six people were killed and more than 100 left homeless when Cyclone Victor hit Honiara yesterday.

If we are writing this story for readers or listeners in any other country, we can leave "Honiara" out of the intro. Of course, we shall include this important detail in the second or third paragraph. Our intro will look like this:

Six people were killed and more than 100 left homeless when Cyclone Victor hit the Solomon Islands yesterday.

Of course, not all stories are as simple to see and write as this. But by applying this step-by-step approach of identifying the key points and ranking them in order before you write, you should be able to write an intro for any story.
TO SUMMARISE:

The intro should be

1. newsworthy
2. 20 words or less
3. attractive to the reader
4. appropriate in style

When writing your intro:

- List the key points
- Put the key points in order of importance.
- Choose the main key points as your news angle for the intro
In *Chapter 4: Writing the Intro in simple steps* you learned what qualities made a good intro, the importance of newsworthiness and of answering the questions Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? (WWWNNN & H) - but not all in the intro! You also took the first steps in actually writing an intro from raw information to the finished short, crisp sentence based on the news angle.

In this chapter, the second part of intro writing, we discuss some golden rules to help you write the best intro possible.

**KISS**

As we have mentioned in *Chapter 4*, all news stories must answer the questions Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? Each of these questions may have several parts, depending upon the nature and complexity of the story.

Do not try to answer them all in the intro. You will only confuse your reader or listener. Stick to one or two key points per sentence, especially in the intro.

Remember the golden rule is **KISS - Keep It Short and Simple**.

You will overload your sentence and make instant understanding difficult if you include unnecessary details which can be explained more fully later in the story.

Your intro is like a canoe being paddled against a fast flowing current. Every word in the sentence should be like a rower with a paddle, helping to push the sentence forward. There is no room for lazy words sitting back without paddles in their hands. They just make work harder for the rest of the words. So look closely at every word and ask yourself: "Does it have a paddle in its hand?" If it doesn't, throw it overboard!

Some of the fattest and laziest words to be found in the intro canoes are titles. Inexperienced journalists often think that they have to put full titles in the intro when, in fact, they belong later in the story. Try to shorten titles for your intros wherever possible.
In the following example, you will see that a general description of the person in the intro, followed by the full name and title in the second paragraph, works much better:

**RIGHT:**
A Port Moresby union leader yesterday condemned politicians who try to interfere in labour disputes.

Mr Mug Wump, president of the Port Moresby Waterside Workers' Union, said...

**WRONG:**
Mr Mug Wump, president of the Port Moresby Waterside Workers' Union, yesterday condemned politicians who try to interfere in labour disputes.

**Active voice**

Use the active voice wherever possible. An active voice sentence uses the simple grammatical structure of subject-verb-object.
The sentence "the man hit the table" is in the active voice, where the table is the object of the verb "hit". The sentence "the table was hit by the man" is in the passive voice. As you can see, the first sentence is not only shorter, but it is far simpler and easier to understand. This is especially important when your reader or listener speaks English as a second or third language.

The following examples will demonstrate this rule:

**RIGHT:**
Copa growers have demanded a new subsidy scheme.

**WRONG:**
A new copra subsidy scheme has been demanded by growers.

**RIGHT:**
Angry villagers attacked three Japanese tourists in Western Province yesterday.

**WRONG:**
Three Japanese tourists were attacked by angry villagers in Western Province yesterday.

The main exception to this rule is when the object of the sentence is much more newsworthy than the subject. For example:

**RIGHT:**
The Prime Minister was attacked by angry villagers in Western Province yesterday.

**WRONG:**
Angry villagers attacked the Prime Minister in Western Province yesterday.

Note that we used the passive voice in the final intro version of our cyclone story. This was because the victims - the six dead and more than 100 homeless - were more important than the cyclone itself. Remember, news is about people. We could have written it in the active voice, putting the cyclone as the subject of the sentence:

Cyclone Victor left six people dead and more than 100 homeless when it hit the Solomon Islands yesterday.

However, this delays the big news until the middle of the intro, instead of putting it at the very beginning.

**Facts First**

Don't think that, because an important person says something important, his name should come first. Let the facts come first in the intro.

Remember to ask yourself: "How does this affect my readers' or listeners' lives?" The answer to that question is the heart of the news story, not the name or title of the person who made the announcement.

You will see in the following example how the full name and titles in the wrong version of the intro makes it overloaded with detail, and hard to understand:
Two overseas companies will negotiate with the Government to develop the important Vanimo timber area.

The Forests Minister, Mr Jacob Diwai, said yesterday that various submissions by different companies had been considered by the National Executive Council.

It had been decided that two of them would be invited individually to negotiate terms for an agreement to develop the resource, he said.

Always begin your intro with your most newsworthy key point, even though you may include another key point in the intro, in what is called a subordinate clause. You will recognise subordinate clauses as they usually begin with words like "while...", "as...", "although..." and "despite...".

Thieves broke into the Prime Minister's official residence last night, while he was attending a concert.

While the Prime Minister was attending a concert last night, thieves broke into his official residence.

Up-to-date

Keep the story fresh. Remember that one of our four criteria for news is "Is it new?" One way in which the reader judges the newness or otherwise of a sentence is in the verb tense. Wherever possible use the present or future tense in your intro.

In the following example, we focus on the real news, which is in the future - the visit of Prince Charles - rather than on the announcement, which happened last night:

Prince Charles will visit Tuvalu in August.

It was announced in Funafuti last night that Prince Charles would visit Tuvalu in August

This also allows us to use the simple future tense "will" instead of the rather complicated "would".

In the next example, we use the present tense "is" rather than the past tense "was". Although the announcement was made last night, what was said is still true today - such things do not change overnight:
The Solomon Islands is on the verge of bankruptcy, the Finance Minister said last night.

**No quotes**

Do not begin a news story with quotes. The value of the quote is dependent entirely on the speaker. For that reason, it is important to know who is speaking before we know what is said.

It really comes down to this: If someone is expressing an opinion (and most quotes are expressions of opinion), then the name of the opinion-expresser should come first, so that readers and listeners can make their own assessment of the opinion. If, on the other hand, the speaker is dealing in facts or revealing something so far unrevealed, let the facts speak first.

In the following example, we can take it as a fact that income tax will rise. The Finance Minister says so, and he is the one who decides such things. (Of course, politicians do not always deliver everything they promise; but if they promise something unpleasant, you may be sure that they are not doing it to win votes, so we can believe that it is true.

**RIGHT:**
Income tax is to rise by seven percent in January.

**WRONG:**
"Income tax will rise by seven percent when I present my budget in January," said the Finance Minister, Ms Bernadette Kina, at a meeting in Lae yesterday.

In the next example, we take the content of what has been said, and present that as fact. The full quote is rather long, but we should be able to use it later in the story.

The fact that this will be the first school swimming pool on the island is not included in the quote - this is a case where journalists must set the news in context by applying their own background knowledge.

**RIGHT:**
Work on Espiritu Santo's first school swimming pool will start next year if government grants can be obtained.

**WRONG:**
"If the primary school gets suitable financial help from the Government, I confidently expect that next year will see the start of work on a new swimming pool here," the chairman of Lugenville Primary School said yesterday.

**Check-list**

Once you have written your intro, you should read it again carefully, asking yourself the following questions:

1. Is it the most newsworthy key point in the story?
2. Is it short and simple? If it is more than 20 words, try to cut it down. Cut out repetition and other unnecessary words. Remember the lazy passengers in that canoe.

3. Is it written in the active voice? If not, should you rewrite it in the active voice?

4. Have you put the facts first in the sentence?

5. Is it up-to-date? Are your verbs in the correct tense?

6. Have you avoided quotes? If you have started with a quote, can you rewrite it in reported speech?

It is very rare for a journalist to get exactly the right intro on the first attempt, even after years of experience. Some intros have to be rewritten several times before they achieve the correct length, balance and clarity.

Never be satisfied with your first attempt, however good. Always ask: "Can it be better?"

**TO SUMMARISE:**

The intro should be

1. newsworthy
2. 20 words or less
3. attractive to the reader
4. appropriate in style

When writing your intro:

- List the key points and put them in order of importance.
- KISS: Keep It Short and Simple.
- Use the active voice.
- Put the facts first.
- Don't use quotes in the intro.
Chapter 6: Writing the news story in simple steps

Here we finish the job of writing the news story, which we began in Chapter 4: Writing the intro in simple steps. We consider ranking key points, structuring them in a logical way, and the importance of checking the story before handing it in.

The first hurdle has been cleared when you have written your intro. You have made a good start - but only a start. You now have to tackle the rest of the story to ensure the second, third and following paragraphs live up to the promise of the intro.

With a thorough understanding of the story, its content and its implications, and with the appropriate intro composed, the remainder of the story should fall into place quite naturally. It should become natural for you to take the readers and listeners by the hand and lead them through the story so that they absorb easily the information you have gathered.

**Remember the inverted pyramid**

Remember the inverted pyramid. Using this structure, the first sentence or first two sentences of the story make up the intro and should contain the most important points in the story. In the sentences below the intro, detail is given which supports the facts or opinions given in the intro; and the other most newsworthy details are given. Less important details and subsidiary ideas or information follow until the story finally tails away to the sort of details which help to give the full picture but which are not essential to the story.

A story written as an inverted pyramid can be cut from the bottom up to fit limited space or time.

**Length and strength**

The actual length of the news story should not be confused with the strength of the story. Some very strong stories about major issues may be written in a few sentences, while relatively minor stories can sometimes take a lot of space. However, it is usual for stronger stories to be given in more detail. Whatever the length of the story, the bottom point of the inverted pyramid - the place where we stop writing - should be the same. That is the level at which further details fail to meet the criteria for newsworthiness.

**Simple steps in writing the news story**

As with writing the intro, if you follow a step-by-step approach to the rest of the story you will make your task simpler and easier. We have already chosen key points, a news angle and written an intro about Cyclone Victor. Let us now return to that information and write the full news story.

The amount of detail which you include will be different for print and broadcasting. If you are writing for a newspaper, you will need to include as much relevant detail as possible. If you are writing for radio or television you will give much less detail.

For example, a newspaper report should certainly include the names and other details of the dead and injured people, if those details are available. You will not want to include these details in a radio report unless they are especially noteworthy.

One reason for this is that newspaper readers can jump over details which they do not want, and carry on reading at a later part of the story. Radio listeners and television viewers cannot do this, so you must make sure that you do not give details which most of your listeners will not want. If you do, you will bore them, and they may switch off.
It is also true, of course, that you can fit much more news into a newspaper than into a radio or television bulletin. Radio reports have to be short so that there is room for other reports in the bulletin.

Information

Let us now return to the Cyclone Victor example, which we used in the Chapter 4. This is the information you have already been given:

At 2 a.m. yesterday morning, meteorologists at the Nadi Weather Centre detected a cyclone developing rapidly near Nauru and moving quickly south-west across the Pacific towards the Solomon Islands. They named the cyclone "Victor". At 3 a.m., they contacted the Solomon Islands government, warning of the approach of Cyclone Victor. Government officials immediately put emergency plans into operation. They warned all shipping in the area of the cyclone’s approach. They broadcast warnings on the radio and alerted the police, who in turn sent officers to warn the people. By 10 a.m., winds in Honiara were blowing at more than 140 kilometres per hour. At about midday, the centre of the cyclone passed directly over Honiara before tracking into the Coral Sea, where it blew itself out. In Honiara, more than 20 houses were destroyed and a number of other buildings sustained considerable structural damage. More than 100 people are now homeless. Six people were killed. Another 18 people have been treated in hospital for minor injuries. Mopping-up operations have started in Honiara. The emergency services are still awaiting news from outlying districts but believe that Honiara has been the worst affected. Police say that of the six people who died, three men drowned when their car was blown off the road into a river, and two women and a man were killed by flying debris.

Key points

These are the seven key points from which we selected our intro:

- Nadi meteorologists warn Solomon Islands government of approach of Cyclone Victor.
- Solomon Islanders themselves warned of approaching cyclone.
- More than 20 homes destroyed and other buildings sustained considerable structural damage.
- More than 100 people homeless.
- Six people killed.
- Eighteen people treated for minor injuries.
- Three drowned and three killed by flying debris.

Remember that we decided that (e) and (d) were the most newsworthy key points because they best filled the four criteria for news:

- Is it new?
- Is it unusual?
- Is it interesting or significant?
- Is it about people?

Remember too that we decided to use key point (e) in preference to (g) because they were about the same fact but (e) was shorter for our intro.

The intro

By filling in just enough of the Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? to allow the intro to stand alone if necessary, we finally wrote the intro:

Six people were killed and more than 100 left homeless when Cyclone Victor hit the Solomon
Islands yesterday.

Options

We have three choices at this point for writing the rest of the story. We could tell it chronologically - that means in the time order in which the events happened. Or we can tell it in descending order of importance of the key points, all the way down to the least newsworthy at the end. Or we can use a combination of these two approaches, i.e. we can begin by giving the key points in descending order then fill in the less important details in chronological order.

Whichever option we choose, there must be a clear logic behind the way the story is told. This will make it easy for the reader to follow and understand it. There are many ways in which you could show visitors around your village or town, some of which would be logical and some illogical.

You might show them the centre of the village first, then move to the outer buildings, and finish with the river and the food gardens. Or you might show everything to do with one family line first, then move to a second family line, and so on. Visitors could follow and understand either of these.

However, if you wander at random through the village, pointing out things as you happen to see them, your visitors will probably become confused.

So it is with writing the news story. You must choose a clear and simple sequence for telling the facts and giving relevant opinions. In this way your readers or listeners will not become confused.

To return to our Cyclone Victor example, let us choose to give the main key points in descending order of importance and then to tell the story in chronological order to give the minor details. This will demonstrate both of the other approaches.

Ranking the key points

We have already chosen (e) and (d) for our intro. In what order should we put the other key points?
Clearly the deaths need explaining if possible, as does the damage to people's homes. Because lives are more important than homes, let us take (g) as our next key point, followed by (f) which is about injuries:

Three men drowned when their car was blown off the road into a river.
Two women and a man were killed by flying debris, and a further 18 people were treated in hospital for minor injuries.

Notice that we split key point (g) into two halves. This was partly to stop the paragraph from being too long and partly to emphasise the unusual nature of the deaths of the three men in the car. It is less unusual for people to be killed by flying debris in the middle of a cyclone, and we filled that paragraph out a bit by including details of the injured.
Now let us tell our readers or listeners more about the homeless:

More than 20 homes were destroyed and a number of other buildings were badly damaged.

Notice here that we changed the word "houses" to "homes", since "homes" are houses with people living in them. We also changed the phrase "sustained considerable structural damage" to "were badly damaged". As in the intro, you must avoid overloading any sentence in your story with unnecessary words - remember the canoe. The original phrase was just jargon. The rewritten phrase is shorter and simpler to understand.

Telling the rest of the story
We have so far used five of our key points in the first four paragraphs of our news story. The remaining two key points are facts about the cyclone itself - how it was spotted and how people were warned. There are clearly lots of details which can be given here.

It would be possible to write the rest of the story by choosing more key points from the information left, ranking them according to newsworthiness then writing them in order. This is, however, very complicated and may confuse your reader or listener. A much simpler alternative is to now go back to the beginning of the event and tell it in chronological order, as things happened.

Before we do this, we have tell our audience that we are going to change from the key points method of news writing to the chronological method, otherwise they might think that our next paragraph is our next key point (although our readers or listeners would not use that term). The easiest way of doing that is to provide a kind of summary to the first segment of our story with the paragraph:

The emergency services are still awaiting news from outlying districts but believe that Honiara has been the worst hit.

This sentence also tells the reader or listener that we have given the most important news. Our next paragraph tells them that we are going back to the beginning of the story:

Cyclone Victor was first detected at 2 a.m. yesterday by staff at the Nadi Weather Centre. They plotted it travelling south-west across the Pacific towards the Solomon Islands. An hour later, they contacted the Solomon Islands government to warn them of the cyclone's approach. Government officials put emergency plans into operation. They radioed ships in the area and broadcast warnings to Solomon Islanders over the radio. Police officers were sent out to warn people. By 10 a.m., winds in the capital, Honiara, were blowing at more than 140 kilometres per hour. Two hours later the centre of Cyclone Victor passed over Honiara before tracking into the Coral Sea, where it blew itself out. Mopping-up operations have now started in Honiara.

Now we have told the story of the cyclone, at the same time bringing our audience up to date with latest developments.

Checking the story

Before we hand this story in to our chief of staff or news editor, there are two more things we have to do to make sure that it is accurate; we must check for mistakes and we must check for missing details.

Inexperienced journalists are often so relieved that they have actually written a story that they forget to check it properly. You should make it a firm rule to read your story through several times before handing it in.

If you should find another mistake on any reading, correct it and then, because your reading has been interrupted by the correction, you should read the whole story through again from the beginning. Keep doing this until you can read it through from beginning to end without finding any errors. Only then can you hand it in.

Mistakes

We have to check back through our story to make sure that we have all the facts correct, the right spellings, the correct order of events, the proper punctuation. In short, is this how you want to see
the story in your newspaper or hear it read out on air?

**Missing details**

We have to ask ourselves whether there are still any outstanding **Who? What? Where? When? Why?** or **How?** questions still to be answered.

In our cyclone example, we do not give any specific details of who the dead and injured were, or how they were killed and hurt. Why did it take the Nadi Weather Centre an hour to alert the Solomon Islands government? What is the damage outside Honiara? What is going to happen to all the homeless people?

The amount of detail which we include in the story will depend on how much we feel our readers or listeners will want.

As we explained earlier, newspapers will give more details than radio or television bulletins. In particular, we shall want the names of the six people who have been killed to publish in a newspaper report; but not in a broadcast report.

There is still plenty of work to do, maybe in our next story.

**The final version**

The final version of our cyclone story, let us say for a newspaper, is now almost ready. We check for mistakes, and are satisfied that we have made none.

We then check for missing details. We have not given the names of the dead and injured, so we might phone the police and the hospital. Both places tell us that names will not be released until the families have been informed. This must be included in our story.

There are no details yet of damage outside Honiara, and it may be difficult to get that information if telephone lines are down and roads flooded. This, too, should be added to the story.

Our finished version should now look like this:

*Six people were killed and more than 100 left homeless when Cyclone Victor hit the Solomon Islands yesterday.*
*Three men drowned when their car was blown off the road into a river, in the national capital, Honiara.*
*Two women and a man were killed by flying debris, and a further 18 people are being treated in hospital for minor injuries.*
*The names of the dead and injured are not being released until relatives have been informed.*
*More than 20 homes were destroyed and a number of other buildings were badly damaged.*
*The emergency services are still awaiting news from outlying districts. However, they believe that Honiara has been the worst hit.*
*Communications between Honiara and other areas have been disrupted by the cyclone.*
*Cyclone Victor was first detected at 2 a.m. yesterday by staff at the Nadi Weather Centre.*
*They plotted it travelling south-west across the Pacific towards the Solomon Islands.*
*An hour later, they contacted the Solomon Islands government to warn them of the cyclone’s approach.*
*Government officials put emergency plans into operation. They radioed ships in the area and broadcast warnings to Solomon Islanders over the radio.*
*Police officers were sent out to warn people.*
*By 10 a.m., winds in the capital, Honiara, were blowing at more than 140 kilometres per hour.*
*Two hours later the centre of Cyclone Victor passed over Honiara before tracking into the Coral*
Sea, where it blew itself out.
Mopping-up operations have now started in Honiara.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Remember to read your story through thoroughly before handing it in. If you find any errors, correct them - *then read it through again*.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your intro meet the six requirements we discussed at the end of the previous chapter?
- Have you chosen the key points? Have you ranked them in order when writing your story?
- Have you presented the facts in an orderly manner and provided links between different segments?
- Have you read it through again?
Chapter 7: Writing the news story - clear writing

In this chapter we build on the lessons learned when writing the intro and in *Chapter 6: Writing the news story in simple steps*. We examine how to use language to guide your reader or listener through the information in a clear and entertaining way.

Choosing what to include in your story is only one part of writing the news story. If you wish to do the job well, you must also think about the way in which you write it. There are a number of things which you need to keep in mind if you are going to write clearly.

**Simplicity**

Keep the language and grammar clear and simple. This is not just a rule for intro writing - it applies throughout the whole news story.

A lot of young journalists write bright, snappy intros with simple grammar and short words, then spoil the story by overloading the rest with long and obscure words and complicated grammatical constructions.

We will discuss this in greater detail in the chapters on Language and Style. For now, remember that the same factors which make a good intro also apply to the whole of the story.

Another way in which we help to keep things simple for our readers or listeners is by writing paragraphs of one or two sentences. You may have been told in writing essays that you only start a new paragraph for a new idea. This does not apply in journalism, where we try to get lots of ideas into a short space in a newspaper or short bulletin on radio or television.

It is standard practice in news journalism to start a new paragraph with each sentence. We call each of these short paragraphs a par. You should get used to this term.

The great advantage of having short pars in radio scripts is that the newsreaders have no trouble keeping track of where they are on the page. When they finish one sentence, their eyes automatically move to the beginning of the next par. In newspapers, short paragraphs introduce white space on to the page, at the beginning and end of each par, which makes the story more readable. It also makes the story easier to cut, if it is too long to fit on the page.

**Accuracy**

We have already mentioned that accuracy is one of the principal requirements of journalism. You may have to generalise in your intro to keep it short and simple. However, you must be accurate and precise when giving the full details later in the story.

In our cyclone story in *Chapter 6*, we said in the intro that Cyclone Victor hit the Solomon Islands, causing death and damage. In the body of the news story we explained that this happened mainly in Honiara, how strong the winds had been and at what time the cyclone struck. All of these precise details help our audience to understand and add authority to our report.

**Sequence and continuity**

By identifying key points and ranking them in importance you have placed the facts in some kind of order. Certainly this is the best method to use for the intro and the first few paragraphs. However, with a long and involved story you will find that jumping from key point to key point may confuse your reader or listener. You will have to put your facts in a logical sequence and provide continuity.
between different segments of the story.

Telling the story in chronological order will do this for some kinds of events, such as the cyclone or a rescue, but it will not work for all stories - for example an election campaign or a debate over where to build a new school. These need a slightly different approach once you have written your intro and principal key points.

If you were showing someone around your village, you would not begin by pointing out the church, then take them inside the copra drying hut, then point out your home, and then take them inside the church. You would be more likely to start your tour by pointing out the main places of interest in general (that is like your intro and first few paragraphs), and then you would go on to visit each of the places, such as the church, the copra drying hut and your home, showing each in greater detail.

That is how it should be with your story. Once you have written your intro and the paragraphs telling the principal key points, take each aspect of the story in turn and give details of it before moving on to the next aspect. Do not ramble from key point to key point. Take your readers or listeners by the hand and lead them through the story.

When you change from one aspect to another, you may occasionally have to provide linking words to guide your audience:

**However**, a spokesman for the men said they had a number of other complaints.

**Meanwhile**, the Western Highlands government was preparing its own plans to fight the coffee rust.

The "however" in our first example says that we are about to hear an opposing view to the one previously expressed. The "meanwhile" in our second example tells us that something else is going on at the same time.

There are a number of other linking words which can give your story continuity. Be careful. Each has a specific meaning, so get it right. Also, remember that if you repeat "meanwhile" ten times in a story you will simply leave your readers or listeners confused, not knowing where in the story they are.

**Facts first**

Some stories involve both the announcement of facts (such as an increase in income tax) and comments on the facts themselves (from the Finance Minister, opposition leader and others). You must always give enough explanation of the facts first to put the comments in context, otherwise you will confuse your reader or listener:

**RIGHT:**
Income tax is to rise by two percent next month.

The Finance Minister, Mr Barney Kina, said today the rise was needed to help to pay for increased spending on education.

**WRONG:**
The Finance Minister said today that an increase in income tax was needed to help to pay for increased spending on education.

Mr Barney Kina announced that income tax will therefore rise by two percent from next month.

You must also make sure that any facts or comments which are given in a brief form in the intro are explained in full later in the story. You must never leave any important Who? What? Where?
When? Why? or How? questions unanswered. In our cyclone example, we said in the intro that six people had died. We explained how they died later in the story.

The same rule applies to comments. If you say that someone attacked a policy or a proposal, later in the story you must quote the exact words he or she used, to support your intro. Readers or listeners will not take everything you say on trust - they too want evidence, and you must provide it.

**Quotes and attribution**

We will discuss quotes and attribution fully in the next two chapters. For the moment there are two general observations to make.

The first is that quotes bring any story to life by bringing together the news-maker and the reader or listener. On radio and television we do this by using a taped interview so that the person can be heard (and seen on television) actually saying the words. In newspapers, we use the person’s actual words, in quote marks (").

In both cases, the readers or listeners are given direct access to the source of the news. When journalists do not use quotes, they seem to be getting in between the news-maker and the reader or listener. They seem to get in the way.

The second observation is that you should, wherever possible, attribute the statement of facts to someone your reader or listener can identify in the story. This gives your audience some idea of how reliable the information is. In our cyclone story, we are not sure what damage has been done outside Honiara, so we attribute the belief that Honiara has been the worst affected to the emergency services:

*The emergency services ... believe that Honiara has been the worst affected.*

We discuss quotes and attribution in much greater detail in the next two chapters.

**Background**

Very often, you will write a news story updating something which has been reported by your newspaper, radio or television station before. We call stories which continue to produce new developments running stories, and we call stories which build upon previous news items *follow-ups*. (See Chapter 24 for full details.)

You cannot assume when writing a follow-up that your readers or listeners will know the original facts of the story. You have to summarise the issue briefly to bring them up to date. We call this information *background*. One or two paragraphs of well-written background details must be included in the body of your news story, so that it makes complete sense.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

*Remember to read your story through thoroughly before handing it in. If you find any errors, correct them - then read it through again!*

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have you presented the facts in an orderly manner and provided links between different segments?
- Where you have facts and comments, are the facts first?
- If your story is a follow-up or part of a running story, have you provided sufficient background information?
- Is everything you have written accurate?
• Can you simplify any of the words or grammar to make the story easier to understand?
• Have you used quotes to enliven the story? Have you attributed the facts and opinions to the right people?
• Have you read it through again?
Chapter 8: Quotes

In this chapter, we discuss what quotes are, why they are necessary and how to use them properly. In the following chapter, we also discuss the correct ways of attributing quotes and other information to people.

A quote is the written form of the words which people have spoken. Occasionally it will also apply to words they have written down, perhaps in a book or a press release. In print journalism, quotes are shown surrounded by quotation marks, either single (’) or double (”). These are sometimes called inverted commas. The alternative to using a quote is to rewrite the sentence into what we call reported speech. We will discuss how to move between quotes and reported speech later in this chapter.

Quotes should not be used on radio, which should broadcast the words in the spoken form, sometimes called audio. Television journalists can use quotes shown as text on the screen.

Attribution is stating who made the quote or gave the information. The most common form of attribution uses the verb to say. Always say who is speaking. In America, attribution is called the tag. We discuss attribution in greater detail in the following chapter.

Why use quotes?

There are three main reasons why you should use quotes in print journalism:

- If you repeat the exact words which people themselves used you will reduce the risk of misreporting what they say.
- When we give a person’s exact words our readers can see both the ideas and the way they were presented.
- People often use lively language when they speak. Quotes allow you to put that lively language directly into your story.

Remember too that, as a journalist, you are simply the channel through which people with something to say speak to people who want to know what they said. The best way of keeping the channel clear is to let people tell things in their own way. One of the golden rules of journalism is: Let people speak for themselves. Use quotes.

In print we hear people's voices through quotes, in broadcasting the voices are heard in the form of audio or actuality.

Because radio journalists should avoid quotes altogether, and television journalists should use them as graphics on the screen, this chapter will concentrate on using quotes in the print media.

When to use quotes

Quotes serve many useful purposes in print journalism but they cannot be used everywhere in your story. You will make your writing more effective if you obey the following rules.
Never start a news story with a quote

The most important reason for not starting a story with a quote is that a quote itself seldom shows the news value of your story. It is your task as a journalist to tell the reader what is news. You should tell them what is new, unusual, interesting or significant about the information you present. Only when you have told them what is news should you use a quote to support your intro.

A standard intro in reported speech is the most effective method of expressing an idea. Very few people speak well enough to say in one sentence what a good journalist can compress into a well-written intro.

Starting a news story with a quote produces awkward punctuation. By putting words inside quotation marks, you give readers an extra obstacle to overcome just at the time when you are trying to grab their attention.

Beginning with a quote also means that your readers see the quote before they know who has said it. How can they judge the importance of the quote without knowing the speaker?

A quote can often be most effective following straight after a hard news intro. See how effective a short quote becomes when it follows a short, sharp intro:

The Minister for Finance, Mr Joe Wau, yesterday attacked laziness in the public service. "Government employees must get off their backsides and work," he told a lunchtime meeting of senior department heads.

Quotes in the rest of the story

If you are going to quote a speech or a personal interview, never leave the first quote later than the third or fourth paragraph of the story. If you cannot find a quote strong enough to go that high, you should question the value of covering the speech or doing the interview in the first place.

One of the problems faced by many journalists is that their shorthand - or their memory - is not good enough to get a full and accurate note of what a person says. So they take the easy way out and write everything in reported speech. It is your task to make sure that you get an accurate note of what is said, even to the extent of asking the speaker to repeat it. Modern journalists can, of course, use tape recorders to make an exact record of what a person says. However, you must still take care in transcribing your quotes into your story. (See Chapter 16: Interviewing.)

There is, of course, no excuse for making up a quote. That is one of the greatest sins a journalist can commit. It destroys your integrity and risks landing both you and your employer in an expensive action for defamation. Don't do it.

Quotes in features

One of the few places where a journalist can occasionally begin a story with a quote is in writing features - and then only in special cases.

The most common use among young journalists is what one might call the sound effect quote, where the quotation is used to create an atmosphere for the feature. The following introduction to a feature begins with a quote especially to grab the reader's attention:

"Atten...shun!"
The drill sergeant's voice rings out over the new Bomana parade ground.

But be warned, this type of intro cannot be used often as it rapidly loses its impact and becomes irritating to the regular reader.
As a rule, do not start stories with quotes until you reach a level of experience when they earn their place through artistic merit and not because of their novelty. (See Chapter 50: Features.)

How often should you use quotes?

Although quotes bring a story alive, it is still possible to kill a good story by carelessness, particularly over-repetition. It is like smothering a meal with sauce, drowning the taste of the meat. Each quote must earn its place in the story. Do not put in strings of quotes simply because you have them in your notebook.

Alternate quotes and reported speech, choosing those quotes which are especially strong and rewriting in reported speech those which are either too complicated or too long. Just because someone said something does not mean that they have expressed themselves well or clearly. If the quote is likely to confuse your readers or spoil the rest of the story, turn the words into reported speech. As we said earlier, very few people are able to compress ideas into sentences better than a good journalist can.

**Writing quotes**

Many new journalists are afraid of using quotes because they believe that the language and punctuation is complicated. In fact, there are some simple rules which, if followed, can make quotes as easy to use as any other kind of sentence.

**Punctuation**

Most newspapers adopt a standard style when punctuating. Two simple phrases will act as a reminder of how to punctuate quotes. (For simplicity, we use the term 'tag' for the attribution of the person who said the words and 'caps' as a shortform for 'capital letters'.)

When the attribution (the tag) is at the beginning of the quotation, the order is:

```
TAG, COLON, QUOTES, CAPS.
```

Look at the following sentence:

He said: "It is not something I expected."

See how the punctuation follows our rule:

```
He said (tag) : (colon) "(quotes) I (caps) ..."
```

When the tag is at the end of the quotation, the order is:

```
COMMA, QUOTES, TAG, POINT
```

as in the following sentence:

"It is not something I expected," he said.

Again, we can see the pattern in the sentence:

```
... expected, (comma) "(quotes) he said (tag) .(point)"
```
Notice that full stops (points), commas, question marks and exclamation marks always go inside the quotes. When you have a quote within a quote, use a single inverted comma for the inside quotation. If both end in the same place, put the comma, full stop or similar punctuation mark within the single inverted comma:

Sgt Ovea said: "I told him, `You are your own worst enemy.'"

You should always start a new paragraph for a direct quote. If you have started a quote and continue to quote in the next paragraph, you do not need to close the quotes before going on to the next par, though you should start the new paragraph with inverted commas. See how we leave out the quotation mark after the first paragraph but include it at the beginning of the second:

Mr Raukele said: "It is not something I ever expected to happen in this country in my lifetime. "I have to admit that it came as a complete surprise."

Whenever you introduce a new speaker, put the tag before the quote, giving the speaker's title as well. This is particularly important when you are changing from one speaker to another. If you quote a new speaker and fail to put his tag at the beginning, the reader will assume that the first speaker is still being quoted:

RIGHT:
Businessman Mr Tom Avua said that trade was lower than last year.
His partner, Mr Michael Mu, added: "I may have to sell my home to pay off the outstanding debts to the bank."

WRONG:
Businessman Mr Tom Avua said that trade was lower than last year.
"I may have to sell my home to pay off the outstanding debts to the bank," said his partner, Mr Michael Mu.

Notice from the example above that it is possible to change the usual "somebody said" order of the tag to "said somebody" order. This becomes necessary when the tag has a long identifier, so that you do not separate the verb "said" too far from the actual quotation:

RIGHT:
"It is a load of rubbish," said Mr Peter Kuman, vice-president of the Retail Traders Association and its regional representative on the PNG Chamber of Commerce.

WRONG:
"It is a load of rubbish," Mr Peter Kuman, vice-president of the Retail Traders Association and its regional representative on the PNG Chamber of Commerce, said.

Partial and incomplete quotes

Although you may not be able to write fast or make notes in shorthand, you may still have notes of particular phrases the speaker used. This is when you might be tempted to use partial or incomplete quotes. These are quotes which do not make full sentences.

There is seldom any excuse for using partial quotes, whether it is in an intro or in the main body of the story. The main exception is when the words you are quoting are slang, such as "dead loss", "the bee's knees", "Star Wars" or "junket", as in the following example:

The Prime Minister Mr Galea yesterday defended his European tour, saying it was not a "junket".
"The trip was very successful, particularly in Germany," he said.

If you do use a partial quote in the intro, you must give the full quote later in the story, otherwise the reader may believe that it is you using slang.

Some bad journalists use quotation marks around words or phrases which they think might be defamatory. They mistakenly believe that, by showing that the words were said by someone else, they themselves will not be sued for defamation. This is not so. If you use defamatory words, you can be sued, whether they were your words or someone else's, whether or not they were in quotes (See Chapters 69 and 70 on Defamation).

Do not put individual words or phrases in quotation marks simply because someone else said them first. Most descriptive words can stand by themselves, without the support of quotation marks. For example, the minister may have said in an interview: "The job ahead will be difficult." If you put that into reported speech, it would be wrong to choose only the word difficult for partial quoting:

**RIGHT:**
The minister said the job ahead would be difficult.

**WRONG:**
The minister said the job ahead would be "difficult".

Incomplete quotes are slightly different to partial quotes. Incomplete quotes are full sentence quotes with some words left out. They can be used if it is made clear that you have omitted some words or phrases without altering the essential meaning of the sentence. This should not be done because you failed to make a note of the whole sentence, only if the part you want to cut is either insignificant or unconnected. You should type three dots (called ellipses) in place of the missing word or phrase. For example, we may not want to use all of the words quoted in the following sentence:

"Carelessness, as many people before me have argued, is the curse of clear writing," he said.

so we rewrite it as:

"Carelessness ... is the curse of clear writing," he said.

Sometimes you may need to use a strong quote which does not actually contain all the information your reader needs to make sense of the sentence. This can happen because the person is speaking about something he or she does not mention in the actual quote itself. In such cases you can insert the missing fact - often a name or a title - in square brackets - within the quote to show what you have done For example, the Finance Minister might be speaking in Parliament about the May Budget but did not use the actual title in the sentence you want to quote:

"I have repeated a thousand times, it will be ready when it is ready and not a moment before."

To make sense for your readers, you can use the quote by inserting the words "the May Budget" in square brackets:

The Finance Minister told the Opposition: "I have repeated a thousand times, [the May Budget] will be ready when it's ready and not a moment before."

Whether you use a full quote, a partial quote or an incomplete quote, you must not take it out of context. The most common complaint against journalists - after that of misquoting itself - is the accusation that the reporter took the statement out of context.

A journalist might be tempted to quote someone as saying: "I entirely agree that the plans are good" when, in fact, what he said was "I entirely agree that the plans are good, but they are
unworkable and unsuitable." That is bad journalism.

**Scare quotes**

Scare quotes are words or short phrases which are placed between quotation marks when they really do not belong. Usually, the writer is trying to add stress to the words or to suggest something other than their obvious meaning.

Scare quotes are usually unnecessary and should only be used if you are confident they are required. As discussed above, there are usually better ways of using partial quotes.

The simplest reason for scare quotes is to add emphasis, which in literature is normally done by the use of italics. In news reporting, however, this usage can cause confusion or be misleading. Unless the words are actually quotes which can be attributed to a person, avoid scare quotes for emphasis.

BAD:  
The priest said he would "never" marry a divorced person in his church.

BETTER:  
The priest stressed that he would never marry a divorced person in his church.

or

The priest said: "I will never marry a divorced person in my church."

A more common use of the scare quote is to suggest that the word or phrase should not be taken at face value. It is often used to suggest disbelief or actual disagreement with the words as they are being used.

Someone who does not believe in global warming might put the phrase in scare quotes to signify that disbelief.

**The Opposition Leader, Mr Tony Abbott, said people should not be alarmed by the threat of "global warming".**

The problem with using a scare quote in this way is that it is now unclear whether the disbelief is in the mind of Mr Abbott or the writer of the sentence. Your credibility as a journalist depends partly on presenting information clearly and unambiguously for your readers, so avoid scare quotes in such circumstances.

Finally, the use of quotation marks to define a single word or phrase linguistically is justified in certain circumstances when the use and meaning are clear. For example:

**The Minister said he had been misunderstood by some people who thought he had said 'weather' when, in fact, he had said 'whether'.**

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Quotes are an important tool for print journalists, but they should never be used on radio, and only as text on television.
Never begin a news story with a quote.

Try and keep a balance between quotes and other sentences.

Take care when punctuating quotes.

Avoid partial or incomplete quotes unless they are necessary.

Avoid scare quotes
Chapter 9: Attribution

In the previous chapter, we discussed what quotes are, why they are necessary and how to use them properly. In this chapter, we also discuss the correct ways of attributing quotes and other information to people.

**Attribution** is stating who said something. Attribution is essential in all the media, including radio and television. Journalists do it so that your readers or listeners can know who is speaking or where the information in the story comes from. You can use attribution for both spoken and written information, so that you attribute information gathered from interviews, speeches, reports, books, films or even other newspapers, radio or television stations. In a moment we will discuss when you need to use attribution. First, however, we will look briefly at how attribution works in reported speech.

**Reported speech**

In the previous chapter, we mainly looked at attribution as it applied to quotes. However, attribution should be used whenever you want your readers or listeners to know where your information comes from. For example, in reported speech the attribution is still part of the sentence, although it is not as distinct as when you use a direct quote. In both of the following sentences, we attribute the words to Ms Mar. In the first, her words are in quotes; in the second they are put into reported speech. The attribution is in italics:

**QUOTE:**  
Ms Mar said: "Students can expect no special treatment if they go on strike."

**REPORTED SPEECH:**  
Ms Mar said that students could expect no special treatment if they went on strike.

Notice how, in the reported speech, we had to change the verb "can" to "could" and the verb "go" to "went". This is because, although quotes must be word-for-word, reported speech is a report of something which was said in the past, so the tenses have to be changed.

The use of the linking word "that" is usually optional in reported speech. It is often left out to reduce the length of the sentence, but should be included whenever it makes the meaning of a sentence clearer. It is often used to separate the verb of attribution from a following verb. Compare the two examples. Notice how including "that" in the second example makes the meaning clearer:

The doctor felt many women worried about their health.

The doctor felt that many women worried about their health.

**How often should you use attribution?**

The good journalist has to strike a balance between the need to make clear attribution of statements and the risk of boring the reader with too many phrases such as "he said".

It helps to change the word "said" occasionally, in attributing both quotes and reported speech. Some useful alternatives are "warned", "suggested", "urged", "asked" and "disclosed". But beware: each of these has a specific meaning. Check that it is the correct one for what your speaker said and the way they said it.

The phrase "according to" can be used in attributing reported speech, but do not use it more than...
once with any single speaker. Although it is usually a neutral term, not suggesting either belief or disbelief, if you use it too often it can give the impression that you doubt the information the speaker has given.

There are other, more obvious danger words to avoid. Words such as "stated" and "pointed out" both imply that what the speaker said is an undisputed fact. You can, for example, point out that the world is round, but you cannot point out that this cake is delicious, because that is an opinion.

Also avoid the word "claimed", which suggests that you do not believe what is being said. Be especially careful when reporting court cases. Lawyers and the police like to use the word "claimed" to throw doubt on opposition statements. You must not do the same.

The exact balance of attribution depends on the kind of story you are writing or the material you can use. If the statements are reliably factual throughout, you only need to attribute occasionally. If, however, the story is heavy with opinion or unreliable statements, you should attribute at least once every two sentences.

**Attributing facts and opinions**

One of the greatest dangers facing young journalist is accepting what people say as the truth. Just because someone tells you that something is a fact does not make it so.

There are some things which are universally accepted as true, for example that the world is round, that Tuesday follows Monday, that Fiji is in the Pacific. But there are also things which people want you to believe are true but which are either not provable or are lies. These people may not knowingly tell a lie, but many people are careless with the truth.

Also, situations may change, so that the truth at one moment may be wrong the next. Attribution helps you to overcome some of these problems. Attribution is the act of specifying who said what.

If you attribute the words to the person who said them, you do not have to prove or disprove the truth of their words; you simply report them. Also, people judge what is said by the person who says it. Statements made by people in authority carry more weight than statements made by other people.

Look at the following example. The attribution is the phrase said the vice-chancellor Ms Una Mar:

**Striking students who miss exams will be given fail marks, said the vice-chancellor Ms Una Mar.**

In this case, you may have very little doubt that this is exactly what will happen. But there is always the chance that Ms Mar will change her mind and give the students a second chance. By attributing the statement to Ms Mar, you protect yourself against this possibility. Thus, if the students do get a second chance, you can say to your critics: "We didn't say it, Ms Mar did."

In any case, your readers will be interested to know what public figures believe to be true. Even if it is later found that Ms Mar was mistaken, it is interesting to know that she once believed she would fail the students. As soon as you find out she has changed her mind, you can carry a news story saying so, recalling the previous story attributed to Ms Mar.

**Clear and undisputed facts**

In cases where there is undeniable evidence that something is so, you obviously do not have to attribute facts. In the following example, the weather was observable. Who is going to argue?

**High winds and torrential rain lashed Port Moresby today, bringing down trees and flooding parts of Waigani Drive.**
Neither do you need to attribute if you have witnessed the event yourself, for example while reporting from a court:

The National Court sitting in Kieta has sentenced a man to 12 years imprisonment with hard labour for rape.

The court has found the man guilty of rape. You saw the judge sentence him. You can state it as a fact.

There is another category of stories which appear to be true because of the reliability of the sources. These are statements made by people in authority who are in a position to know, such as the police chief telling you about an arrest or the farm manager talking about his cooperative. In such cases, you might not attribute the facts in the intro, but your readers and listeners will still want to know how reliable your information is. So you must attribute the facts further down the story:

A gang of youths ran riot through Boroko shopping centre yesterday, smashing car windscreens and shop windows.
Police said about 30 youths were involved and all are thought to be from Morata.

or:

The Pago Farm Cooperative plans to double its rice production to 200 tonnes next year.
Manager Mr Irwin Neman revealed the plans yesterday at a ceremony to mark the cooperative's second anniversary.

In both cases, the sources are reliable enough for the intros to stand on their own. Attributing the information has added extra weight to them. Your readers or listeners can judge how reliable the information is.

Opinions

There is no alternative to attribution when statements made are opinions. If you do not attribute an opinion to an individual, your audience will assume that it is your own opinion - and there is no excuse for that kind of confusion in a news story.

Your problem may come in deciding what is a verifiable fact and what is only opinion. In many cases this is easy:

Localisation in the public service has been rapid, but the quality of work is still below expectations, according to Home Affairs Minister Mr Barney Kina.

With a concept as vague as "quality of work", this can only be an opinion, even expressed by a senior minister. You will often find that opinions use vague and unspecific language. (See Chapter 56: Facts and opinion.)

In cases where fact and opinion are not easily separated, play safe and attribute the story.

Attributing a statement to someone is no defence in a claim for defamation. If you wrongly accuse a person of being a thief, it is no excuse to say that you were just quoting someone else.

Reliable sources

In some cases, your sources of information may not want to be named, for fear of revenge. Journalists who are sure of their facts often attribute such information to "usually reliable sources", 
"informed sources" or "sources within the department/company".

In some cases, they use phrases like "it is widely believed that" or "it is understood that". Be warned! If your information is wrong, the blame will rest at your door. The greatest danger comes in "off the record" interviews. You must always consult your news editor or chief of staff about what you can and cannot say in such cases. (See Chapter 59: Sources of information.)

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Quotes are an important tool for print journalists, but they should never be used on radio, and only as text on television.

Always attribute quotes to the speaker or source of information.

You can use alternative words to "said", but beware that they may have distinct meanings and may imply support or disbelief.

Attribute all opinions and information which is not a clear and undisputed fact.
Chapter 10: Language & style basics

This is the first of four chapters about language and style in news writing. In this chapter, we give guidance on how to write sentences for maximum understanding and why care over language is important. In the three following chapters we show how to avoid some common language problems, we suggest some rules for news writing style and we give advice on translating news from one language to another.

The importance of language

Your main task as a journalist is to help people understand what is happening around them; in their village, in their country and in the world. Most readers or listeners will not have your knowledge of language, so you must simplify it for them. You should be able to examine the most complicated issues and events then translate them into language which your audience can understand. If you fail in this, people will stop buying your newspaper or tuning in to your radio or television station. You will be failing in your job.

For many journalists today, English is the main language used for newspapers or magazines, radio, television or the Internet. This book is written in English, so these chapters concentrates on the English language. It is worth remembering, however, that even a language as common as English is not exactly the same all over the world. There are differences between, for example, UK English and American English. There are often also differences in the way English is written or spoken within individual countries. It may sometimes be difficult to decide what is correct in the English used in your country. Language is developing all the time, and your country may not yet have a well-established set of rules for English. If this is so, you should use the form which is accepted as correct by the most literate educated people in your country. Above all, use words and grammar which are most easily understood by your readers or listeners.

Although you are reading this in English, you may do a lot of writing in other languages. Many of the general points we make about writing style will apply to these other languages. Learn the general points and try to apply them to your own language or languages.

You may get some guidance on such things as sentence length, punctuation or word usage from your organisation’s style books. These are books which lay down rules for language you must follow in your particular paper or broadcasting station. You should ask your editor or chief of staff for a copy of your organisation's style book. Unfortunately, many small or new organisations do not have their own style book. In these chapters, we try to give you some general guidelines for language use and writing style. Use this advice to create your own style guide. For more details on how to keep and use a style guide, see Chapter 15: Newsroom books.

Short, sharp, clear sentences

Whether you write for newspapers, broadcasting or the Internet, you should always aim for words and sentences which provide the maximum amount of understanding with the minimum risk of confusion. This generally means keeping words and sentences short and simple. You can use long words, but you must be sure they are doing their job properly. In Chapter 5: Writing the intro, the golden rules, we said that many words are like fat and lazy people sitting back without paddles in a canoe. Remember, there is no room in your sentences for fat and lazy words. If words do not add to understanding, throw them overboard.

Sentence length

There is no single rule about the length of sentences in news writing, but you should set yourself a target for the maximum number of words you use. We suggest that you never use more than 20 words in any sentence, except in special circumstances. If you follow this rule, your sentences will
be simpler, there will be less room for error and you will make a more efficient use of words.

An alternative way of judging the best length for your sentences is to count the number of ideas or concepts you expect your reader or listener to understand. Compare these two examples of the same story. Notice how version A tries to pack all the ideas into one sentence, whereas version B splits them into three separate sentences:

**Story A**
Four aircraft passengers, the pilot and three people travelling in a car were killed when a twin-engined Beechcraft Baron aircraft hit an electric power line and crashed near Nadi airport this week.

**Story B**
Eight people died when an aircraft crashed near Nadi airport this week.
The pilot and four passengers died when their twin-engined Beechcraft Baron hit a power line. The plane then crashed into a car on a road near the airport, killing three more people.

Notice that, although Story B is 12 words longer than Story A, it is split into three sentences. None of the sentences in Story B is longer than 20 words. Get someone to read both stories out loud to you, and you will quickly see that Story B is easier to understand.

The reason is simple. Story A contains six separate ideas for the reader or listener to understand at one time:

1. the people in the plane;
2. the people in the car;
3. the type of plane;
4. the cause of the crash;
5. the location of the crash;
6. the time of the crash.

Story B, by comparison, has fewer ideas in each sentence. The first sentence has just four simple ideas:

1. the total number of dead;
2. a simple description of the type of plane;
3. where it crashed;
4. when it crashed.

The second sentence tells us:

1. how many died in the plane;
2. the exact type of plane;
3. the exact cause of the crash.

The third sentence tells us:

1. how the people in the car died;
2. where the car was;
3. how many died in the car.

You may argue that Story B, as well as being longer, gives a total of ten ideas to understand. However, many of those ideas are not separate. They relate to details in the preceding sentence. Linking ideas and repeating details often helps understanding. More important, those ten ideas are not thrown at our audience in one breath. The full stop at the end of each sentence (which comes as a pause on radio and television) allows the reader or listener time to digest one set of facts before moving on to new details.
We recommend that you try to limit each sentence to no more than three separate ideas. You can occasionally use four ideas per sentence, as long as those ideas are not complicated. We fitted four ideas into the intro of Story B above because two of the ideas - the time and place - are very simple and easy for the reader to understand.

Look back at the example of the Fiji cyclone in Chapter 6 to see how we changed an even bigger mass of confusing detail into easily digestible sentences.

**Lively language**

The words you use will help to make your story easy to understand. Later, in Chapter 11, we give lists of words you should avoid, either because they are difficult to understand or because they are fat and lazy and do not help to push your sentence along.

As we said earlier, long words are not bad in themselves, if they are the only words available to explain a particular meaning accurately. However, the English language is large and varied so there are usually shorter alternatives which do the job just as well as long words.

Many young journalists think that they have to use the whole of their vocabulary when writing even the simplest news story. You may wish to show off your knowledge of the language, but remember that your knowledge is not what matters. The vocabulary of your reader or listener is more important.

Some journalists also believe that they can only add drama or depth to a story by adding words. We get sentences like:

*The man ran swiftly across the street to help the defenceless boy who was being brutally beaten.*

Take out the adjectives and adverbs in italics. They are unnecessary and only slow the sentence down. The word swiftly is unnecessary because people do not usually run slowly. The boy is obviously defenceless, otherwise he would not be being beaten. And the word brutally is unnecessary, as most beatings are brutal. The sentence is now much livelier and sharper:

*The man ran across the street to help the boy who was being beaten.*

The most effective way to add drama to a sentence is to choose the verbs carefully. For example, try changing the verb “ran” to “strolled”, “walked”, “flew” or “thundered”. See how they alter the whole picture of what happened. We do not suggest that you change verbs simply to add drama. Every word must accurately describe what happened. But it is better to choose the correct verb than to add unnecessary adjectives and adverbs. The use of a variety of verbs is most common in sports reporting, where we read of players kicking, shooting, powering or rocketing the ball into the net.

**Using new words**

Many careless writers introduce new words without thinking how they will be understood by ordinary people. Sometimes they change nouns into verbs, in order to make sentences shorter. The danger with this is that the resultant verb is often less precise than the original phrase and is less readily understood by people. Avoid using verbs such as:

To author (use to write)
To hospitalise (use to admit to hospital or to be in hospital)
To parent (use to be a parent or to act like a parent)

You must be very careful about introducing new words which your readers or listeners might not understand. This is especially important if the word is in their second language. Stay with familiar
words.

However, if you cannot avoid using a new word, you must follow it immediately with an explanation. For example, many English language newspapers and broadcasters use the Russian word *glasnost* quite freely when speaking of the changes in the Soviet Union. When they first began to use it, they needed to explain that *glasnost* means "the opening up of a society which has previously been rigidly controlled".

There are also times when new words or usages have been readily accepted by society before the media decide to use them. It would be foolish, for example, to fight against the use of *farewell* as a verb in the South Pacific. People often speak of ´farewelling a friend´.

**Sentence structure**

It is not enough to write short sentences using simple words. You also have to construct your sentences in such a way that the ideas are easy to understand. In *Chapter 4* we discussed one of the best ways of doing this - using the active voice.

You will remember that the sentence “the man hit the table” is in the active voice (where the man is the hitter). The sentence “the table was hit by the man” is in the passive voice. Wherever possible, write in the active voice. That is the way most people speak. People do not say "the bus was missed by me", they say "I missed the bus".

However, there are times when you cannot avoid using the passive voice. This is particularly so when it is not clear who is responsible for the action or when the subject of the sentence is unimportant or unclear. For example we would write:

*Three children have been admitted to hospital with suspected food poisoning. (Passive voice)*

It would be wrong to use either of the following versions, the first because it is not clear who admitted them (was it a doctor or a nurse?), the second because we are not sure that it was food poisoning:

*Someone admitted three children to hospital with suspected food poisoning.*

or:

*Food poisoning put three children in hospital.*

Other factors which can make sentences too complicated for your reader or listener to understand include:

**Subordinate clauses**

You should avoid starting a sentence with a subordinate clauses. Subordinate clauses usually begin with words such as "while...", "as...", "although...", "even though...", "because ...", and "despite...". They are separate phrases within a sentence which help to put the main part of the sentence in context. In the following example of bad sentence construction, the subordinate clause is in italics:

**BAD**

*Although there has been a 20 percent increase in murders this year, the Prime Minister has vowed not to bring back hanging.*

The main point of the sentence is that the Prime Minister has said he will not bring back hanging. The subordinate clause sets this promise in the context of the rising crime rate. In the example above, putting the subordinate clause at the beginning of the sentence may confuse your readers
or listeners. They expect to hear the main facts first. Rewrite the sentence as follows:

**BETTER:**
The Prime Minister has vowed not to bring back hanging, despite a 20 percent increase in murders this year.

**And and but**
Even simple joining words like *and* and *but* can cause confusion if they are not used wisely. These words are called *conjunctions* because they join things together. The word *and* is quite acceptable when used to join together two words or phrases:

The man *and* the woman had two daughters *and* a son.

However, it should not be used to join together long lists of ideas which can quite easily be split into separate sentences. In the two examples which follow, the first version is confused by using *and* and *but*. By splitting it into separate sentences we do not alter the meaning, we simply make it easier to understand, for reasons we discussed in the section on sentence length:

**RIGHT:**
Import duty on meat and vegetables will be reduced by ten percent. The special subsidy for rice exporters will be increased by five percent. These changes will come into effect after the next budget.

**WRONG:**
Duty on imported meat and vegetables will be reduced by ten percent and the special subsidy for rice exporters will be increased by five percent but these changes will not come into effect until after the next budget.

**Paired negatives**
Paired or double negatives in English are not only bad grammar ("he has not got no pawpaw"), they usually create confusion, especially in the spoken word. Although logically paired negatives simply cancel each other out, many people do not use them in this way. Many other languages have totally different rules about paired negatives, and even some British dialects use the paired negative to add stress to a negative idea.

For example, the sentence "He was happy" is easy to understand. So is the sentence "He was unhappy". But what do you understand by "He was not unhappy". Was he happy or unhappy? Do you see the confusion? Make it a rule: avoid paired negatives.

**Objectivity**
Your language must not only be easily understood, it must be fair. You should not use words which give a biased view of a person, an event or a situation.

Many words develop special, biased meanings because of the way they are commonly used in a community. In some cases, you cannot avoid using such words. Take care that the words you use reflect the meaning in the community and not your own opinions. In particular, you should be careful about using words which describe disputes or conflicts. In these cases, each side to the dispute may choose to use the words which reflect well on them and badly on their opponents. As a journalist, you should try to steer the middle course.

The most obvious cases of bias are introduced by the use of adjectives and adverbs. A protester's *peaceful* resistance may seem like *violent* obstruction to a policeman on duty. An injured person waiting for an ambulance may think it arrived *slowly* when the ambulance driver
believes he drove fast.

Verbs too can be loaded with bias. The same protester who lobbed a stone at a police van may be seen by the men inside to have hurled it at them. A boss sees his workers go on strike, the workers may say they withdraw their labour. Words like sack, retrench and make redundant describe similar situations in which people lose their jobs, but they mean quite different things to the bosses and workers involved. Some American companies even speak of letting workers go, even though the workers themselves have no choice.

Nouns can also express bias. A building can be a house to a poor person, yet seem like a shack to the rich observer. It may seem to be in a suburb to its owner, and in a slum to the rich man. And who is rich? If you have $100 you will be rich to a beggar, but poor to a millionaire.

It is impossible to list all the words which may contain bias. You must look at each word individually and ask yourself if it is fair and accurate.

Quotes
You are on safer ground when you use words in quotes. That way the reader can judge the bias through the eyes of the person you quote. (In radio or television, it is better to use a recording of people speaking the actual words, called actuality.) In the following example, look at the difference between these two sentences describing the same crime. Notice how the magistrate and the accused see the crime in opposite ways:

The magistrate said: "These were mean and despicable thefts, carried out against a defenceless family for no good reason."

The accused said: "I never robbed anyone. I just took from the rich people and gave it back to the poor."

Do not pass judgment. Give the words in quotes and let you readers or listeners judge for themselves.

An added advantage of using quotes is that you can use much livelier language - the words the people themselves used. We talked about this in detail in Chapters 8 and 9 on quotes and attribution.

TO SUMMARISE:

You must keep your language clear and simple so that your readers or listeners can understand.

Sentences should be short - no longer than 20 words or three concepts (ideas).

Sentence structure should be simple; it is best to write in the active voice.

Explain any new words whenever you use them.
Chapter 11: Language & style - words

In this, the second chapter on Language & Style, we look at the words you use to tell your story. We see how important spelling is and how to avoid confusing your readers or listeners with the words you choose. We also list some words which are better than others, words you should avoid and some words which are commonly misused - together with the correct forms. In the following two chapters in this section we will look at grammar and at translations.

So far, we have been looking at some general principles governing the way we write for understanding. We now look in more detail at words themselves - which words or phrases help understanding and which do not. We will give you separate sections for common errors. However, our word lists will not be complete. You must use your common sense when using words not on our lists.

Spelling

Languages are in a constant state of change. English, as the world's most widely used language, changes faster than most. Spelling is an area in which this change is most noticeable. There are two standards in spelling - Commonwealth English and American English. Which spelling you choose will depend on usage in your country. Most media organisations decide on a particular alternative and stick to it. Here are some examples of alternative spellings:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMONWEALTH</th>
<th>AMERICAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>colour</td>
<td>color</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organise</td>
<td>organize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through</td>
<td>thru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defence</td>
<td>defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jewellery</td>
<td>jewelry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jargon

Jargon is specialised language concerned with a particular subject, culture or profession. It is not usually found in the everyday speech of your ordinary reader or listener. Typical of jargon are such things as medical or technical terms, understood by small groups of specialists in their own fields. For example, a coronary thrombosis to a doctor is commonly called a heart attack by the layman.

Computer scientists speak of accessing data when ordinary people talk about getting information.

There is an obvious need for such technical terms in context, such as the doctor's surgery or the computer room. Unfortunately, jargon words tend to spill over into the media. This is partly because journalists want to impress readers or listeners by their knowledge and partly because journalists do not understand what they have been told. Bad journalists find it easier to pass on the problem to their audience by simply repeating the difficult words which they have been given and don't understand. You should first ask the person concerned to explain what they mean in simpler terms.

This is especially obvious in reporting on government and the public service. Officials often hide behind their own jargon, using it as a wall to keep the public away from their secrets. A Papua New Guinea Minister for Minerals, speaking about foreign shareholders in a big mine, was quoted as saying:

"...they were invited to participate in the development of that mineral resource and they are
obligated to honour their agreement to participate."

Put into simple English, this means:

They agreed to take part in mining and must stick to that agreement.

Notice that we have had to take the sentence out of direct quotes. You cannot drastically alter the words a person says and leave your readers or listeners believing that they were a direct quote. It is much better to use reported speech that people can understand than use quotes which they cannot.

The message is clear. **If you do not understand what you are writing, do not write it.** If you have a good knowledge of language, you can translate jargon yourself. If you have any doubts, go back to the people who gave you the information and ask them: "What does it mean in plain English?"

Having said that, there are times when you have to use technical or otherwise difficult terms. In such cases, you should provide an explanation for your reader or listener. This need not be complicated. In the following example, we use the term de facto and explain it within the natural structure of the story:

The immigration service says it will no longer recognise de facto relationships in issuing visas. Officials say that in future, they will only give joint entry permits to couples who are married. Men and women living together in de facto relationships will have to apply separately.

Always try to explain abstract jargon in concrete terms; that is, translate ideas into what they mean in the day-to-day lives of your readers or listeners. This is important in areas such as economics and government. For example, a ten percent annual rate of inflation means for most people that the dollar in the pocket a year ago now buys only 90 cents-worth of goods. An increase in the basic tax rate means that workers will get less money in their pay packet.

Public servants often take ordinary words and alter their use, making them difficult for people to understand. For example, they talk about sighting a document when they really mean they saw it. To sight something usually means suddenly seeing it from a distance. To complicate matters further, there is also a verb to cite a document, which means to quote from it. To a radio listener, “sight” and “cite” both sound the same. There are numerous examples of misuse which you should avoid whenever possible.

The following is a list of jargon words and phrases. Alongside each there is an example of a good alternative:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jargon Word</th>
<th>Good Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>absence of</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accommodate</td>
<td>hold or seat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accommodation</td>
<td>housing or room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adequate</td>
<td>enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adjacent to</td>
<td>near</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>affluent</td>
<td>rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a great deal of</td>
<td>a lot of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ahead of schedule</td>
<td>early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>along the lines of</td>
<td>like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anticipate</td>
<td>expect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>approximately</td>
<td>about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ascertain</td>
<td>find out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as of that time</td>
<td>then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assistance</td>
<td>help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at an early date</td>
<td>soon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attempt</td>
<td>try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at that moment in time</td>
<td>then</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
at the present time  now
at this moment in time  now
behind schedule  late
beverage  drink
by means of  by/using
cause injuries to  injure
commence,  start
commencement  force
compel  about/on
concerning  made of
constructed of  now
currently  dead
deceased  show
demonstrate  although
despite the fact that  stop
discontinue  sent
dispatched  give
donate  because
due to the fact that  meet
encounter  happen
eventuate  very
exceedingly  help
facilitate  full
filled to capacity  got in
gained entrance to  met
gathered together  approve
give approval to  consider
give consideration to  cause
give rise to  put in hospital
hospitalised  to do/ carry out
to implement  also
in addition  before
in advance of  there
in attendance  because of
in consequence of  tell
inform  alone
in isolation  start
initiate  because
in light of the fact  often
in many cases  to
in order to  ask
inquire  about
in regard to  despite
in spite of  although
in spite of the fact that  while
in the course of  towards
in the direction of  in/if
in the event of  near
in the vicinity of  has
is suffering from  escaped
made good their escape  make
manufacture  happen/appear
materialise  fit/reach
measure up to  meet
meet with  force/need
necessitate  an aim
an objective  when
on the occasion of  by
on the part of  take part
participate  died
passed away thank/praise
pay tribute to people/workers/staff
persons/personnel arrest
place under arrest to have
prior to before
proceed to
pursue about
render assistance to help
residence home
shortfall in supply shortage
submitted his resignation resigned
subsequently enough
sufficient was hurt
sustained injuries act
take action on the issue end
terminate consider
take into consideration send
transmit cities or towns
urban centres use
utilise worth
valued at object to
voice disapproval of thought/said
was of the opinion that all
whole of about
with reference to except
with the exception of

**Unnecessary words**

People frequently put in extra words or phrases which do not add to understanding. As a journalist you should judge which words help your reader or listener and which only make the sentence longer. For example, people write about waiting for a period of two years. The phrase a period of is unnecessary; you should simply say waiting for two years.

Another common fault, particularly in the spoken word, is to add adjectives or adverbs to nouns or verbs which should not have them. In grammar, this is called redundancy. It usually happens where the noun or verb is an absolute; that is, where something either is or is not, with no half measures. It is clearly wrong to describe a woman as very pregnant. A woman is either pregnant or she is not; there is a definite moment when she becomes pregnant. If the very is being used to indicate that she has been pregnant for several months, it is best to give exact details saying, for example, the woman is eight months pregnant.

It is equally wrong to describe a person as utterly dead. There is a moment at which life stops; people are either dead or they are alive, they cannot be slightly dead or rather dead. They may be nearing death, but that is a different and quite acceptable phrase.

The following is a list of unnecessary words and redundant phrases. Get rid of the words in italics:

- absolute perfection
- absolutely necessary
- accidentally stumble
- acute crisis
- adequate enough
- advance planning
- a distance of two metres
- hot water heater
- in a week’s time
- joined together
- just recently
- last of all
- link together
Clichés

These are phrases which have been used so often in such a variety of situations that they have lost most of their meaning and force. They become boring to regular readers or listeners and should be avoided.

Journalists in older English-speaking countries such as Britain and the United States are usually taught to avoid clichés. There are two problems facing young journalists in developing countries in the use of clichés. One is that clichés often depend on aspects of a culture specific to certain countries. To describe something which happens very slowly, a British person might say *at a snail’s pace*, whereas an American would say *as slow as molasses in January* (a reference to the way that sticky liquids like molasses are harder to pour in cold weather). The American cliché might not be understood by many British people, who call molasses *treacle*. It would be meaningless to people living south of the Equator, for whom January is a hot month - and for people in the tropics who have no experience of cold seasons.

Journalists should be able to recognise clichés which develop in the language of their own country.
If, for example, everyone talks about things or people being as fat as a buffalo, this becomes a cliché. The good journalist will find an alternative which is more accurate or more lively.

The second problem with clichés is that phrases which have become boring in one country may seem fresh and powerful in another. Again, it is your responsibility as a journalist to recognise which phrases are fresh and meaningful, which are stale and meaningless.

We will give you a list of phrases which have become clichés in most of the developed English-speaking nations. It is for you to decide which are clichés in your country:

- a bee in his bonnet
- all walks of life
- all-out effort
- armed to the teeth
- as luck would have it
- at a loss for words
- bated breath
- beaming smile
- behind closed doors
- benefit of the doubt
- bigger and better
- bitter end
- blessing in disguise
- blunt instrument
- budding genius
- busy as a bee
- calm before the storm
- colourful scene
- conservative estimate
- crime wave
- crystal clear
- daring robbery
- dramatic new moves
- dull thud
- easy prey
- fateful day
- festive mood
- few and far between
- finishing touches
- flow like water
- foregone conclusion
- gruesome find
- hail of bullets
- hang in the balance
- head over heels
- hot pursuit
- ill-fated
- in full swing
- in the hot seat
- in the limelight
- in the nick of time
- innocent as a newborn baby
- in no uncertain terms
- laid to rest
- last but not least
- like two peas in a pod
- long arm of the law
- loomed on the horizon
- lucky few
- man hunt
- marked contrast
- more than meets the eye
- Mother Nature
- mystery surrounds
- nipped in the bud
- order out of chaos
- pool of blood
- proud father
- raced to the scene
- rags-to-riches
- red-blooded male
- sadder but wiser
- sea of faces
- second to none
- sigh of relief
- sign of the times
- silver lining
- smell a rat
- sparkling eyes
- steaming jungle
- storm of protest
- stormy session
- sweeping changes
- terror-stricken
- thick and fast
- tiny tots
- top-level meeting
- tower of strength
- vanish into thin air
- watery grave
- whirlwind tour
- white as a sheet
- widespread anxiety
Troublesome words

A large number of words in the English language are misused. Often it is simply a matter of confusion between similar-sounding words. It is important that you use words correctly. For example, there is often confusion in radio and television between the word *diseased* (which means having a disease) and *deceased* (which means dead). In fact, the word *deceased* causes young reporters so many problems you should avoid using it altogether. Police reports often speak of the *deceased* when referring to a dead man or woman. A reporter who simply parroted a police statement about a fight between two men wrote the sentence:

The deceased went up to the accused and hit him over the head with a stick.

It is clearly nonsense to say that a dead man hit anybody over the head with a stick. Dead people do not do that. The sentence would have been much clearer if the reporter had used both men's names.

The following is a list of words which frequently cause problems, especially through misuse:

affect: is a verb meaning to have an influence on. Often confused with effect which is the noun. So we say: *The girl's headache affected her performance, but the noise had no effect on her.*

all right: is two words. Do not spell it *alright*.

alternatives: a choice between two things. If there are more than two, use *choices*.

among: used when there are more than two things. If there are two things, say *between.*
anxious: means to be troubled or worried. It is sometimes wrongly used to mean eager.

beside: means at the side of. Besides means in addition to.

canvass: means to ask for something. Do not confuse it with canvas, which is a cloth.

charge: there is often confusion between to charge with and to charge for. A person is charged with an offence (the man was charged with murder) People are charged for goods or services they receive (he was charged $20 for his ticket).

chronic: means long-lasting. When talking about illness, it is often confused with acute, which means severe.

continual: means happening lots of times. Do not confuse with continuous, which means happening all the time without a break.

council: is a meeting. Counsel is advice. A councillor is an elected representative on a council. A counsellor is someone who gives advice. We also refer to lawyers in court cases as counsel, because they give legal advice.

decimate: literally it means to kill one in ten. Today it is used to describe heavy casualties. It does not mean to destroy.

disappeared: traditionally only ever used as an intransitive verb (i.e. without an object), as in "the rabbit disappeared". Now in some versions of English it is used as a transitive verb (i.e. with an object, usually human) to mean to intentionally make someone disappear, as in "the regime disappeared hundreds of dissidents", though this form is still unusual in British, Australian or American English.

disinterested: means not being directly affected by the issue one way or the other. Do not confuse with uninterested, which means lacking any kind of interest.

hang: a criminal is hanged, clothes are hung.

immigrant: a person who comes into the country to live permanently. It is confused with emigrant, who is a person who leaves his or her own country to live permanently in another country. An emigrant from one country becomes an immigrant into another.

invaluable: means of too much value to be priced. It is often wrongly used to mean without value.

less: confused with fewer. Less refers to quantity (less water, less flour, less fruit). Fewer refers to number (fewer boys, fewer coconuts).

licence: in Commonwealth English, this is the noun. To license is the verb.

literally: usually confused with figuratively. Literally means exact to the letter. If it happens literally, it happens exactly the way it is described. People speak of being "literally dead on my feet". If they were, they would be dead.

loan: is the noun. The verb is to lend.

over: means above. When talking about numbers, use more than (there were more than 50 people in the hall).

practice: is the noun. To practise is the verb.
**principal**: means the main one or the first. We speak of the *principal instalment* or the *school principal*. It is often confused with *principle*, which is a moral guideline.

**Scots**: these are people from Scotland, who are *Scottish*. Do not confuse it with the whisky called *Scotch*.

**stationary**: is an adjective meaning standing still. It is confused with *stationery*, a noun meaning writing materials.

**treble**: mean three times. Do not confuse with *triple*, which means three kinds. A *treble chance* gives you three chances of winning. A *triple jump* is an event involving three kinds of jumping action.

**Ukraine**: is the name of the country, not *the Ukraine*, which was a label used by the former Soviet Union to imply it was a region rather than an independent state.

**whisky**: Scotch whisky is spelled without an `e`. Irish and American *whiskey* is spelled with an `e`.

You can read more about troublesome words at the Common Errors in English website by Paul Brians. It is based on American English and contains hundreds of simple explanations of correct English usage.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

You must keep your language clear and simple so that your readers or listeners can understand.

Check any spellings you are unsure of; spelling is important.

Explain any new words whenever you use them.

Avoid jargon, unnecessary words and clichés.

Remember, if you do not understand a word you cannot expect your reader or listener to.
In this, the third chapter on Language & Style, we look at some of the most important grammatical rules for news writing, at some common mistakes and how to correct them. In the final chapter on Language & style we will look at translation.

In the previous two chapters on language and style we discussed the importance of structuring your stories well and using the correct words. The third element of good writing is grammar - the rules by which the words fit into the structure. With so many people using a language as complex as English, there are lots of opportunities for making errors. We cannot possibly list them all here. We will, however, remark on some of the most common mistakes made by journalists.

**Collective nouns**

Some nouns which are collections of individual parts are treated as plural, while others are treated as singular.

It is very much a matter of which style your particular newspaper or broadcasting station uses, but there is a general guideline.

If individuals within the group act or make decisions as a single body, use the singular verb.

**RIGHT:**

The Government said it was going to abolish income tax.

**WRONG:**

The Government said they were going to abolish income tax.

However, if the collective group is more noted for its individual parts, treat it as a plural. This is commonly done for sporting teams.

**RIGHT:**

The team manager said they were going to win.

**WRONG:**

The team manager said it was going to win.

Remember also that a singular noun should be treated as singular even when it contains several things. For example, we say that:

A bag of coconuts is sitting on the table.
A flock of sheep is grazing in the field.
The bus full of nurses is waiting outside.

This is because the subject of the sentence is "a bag", not "coconuts"; "a flock", not "sheep"; and "a bus", not "nurses".

**Neither, none, each and every**

The words *neither, none, each and every* are treated as singular when they are the subject of a verb, even though they refer to more than one thing or person. This is because the words mean *not either one, not one, each one and every one*. 
Neither the man nor the woman is able to speak.

The word *none* is treated as singular (because it is short for *not one*), even though it is usually followed by a plural noun. The subject of the sentence is *none* (i.e. *not one*) and therefore needs a singular verb. The subject of the sentence which follows is not *men*, it is *none*:

None of the men was willing to testify in court.

The words *each* and *every* are treated as singular, even though they may be followed by a long list of things they refer to.

Every car, bus, bicycle and rickshaw in the city has to be licensed.

Misplaced modifiers

When you use a phrase to modify or describe part of a sentence, make sure that it describes the correct part. The rule is that the modifier attaches to the noun nearest to it. Mistakes can sometimes be very amusing. In this example, the modifier is in italics.

The plane came to a halt in front of the clan chief who was dressed in a grass skirt

Dressed in a grass skirt, the plane came to a halt in front of the clan chief.

I, me, we and us

These become a problem when you turn someone's quotes into reported speech. It is correct to use *I, me, my, we, us, and our* within quotation marks, but once you take the quote marks away and write in reported speech, you have to make the following changes:

*I* becomes *he or she*,
*me* becomes *him or her*,
*my* becomes *his or her*.
*We* becomes *they*,
*us* becomes *them*,
*our* becomes *their*.
*you* becomes *him, her or them*,
*your* becomes *his, hers or their*.

Many journalists remember to change the *I, me* and *my* in reported speech but forget about the rest of the changes that have to be made. In the following example, we show the right and wrong ways of turning a sentence from quotes into reported speech. The original sentence in quotes was:
The Prime Minister of Fiji told soldiers in Suva: "I will do my best to protect our country."

Turned into reported speech, it becomes:

**RIGHT:**
The Prime Minister of Fiji told soldiers in Suva that he would do his best to protect their country.

**WRONG:**
The Prime Minister of Fiji told soldiers in Suva that he would do his best to protect our country.

In the wrong version above, leaving the word "our" in the sentence implies that we, the journalist, are included in the story.

It is sometimes not enough just to change a few words. Sometimes you will have to add words of explanation. In the correct sentences above, it is clear who is speaking to whom. However, when changing quotes into reported speech it occasionally becomes less clear, especially in paragraphs later in the story. Suppose the Prime Minister then went on to tell the soldiers:

"I can do so much, but I also need your help."

In reported speech you would then have to write:

The Prime Minister of Fiji told soldiers in Suva that he would do his best to protect their country. He said he could do so much, but he also needed help from the army.

This would be an acceptable solution in writing for radio and television, where you should not use direct quotes in scripts. If you are writing for the print media, the best solution is to give the quotes themselves.

**Its and it's**

There is often confusion over these two words. The rule is simple. Use *its* when referring to something belonging to *it*. Use *it's* as a short form for *it is*. For example:
The wounded animal returned to its lair.
The hunter said: "It's not clear what is happening at the moment."

**Punctuation**

Here are some basic rules of punctuation used in most style books. The Golden Rule of all writing, however, is to keep it simple and clear.

**Capital letters**

These are used at the beginning of sentences and for the names of people and places. Capitals are also used at the beginning of words which are a titles rather than a description. For example, we write about "the Government of Sri Lanka" because that is the title of one specific body, but we write of "agreements between governments" because we are speaking about governments in general. The following example demonstrates the difference:

Eight prime ministers attended the meeting, hosted by the Prime Minister of India.

Capital letters should also be used for the trade names of products and companies. For example:

The Universal Cement Company produces cement called Cemebond.
Full stops

Called "periods" in America, full stops are used at the ends of sentences, as decimal points and with certain standard abbreviated place names. For example, in America Cal. for California or N.Y. for New York; in Australia W.A. for Western Australia or Vic. for Victoria., though it becoming increasingly common to drop the full stops in informal use. However, unless the abbreviation is one well-known to your audience, write the name in full. Journalists working for radio or television normally give the names in full.

When used at the end of a quote, the full stop comes within the closing quotation mark:

He said: "This is not what we wanted."

Not all abbreviations use full stops. Most newspapers today do not use them to abbreviate Mr, Mrs, Ms, Dr, Rev and similar common titles.
It used to be the case that full stops were used within abbreviations of titles. Increasingly, editors are choosing to leave them out, as in USA, PNG or UN.

Commas

The comma in written English acts very much like a pause in the spoken language. It is used within sentences to separate phrases or lists of words, as in the following example:

The company, which was only set up last year, now produces a range of goods including tyres, steering wheels, exhaust systems and windscreens.

Notice that there is no comma before the and at the end of the list.
Commas should only be inserted to help reading or listening. If you find you have several commas in your sentence, it is probably too long and should be split into separate sentences.

Semi-colons (;)

Their main use is to separate phrases which already contain commas, especially in lists:

The winners were: Bagu Lagi, geology; Jim Ho, physics; Peter Graham, Doro Meeni and Fa'afio Tokala, economics; and Nga Nganda, history.

Colons (:)

There are two principle uses for the colon in news-writing. One is at the start of lists, as in the example above.
The second is when going from attribution into a quote:

The judge said: "This is not the first time I have had to deal with this kind of case."

Apostrophes (')

There are several uses for apostrophes. The most common is to show possession. It is usually used in front of an s. In this example, the printery belongs to the company:

Fire last night destroyed the company's main printery.

However, when a plural noun ends with an s, the apostrophe is not normally followed by another s:

Frank's jokes were a great success at his parents' anniversary party.
In the sentence above, the jokes belonged to Frank, so we add an ’s. However, the word *parents* already ends in *s*, so we just add an apostrophe.

Apostrophes are also used in contractions in place of missing letters or numbers:

"In the '34 gold rush, miners couldn't get to Bulolo quickly enough," he said.

**Quotation marks (" ")**

These should mainly be used to distinguish spoken words, although some journalists use them when quoting from written reports. For a fuller description of their use, see Chapter 8: Quotes.

**Hyphens (-) and dashes ( - )**

Hyphens are used to pull words together, and dashes are used to separate phrases, usually for dramatic effect.

Hyphens are used to join two or more words into one idea, for example: *non-agreement, well-meant, Vice-Chancellor, mother-in-law*. They are also used in some words to avoid ambiguous meaning. For example, the hyphen distinguishes between *re-cover* (to cover again) and *recover* (to get something back).

The dash (which is given more space than a hyphen) is used to indicate a dramatic shift or a surprise phrase, as in the following example intro.

David Paro arrived home from work yesterday to find an unwelcome gift on his verandah - three tonnes of manure.

Do not use the dash unless it is necessary; it can get tiresome to readers.

**Question marks (?)**

These should only be used after a direct question, which means they usually appear within quotation marks. Examine the following combinations to see the right and wrong uses of question marks:

**RIGHT:**

The doctor asked Mary: "When did you last give blood?"

**WRONG:**

The doctor asked Mary: "When did you last give blood."

**RIGHT:**

The doctor asked Mary when she had last given blood.

**WRONG:**

The doctor asked Mary when she had last given blood?

Journalists sometimes wrongly ask their readers questions, particularly in writing features. The journalist's job is to answer readers' questions, not leave them guessing, so avoid posing questions.

**Exclamation marks (!)**

You should not need these in news-writing. In novels they are inserted to signify drama. If you are a good reporter your story should do that for you. You should only use them at the end of a quote which is an exclamation or an order, for example:
Mr Paro took one look at his veranda and said: "Damn!"

Ellipsis (…)

This is a series of three dots put into quotations to show that something has been missed out:

"The car struck several objects ... before coming to rest against a tree."

Again, you should try to avoid this if at all possible, as it suggests to your reader that you are hiding something.

The ellipsis is frequently used instead of a dash in radio and television news-writing. The newsreader knows to allow an expectant pause before finishing the sentence. So in radio, we might rewrite the manure example:

David Paro arrived home yesterday to find an unwelcome gift on his veranda ... three tonnes of manure.

Brackets ()

You should also avoid brackets in news-writing. They are meant to contain extra detail within a sentence, but are more often used by lazy journalists to avoid having to rewrite sentences correctly.

Some newspapers allow their use when explaining abbreviations, for example:

A surgeon suffering from Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) has been sacked from his job in the country's main hospital.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Keep your language clear and simple so that your readers or listeners can understand.

Sentence structure should be simple.

Check all your work to make sure that everything you write obeys the rules of grammar and punctuation.
Chapter 13: Language & style - translation

In the previous three chapters on Language & Style we looked at structures, words and grammar. In this, the final chapter in this section, we look at these issues in the context of reporting and writing across different languages, some of the challenges of translation and some of the main dangers to look out for.

If you are a journalist working in a multilingual society, you may have to work in more than one language. Whether you gather the information in one language and write the story in another, or whether you write a story first in one language and then rewrite in another language, you face the task of translation. However, if you have a good command of both languages and follow a few simple rules, translation should not be difficult.

The previous three chapters on language and style have looked at structure, words and grammar. In this, the final chapter in this section, we provide some general guidance when working in more than one language. This is written only in English, but the processes we describe always involve two or more languages. It is possible that English will not be one of the languages you work in when translating. To avoid confusion, we will call the language which you are translating from (or conducting interviews in) the source language; and we will call the language you are translating into (or writing the final story in) the target language.

The principles of translation

The first thing to remember is that translation is the transfer of meaning from one language to another. It is not the transfer of words from language to language. You must translate the meaning of what is being said, rather than do it word-for-word. This is because languages are not just different words. Different languages also have different grammar, different word orders, sometimes even words for which other languages do not have any equivalents. The English spoken by a scientist may have words which a simple farmer cannot even start to imagine. And the farmer is likely to have words for things the technologist never dreamed of.

Simple steps in translation

We will start by talking about the simplest form of translation - the one where you already have a story written down in one language (the source) and you want to translate it into another language (the target). The steps to follow are:

1. Read the whole of the original source story through from beginning to end, to make sure that you can understand it. If you cannot understand everything that is said, you cannot translate it. If there are any words or phrases that you do not understand, you must clarify these first. You may decide that the ideas they express are too difficult to translate or not worth translating, but you need to know what they are before you can judge.
2. Do a first draft translation, trying to translate all the source material. But do not translate word-for-word. Remember that you are translating the meaning. When you have finished the first translation, you will now have a draft story in the target language.
3. Go back over the whole of your draft translation and polish it without looking at the source original. (You might even like to turn the source story face down on your desk so you cannot cheat.) Make sure that your translation reads well in the target language.
4. Compare the final version of your translation with the source original to make sure that you have translated it accurately. This is when you can make any detailed adjustments in individual words or phrases.

False friends

Beware of words or phrases we call "false friends". These are words in the original source language
which you retain in your translation, often because you cannot think of the correct translation. If you cannot think of the right word, how can you expect your reader or listener to? Of course, languages borrow from each other all the time. If a society comes across a new idea, it may simply use the foreign word without inventing a word of its own. Remember, however, that you are translating meaning, not words. If you come across a word in your original language which has no equivalent in the target language, perhaps you can use a phrase (i.e. several words) instead. For example, many languages do not have a word for "computer". Instead of retaining the English word "computer", can you translate it as "a machine which does brain work" or something similar? Be careful, though, that you do not try to re-invent the community's language to suit your own way of thinking. If you have problems with translating words, consult experts or ask your colleagues to see if you can reach agreement on the correct translation. If you are a journalist working in a small language community, the words you decide upon could become the standard usage.

Of course, some foreign words will inevitably creep into other languages. Words like "computer" are becoming widely accepted by speakers of non-English languages and may eventually be understood by everyone. The problem arises in the time between the foreign word being first introduced and it being understood by everyone. During such transition periods, use the word untranslated, but follow it immediately with a translation or explanation. For example, you might write in your target language the equivalent of:

The provincial government is to buy computers for each of its local offices. The computers are machines which will help office staff to keep accounts, write letters and do other jobs.

Dictionaries

You cannot translate words in isolation. Words get their meaning from how they are used in each situation - what we call their context. You must do a contextual translation. You should use a bilingual dictionary where one is available, but be careful when looking up translations for individual words. Dictionaries are useful, but there is very often more than one translation for individual words. The best dictionary is one which defines the word in its various contexts. For example, a simple English word like "skip" has several quite different meanings. It can mean any of the following, depending on the context: to move lightly, especially by jumping from one foot to another; to omit or leave something out; to deal with something quickly and without much thought; a large container for transporting building materials, especially waste. It can even be short for "skipper", the captain of a ship or sports team. You can see that using the wrong translation of "skip" could have some unfortunate results.

Listen to the little voice in your head if it tells you that a translation seems strange. It is better to ask advice than to write something silly. You may not know all the uses for each word, especially slang words which you cannot find in dictionaries. For example, mechanics often refer to an adjustable spanner as a "monkey wrench", when it has nothing to do with monkeys.

Writing style

You do not have to be an expert in linguistics to make good translations. If you know your target language well, you can usually hear in your head whether the sentence sounds correct in your translation.

Your translation should not try to duplicate the word order or grammatical construction used in the source language unless it is also correct in your target language. For example, some languages put the verb (the "doing word") at the beginning of a sentence, some in the middle and some at the very end.

You do not have to use all the words from your source material for translation if your target language can cope without them. For example, we may say in English "The ship sank lower in the water", whereas in another language the words "in the water" may be unnecessary because the words for "sink" in relation to "ship" already includes the idea of "water".
Also, do not be afraid of using more words in your translation than in the original. Although in journalism you should aim to keep your sentences short and crisp, this must not be allowed to interfere with the clarity of the ideas you are trying to communicate.

**Some other problem areas**

Translation is a very big and complicated field which we cannot discuss in great detail here. However, the following are some other problem areas you might want to keep in mind:

**Understatements and euphemisms**

Be aware of the cultural differences in languages. Some languages like to hide unpleasant facts beneath understatements or euphemism. Euphemisms are mild or inoffensive words which are used in the place of harsh or hurtful words.

Some speakers might use humour in one situation which another language would not permit. Again, you must understand the meaning in context.

**Linking words**

Words such as "although", "but", "from", "even" and a host of others are usually very important in English, as they are used to show the relationships between the words in your sentences. Getting these small words wrong can alter entirely the sense of the sentence.

**Verbs**

These can sometimes cause problems in their different forms. There are, for example, quite distinct meanings for the words "can", "may", "must" and "should". If you are not sure, it is best to avoid the construction altogether and say it a different way.

**Accuracy**

Some languages are more accurate than others in certain areas. For example, many language groups in Papua New Guinea have more than 10 different words for varieties of sweet potato. The Inuit Indians of Canada have different words for 20 separate things which in English we just call "snow".

English is not a precise language in many areas. Be aware that a vagueness in English may not be acceptable in another language. For example, we can say "Doctor Smith" in English, whereas in Chinese we have to know the gender of the doctor to translate the word "doctor".

**Ambiguity**

Sometimes the exact meaning in the source language is left unclear (ambiguous) on purpose, in which case you should try to keep it that way. This is especially so when reporting claims, accusations and hearsay evidence in such things as police stories. For example, a person might be charged in English with "unlawful carnal knowledge", which usually means a sexual offence against a person under the age of consent. You should not translate that as "rape of a child" or "sodomy of a little boy" or any other specific sexual act unless that is part of the charge. It is better in this case to use a phrase similar to "a sexual offence against a young person".

**Names and titles**

There is still a debate about the need or otherwise of translating names from one language into another. For example, would you retain the English title "Education Department" or translate it into
something like “office for schools”? Of course, a lot depends on how the rest of your community use the term, especially those people who are most closely involved, such as the Education Department itself. Your newspaper, radio or television station may have a policy on this. If not, perhaps you should get together to decide on a policy, taking into account how the community in general deals with names and titles. Get a large, hard-bound exercise book for the newsdesk, thumb-indexed A to Z down the side. You can call this your Translation Style Guide. Once you have agreed on the correct translation for any problem word, enter the word with its translation on to the correct page in the book. Revise the book every so often to make sure that all the entries are still relevant. If your newsroom computers are networked, create a common file which everyone can access.

There are two ways people use names (or titles). The first is to identify the place or person, the second is to describe their function. It is usual to leave untranslated names which act as signposts for people, but translate those names which describe a function. For example, you would not translate the word "Baker" in the name "Baker Street", because it acts as a signpost, but you would probably translate the name "Police Station".

If a language used by your community is also used elsewhere in the world, you should remain aware of how it is spoken in other countries. For example, French may be commonly used in your society, so you need to keep up-to-date with how French is used in other French-speaking countries. Remember that all languages change, especially in their motherland. Constantly refresh your understanding of the way the language is developing both in your own society and elsewhere.

**Translation during news gathering**

So far, we have talked mainly about rewriting a story in one language into a story in another language. But your work may involve interviewing in one language and writing the story itself in another language. For example, your newspaper may be printed in English, but you have to interview a villager in his mother tongue which is not English.

The best way of doing this is to conduct the interview in the villager's language and make your notes in that language too. You can then translate your quotes into English as you write your story. This method means that, while you are conducting the interview, you can ask questions in the villager's language to clarify any doubtful points. You can also check your story back with him in his language to make sure you have the facts correct.

However, some languages may have been written down only recently and so may not have a clear and easy written form in which to make your notes. If this is so, and if you are fluent in both languages, you may be able to listen in the villager's language while making your notes in English. You are translating as you listen and write. This may work perfectly well, but a word of warning: Trying to translate while also concentrating on what the villager is saying may introduce errors into your notes. Ask the villager to slow down a little so that you can make your notes, then check your notes at the end of the interview by translating them back into the villager's language for him. Radio and television journalists can overcome this problem by using their tape recorders, but newspaper reporters might also find a tape recorder useful in such situations. You should still make notes, but have a tape recorder running at the same time so that you can check later to make sure that you made the correct translation during the interview. (See Chapter 16: Interviewing basics.)

There is one final complication of which you must be aware. This comes when you are interviewing in a source language, writing your story in a target language and then having to translate the same story back into the source language. This might occur if you have to produce a special language bulletin or an edition of your newspaper in the source language. The danger is that you might not get an exact translation back into the source language, and so you might misquote someone. When writing a story which has to be translated twice, always refer back to your original notes when writing your second story, so that you can get the quotes exactly right.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

As this is the last of the four chapters on Language & Style, lets look back at the main lessons
we've learned in this section:

- You must keep your language clear and simple so that your readers or listeners can understand.
- Sentences should be short - no longer than 20 words or three concepts (ideas). Sentence structure should be simple; it is best to write in the active voice.
- Explain any new words whenever you use them.
- Avoid jargon, unnecessary words and clichés.
- Check all your work to make sure that everything you write obeys the rules of grammar and punctuation.
- When translating, translate the meaning of sentences, not the individual words.
- Always keep your readers or listeners in mind whatever you write.
Chapter 14: Copy presentation

Here we consider the importance of how you present your copy, and we suggest a good style for copy presentation. We also consider how to dictate copy by telephone.

Most newspapers, radio and television stations today have computers for reporters to use to type their copy (stories). There are many different kinds of computer and many different programs used with them.

If you are using a computer, there will be certain rules which you must follow, to tell the computer who you are and what you are doing. The computer can perform the actions you need but you must make the decisions on how your copy is presented, filed and distributed.

Every piece of copy which you write - every news story, every feature - should follow some simple rules for presentation. These rules vary slightly from one newspaper or broadcasting station to another, but they all serve the same purposes - to improve the smooth management of lots of stories, from the reporter through the sub-editors to the printers – or website - and to avoid errors. While many newsroom systems now make it possible to take a story from through the production process from reporter to press room, studio or website designer without ever printing out paper copies, there will always be occasions when a paper copy of a story, page or bulletin is needed, so knowing how to handle paper copies is still important.

So all reporters typing copy need to follow certain rules, to make sure that difficulties do not arise.

Basic rules for copy presentation

Your newsroom may already have a style for the way in which copy should be presented. If so, you should follow it. If your newsroom does not have a style, this is a good one to use. (Later in this chapter, we shall see an example of copy presented in this style.) These are the basic rules:

- The first page of each story or feature should have three pieces of information in the top left-hand corner or – if your newsroom computer has a standard template for writing stories – in the appropriate field:
  - a) your surname;
  - b) the date;
  - c) catchline and page number 1.

- The catchlines is a key word of the story, chosen by you to identify this particular story. Keep the catchline short and simple, but avoid using general words such as "church" or "meeting", which might get used on another story by another reporter. Use distinctive words such as "methodist" or "revival".

- These three pieces of information will not be published with your story. It is not necessary, therefore, to use initial capital letters for any of the words. Since it takes slightly longer to type a capital letter than a lower case letter (there are two keys to press instead of one), and since journalists are always in a hurry, you may type all this information in lower case letters if you wish.

- Each subsequent page should have in the top left-hand corner the catchline and page number: "methodist ... 2", "methodist ... 3" and so on.

- Use double or triple spacing so corrections can be made on printed copies or so the newsreader can read the text comfortably on air, either from the printed paper copy or the studio computer screen or teleprompt machine (often referred to as an Autocue).

- Leave good margins on the sides and bottom of the page.

- Never start a paragraph on one page and continue it on the next.

- Write the word "more" or the letters "mf" (more follows) at the bottom of each page if the
story is not finished.

- Write the word "ends" at the end of the story or "###" depending on the house style of your organisation. [Traditionally in the United States, journalists typed the number "30" to signify the end, but this convention is seldom used today.]

**Radio style**

For radio copy, the style must be slightly different.

- Try to keep stories short, with the whole story on one sheet of paper if possible.
- Every word must be spelled correctly and be grammatically correct, otherwise it may cause the newsreader to stumble.
- Type proper names in capital letters.
- Do not split phrases from one line to another.
- Write the pronunciation of difficult or foreign words in brackets immediately after the word.

(See Chapters 48 and 49: Radio and Television.)

**Television style**

For television copy, you need a special style, so that the script can synchronise with film reports, captions and other visual effects.

The copy must include details of timing, studio instructions and details of accompanying film or video clips.

This is a specialist field, and you are advised to consult a specialist book in this field, though for general advice you can check Chapters 48 and 49: Radio and Television.

**Phoning copy**

It is not always convenient for reporters to write their stories in the newsroom. If they are at the scene of a news event, and if time is pressing, it is usually better for them to write the story where they are, and send it in to their newsroom by telephone.

The best way to do that is with a portable laptop or notebook computer and modem. The reporter uses the laptop computer in the same way as the desktop computer in the office. Then, when the story is written, the modem is used to connect the laptop to a telephone, and the story can be sent down the telephone line to the newsroom, where it can be received by the newsroom computer. There is no need for the story to be typed again.

This is very efficient, but it depends upon having the right equipment (which is quite expensive) and upon having dependable telephone lines. Very often, in developing countries the quality of the telephone lines is not good enough to allow successful use of computer modems.

The cheaper alternative is for the reporter to dictate his or her copy by telephone to a typist in the newsroom, who will type it as it is spoken.

This, too, requires some investment in equipment, though only on a small scale. The copy-taker (that is the typist who will take the copy) must have both hands free to type with; this means that he or she will need a headset instead of the usual telephone receiver. This is usually a pair of headphones with a microphone attached. This must be next to a computer terminal, or typewriter, which can be made available whenever it is needed.

How to phone copy
The reporter who has to phone copy to the newsroom will first need to write the story. This can be done with a pen and paper, in longhand or shorthand, so long as the reporter can read it clearly.

Once the story has been written, the reporter must find a telephone, call the newsroom and ask for someone to take the copy. Once this person is ready, they can begin.

It is very important that the reporter speaks slowly and clearly, spelling all proper names. Even punctuation should be spoken clearly, so that the copy which is typed in the newsroom is precisely what the reporter wants.

For example, let us imagine that you have to phone the following copy:

**Police have warned the public about three men who escaped from Bomana Jail yesterday.**

"**These men are ruthless and dangerous,**" said Superintendent Walter Geno, who is leading the hunt.

"**The public should not try to tackle them. If anybody sees them, they should contact the police at once.**"

You should read it as follows (read it out loud yourself now, pausing for a few seconds at every set of three dots):

Police have warned ... the public ... about three men ... who escaped ... from Bomana ... that's capital B, O, M, A, N, A ... Jail capital J ... yesterday point new par. Open quotes ... These men ... are ruthless ... and dangerous comma close quotes ... said superintendent capital S all one word ... Walter ... capital W, A, L, T, E, R ... Geno ... capital G, E, N, O comma ... who is leading the hunt point new par. Open quotes ... The public ... should not try ... to tackle them point. If anybody ... sees them comma ... they should ... contact the police ... at once point close quotes new par.

How fast you can read this will depend on how fast your copy-taker can type. You and the copy-taker will also have to get to know each other, in order to make this exercise as quick and as efficient as possible.

When you have finished dictating the whole story, the copy-taker should read it all back to you. Whenever you hear a mistake, jump in and correct it. The copy-taker can then make the correction.

There will probably still be some mistakes, at least until both the reporter and the copy-taker have had plenty of practice. This is especially true if you are working in a second language.

When the reporter gets back into the newsroom, and when there is a quiet moment, the reporter and copy-taker should sit down together and compare the reporter's version of the story with the copy-taker's version. Whenever there is a mistake, they should discuss how it happened - perhaps it was the reporter's pronunciation, or the copy-taker's language error - and then they can find ways to stop it happening again. For instance, if the copy-taker is not sure when to use "there" and when to use "their", the reporter may have to spell the word each time. This will make the exercise slower, of course, but it will get the right results.

**Advanced copy phoning**

When you become good at phoning copy, and if there is an occasion when time is extremely limited, you can try to phone copy without writing it all down first.

This sounds very difficult, but like any skill it becomes easier with practice.
The important thing is to structure the story on paper first. This means that you will write a list of the things to be covered in the story, in the order you want to cover them, but without writing the story itself.

Many reporters like to write the intro, and perhaps the second and third paragraphs, too, and then compose the rest as they go along.

If you were doing this, your story structure which you write down might look like this:

**Police have warned the public about three men who escaped from Bomana Jail yesterday.**

Geno quote.

Search details.

Escape details.

3 men details.

You would then read the intro, as we already discussed; and then construct the story from your notes as you phone it in.

Seeing "Geno quote", you would find the Supt Geno quote in your notebook, and read the next two paragraphs as they are written in our earlier example.

Then, seeing "Search details", you would turn to your notes where Supt Geno was telling you about the search for the escaped men, and dictate two or three paragraphs telling that part of the story.

In other words, it is exactly the same as writing a story, but is done by speaking it out loud instead of writing it down.

The main difficulty in this technique is to remember what you have already said, and how you said it. You may need to ask the copy-taker occasionally to read back to you the last sentence or two, so that the next bit can flow on smoothly.

This is not an easy technique, but it is essential whenever time is precious. Newspaper reporters should try to master the technique, in order to give the best possible service to their readers.

Broadcasters often need to send a voice report by telephone in this way, in order to bring important news to the public as quickly as possible, although it is always better to write a script first if possible. If you do not have time to write a script before phoning a story, remember to keep sentences short. Many experienced radio reporters close their eyes after looking at each line of their notes, so that they can concentrate fully on what they are saying and how it sounds.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Write your copy in a way which makes it easy for other people to understand and to work with.

If your newspaper, radio or television station has its own copy presentation style, use it; otherwise use the one suggested in this chapter.

When phoning copy, do it in a way which makes it difficult for mistakes to happen.
Chapter 15: Newsroom books

Here we look at the books which you will need to use as a journalist, and how to get the best out of them. We look at the notebook, contacts book, newsdesk diary, style book and various reference books.

Journalists cannot know everything or remember everything. They need to write down information which they will need in the future; and when they need the information, they need to know where to find it.

There are many kinds of books which will make you a better journalist if you know how to use them properly.

Your notebook

Even in the digital age, the notebook is an essential tool of a journalist's trade, whether working in print, radio, television or online. Few people have memories good enough to remember everything they are told, and there is no room in journalism for getting things "roughly right". The notebook allows you to record essential details and organise information; it frees your mind for thinking.

However, it is no use carrying a notebook around unless you are able to use it properly and consistently.

Whenever someone starts to talk, you should assess whether or not it is likely to be newsworthy. If it is, take out your notebook and start taking notes.

Many young journalists are embarrassed to take their notebooks out in front of people. Remember, if a person is to be quoted, he or she would much prefer that you get a correct version than be misquoted. If there is any doubt in your mind about a person's willingness to be interviewed, ask if they object to you making notes. If they do, try to remember what they said and write your notes up as soon as they have gone. Be careful though. Your notes will not be so accurate and you must bear this in mind when you are writing your story.

The equipment

Do not struggle with notebooks which are either so large that they become impossible to hold or so small that they do not hold enough information and leave you turning the page for every sentence.

Ideally you should choose a notebook with the following features:

- It should sit comfortably in one hand. This is useful whenever you have to make notes standing up or walking.
- It should have a hard back for support.
- It should have a metal spiral at the top to make it easier to flip pages over.
- It should have feint rules on both sides of each page.

Once you have found a make of notebook that you like, stay with that make where possible. It will be one less thing to go wrong.

Before you attempt to make notes, also make sure that you have either a sharp pencil or a working ballpoint pen, whichever you prefer, and always have at least one spare. Regularly check all your pens and pencils to make sure they are in working order. If in doubt, throw it out.
Using the notebook

As soon as you get a new notebook, write your name and the name of your news organisation clearly on the cover, in case it ever gets lost.

Write on the cover the date when you start using it. This is useful for future reference.

Hold the book firmly in your hand, with the cover and any used pages flicked well out of the way. On windy days, hold any free pages firmly under the book.

You can even hold down used pages by putting a rubber band around them.

Start every story on a new page, even at meetings where there are several stories (e.g. Parliament).

At the foot of your new page, mark clearly in longhand:

a) the title of the meeting or full name of your interviewee and
b) the date and place of the meeting or interview.

It is easier to flick through the notebook looking for these details at the foot of the page, than to look for them at the top of the page.

Many journalists like to draw a rough margin down the left-hand side of each page, in which they can make longhand notes or marks of emphasis. Others like to draw a line down the centre of the page, which allows them to get two columns of shorthand per page. This is especially useful if your shorthand outlines are small.

Note clearly whenever a new person speaks or the speaker touches on a new topic. This does not need to be a full title, just enough for a reminder. Leave a blank line between new speakers and/or topics.

Clearly mark those passages, words, figures etc. which you regard as important. You should develop your own system of marks, preferably made in the margin. For example, one stroke alongside your notes for any material you must include in your story, two strokes for more important sections and three strokes for the most important angle or remark.

Work your way through your notebook in an orderly fashion, starting at the front and using only one side of the paper. This makes it much easier to go back through your notes when you need to recap.

When you come to the end of the book, turn the whole notebook over and start again, using the reverse side of each page.

At an interview, always review your notes quickly before you thank the interviewee and leave. This allows you to identify any areas you may have missed or which are unclear. It is always a good idea to go through your notes after the interview, before sitting down at the keyboard. This is the time when you should go over any doubtful shorthand outlines and put extra marks or key words in the margin. If you review your notes while they are still fresh, you decrease the chance of making errors in reading them back.

On occasions you may make notes of an interview or meeting without expecting to use them
immediately, for example if they are part of your research into a future feature article. Always type these notes up straight away. If you do not, when you return to them in a week or a month, you may find that you cannot read your shorthand.

When you have used the notes, strike them out with a single diagonal line across each page. This makes the task of finding "active" notes a lot simpler. Do not obliterate the pages and never tear them out. You may need to refer back to them at some time in the future, such as in the case of a complaint.

When you reach the last page of your notebook, you will have used only one side of each page. Now turn the whole notebook over and work your way from the back to the front, using the other side of each page.

When a notebook is finished, do not throw it away. Mark the date you finish it clearly on the front cover, then store the book safely in your desk drawer or filing cabinet. You can eventually throw the books out, but make it a policy never to discard a notebook for at least a year after it is finished. You never know when you might need it again. Should you be accused of defamation, for example, a properly marked notebook can be produced as evidence in court and may help in your defence.

Finally, there will be occasions when you are caught without a notebook, maybe at a social event. Then you must make use of whatever paper is handy. Most experienced journalists have, at some time in their careers, used paper napkins, the backs of menus and even beer mats, peeled apart to give them two white squares of paper. This is only for emergencies, though. There is no substitute for a well-kept notebook.
Contacts books

It is often said that a reporter is only as good as his or her contacts book. Whether it is a real book or simply files on a computer or personal digital assistant (PDA), it serves the same purpose. So what is it about a contacts book which makes it so important?

Whenever you write a story, you need two things. You need information and you need quotes. In order to do your job well, you have to know who to contact for these things.

Your contacts book is the list of people who you know are prepared to be helpful to you, together with their telephone numbers, email addresses, fax numbers, addresses, or whatever other information you need.

It is basically just an address book, the sort of thing which many people keep by their telephone with a list of their friends' numbers. The best ones have a thumb index, so that you can turn straight to the letter you want. What makes your contacts book special is the names and numbers which you put into it.

Every time you write a story, and speak to someone who was helpful, put their name, job title and telephone number in your contacts book. The next time you need to speak to somebody about the same subject, you will know who to call.

It is useful also to cross-refer. For example, suppose you have just phoned the Agriculture Department to talk to someone about fish farming. You have found that a Dr John Sine, who is the Manager for Aquaculture Development, is very knowledgeable and happy to talk to you.

The best place to put this entry into your contact book is under A for Agriculture. So on the A page you need to enter:

Dr John Sine  
Manager for Aquaculture Development  
Agriculture Dept  
215-1000  
jsine@dag.gov.pg

But the next time you want that name, number or email address, you may have forgotten who he works for. You may only remember that he was the fish farming man. So on the F page you need to enter:

Fish farming - see Agriculture Dept, John Sine

Or the next time you may just remember Dr Sine's name, but not remember what it was he knew so much about. So on the S page you need to enter:

John Sine - see Agriculture Dept (fish farming man)

This may take a few minutes to do, but it is something which you will only have to do once. It will give you a contacts book which will save you time when you really need it. If you are using contacts/address book software on your computer or PDA there is usually a function to make cross-referencing easier.

Look after your contacts book, keep it safe and it will serve you well.

Personal contacts book; are personal property. Do not look in another journalist's personal contacts book unless they give you their permission. If you need a contact, ask your colleagues if they have any.
Newsroom contacts book

In addition to the contacts book which each reporter will have, it is useful for the newsroom itself to have a contacts book.

This will contain all those people who are able and willing to help your news organisation. Many of them will be the same people in the reporters’ personal contacts books.

However, it is important that the newspaper, radio or television station has a collective memory, so that each new reporter does not have to start all over again establishing all the contacts.

Reporters will probably not put all their personal contacts into the newsroom contacts book. Sometimes a contact trusts only one particular reporter, not the whole newsroom. This person’s name should not be put into the newsroom contacts book, in case another reporter deals with the person badly and makes them decide not to talk to any reporter again.

Newsdesk diary

No newsroom can run properly without a proper newsdesk diary. Whether it is in a book form or a file on your newsroom computer, it can give a newspaper, radio or television station confidence that it knows what is going on in the society, and that it is reporting the things which matter.

The ideal traditional newsdesk diary is an A4 size (roughly 30cms x 20cms, or 12 inches x 8 inches) diary with one page or two pages per day. This should sit on the desk of the person who decides what each reporter will do each day. It may be the chief of staff, or the news editor, or the city desk, or the editor.

Whenever you hear about a future event, it should be written in on the relevant day of the newsdesk diary. Any announcement about a future event, which you report now, should also be put into the newsdesk diary under the day of the event.

Everything which is going to happen should be entered - sporting events, meetings, court hearings, sittings of Parliament, public holidays.

When you get a new diary at the beginning of each year, mark in the important anniversaries which will occur so that you can do feature articles or follow-up stories on the right day.

You can now plan ahead, keeping an eye on the next week or two so that events do not take you by surprise. Every day, you should know what is happening and be able to cover the most important events.

Style book

Every journalist is confronted with choices all the time about how to say things.

Should a newspaper use the formal titles - the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China - which the governments of those two countries prefer? Or should it use the informal titles - China and Taiwan - which many people are more familiar with?

Should a radio station stress the first syllable of controversy - CON-tra-ver-see - or the second - con-TROV-er-see?

These are questions of style. It is useful for a newspaper, radio or television station to have a consistent style, so that one story does not refer to "ROC" while another refers to "Taiwan".

Style books also need to deal with spelling (judgement or judgment?), punctuation (U.S.A or USA?)
and other similar matters.

**Compiling a style book**

It would be a huge job to write a style book, if your news organisation does not already have one. It is better to compile one bit by bit, adding each choice to the style book as you make it.

Your style book can be either in traditional book form or as files on a computer. The best hard copy type is a loose leaf binder - a hard-back folder with a spring clip inside for holding pages which have two holes punched in them. This binder should have 26 sheets of card, one for each letter of the alphabet. If it is also thumb-indexed, that is helpful.

Now, when you have to make a choice of style - let us say to choose between the spellings *labour* and *labor* - you will look in the L section. If no style exists, ask the editor what he or she wants. If the editor favours Commonwealth spelling, the answer will be *labour*.

You can now write or type on a sheet of paper "labour (not labor)" and clip it into the L section in the style book. Any other reporter faced with the same choice in the future will be able to find this page and follow the style. The decision has been made, and the newspaper will be consistent.

Any style may be modified. Although in Commonwealth English *labour* is the spelling for the word associated with work, the *Australian Labour Party* spells its title without a ‘u’. Thus your style guide should note:

**Labour (not labor)**

except in Australian Labor Party

Radio and television style books should also provide a guide to pronunciation. Although there are many different methods of writing words phonetically (how they sound), the simplest is to split the word into syllables, typed in lower-case letters, but with the stressed syllables in capital letters. So your style book may include:

**SAA-moa** (not sa-MO-a)

**tu-VA-lu** (not TU-va-LU)

As time goes by, you will find that you have a comprehensive and useful style book. Persuade all the journalists to look at it from time to time, so that everybody writes in the correct style.

**Reference books**

It is probably even more important for journalists to know where to find out facts than it is for them to know the facts themselves.

A lot of time is wasted with routine inquiries if reporters do not know which reference works are available and how to use them. Traditionally, a journalist’s main references books kept on newsroom shelves or in libraries. These are still important as quick and ready sources of information. But increasingly journalists are doing research on the Internet, which can be even quicker and more up-to-date.

First we will look at some traditional reference books, then we will look at resources available on the Internet and how to access them.

The following categories of reference book are useful in any newsroom.

**Dictionaries**
Every newsroom should contain at least one good dictionary in each working language. These can be used to check on meanings and spellings.

Which English language dictionary you choose will depend largely upon whether you use Commonwealth or American spelling.

For English spelling, the main choices are:

- Concise Oxford English Dictionary (gives definitions of words as they were used in the past, as well as how they are used today).
- Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (also written for second language users).
- Collins English Dictionary (contains references to proper names as well as to words).
- Readers Digest Great Illustrated Dictionary (a dictionary and small encyclopedia in two volumes).
- The Macquarie Dictionary (for the Australasian region)

For American spelling, the main choices are:

- Webster's Third New International Dictionary (very comprehensive).
- Random House Dictionary of the English Language (includes a small atlas, brief guide to historical events, four foreign language dictionaries - French, Spanish German and Italian - and other sections).

There are also a number of specialised dictionaries which can be very useful. These can include dictionaries of science and technical terms, medical terms, parliamentary terms and sporting terms. Examples include:

- Webster's Geographical Dictionary (excellent for the spelling and pronunciation of place names).
- Butterworth's Medical Dictionary
- Black's Agricultural Dictionary
- Harraps Dictionary of Business & Finance

Encyclopedias

An encyclopedia is a book which gives an outline of information on a wide range of subjects - a little information on a lot of things.

The subjects are arranged in alphabetical order and most encyclopedias have an index, either at the end of each volume or as a separate volume.

Some of the most useful encyclopedias are:

- Encyclopaedia Britannica (Macropaedia in 19 volumes and Micropaedia, ready reference and index, in ten volumes).
- Encyclopaedia Americana.
- Mitchell Beazley Joy of Knowledge Library (excellent colour illustrations).
- Compton's Pictured Encyclopaedia and Fact Index.
- Chambers's Encyclopaedia.

Many encyclopedias are now available online, which means they are usually more up-to-date, an important consideration with topical reference works. Most charge an annual fee for using them, though they might have a free trial period when you can see whether they will be worthwhile or
Wikipedia is a free web-based encyclopedia put together by contributors throughout the world. It is usually very up-to-date, in different languages and contains references to many things which are too insignificant for professionally-published encyclopedias to include. While the Wikipedia editors say there are systems in place to check entries for accuracy, there have been numerous examples of inaccurate or malicious entries going undetected for quite some time.

Our advice for journalists is to use Wikipedia as you would any other unchecked source - it is a good starting point and guide but you should check critical information yourself before publishing or broadcasting it as fact.

**Telephone directories**

The telephone directory is one of the most useful reference books in any newsroom. Journalists should not be allowed to take the newsroom telephone directory home, draw in it or tear bits out.

As well as telephone numbers, your telephone directory will usually give spellings of names and addresses, plus fax numbers.

It can also be useful to have a telephone directory for any neighbouring country with which you deal frequently. Internal telephone directories are useful acquisitions, too - for the government, a university, a large business or whatever. They can save you time and trouble going through switchboards, often giving you direct access to the person you seek.

**Yearbooks**

Many books of information are published every year, in order to keep up-to-date. The two main categories are yearbook and almanacs.

Yearbooks generally contain current information on a subject such as government, education, economics or a region. Examples include:

- A Yearbook of the Commonwealth
- Statesman's Yearbook
- Pacific Islands Yearbook

Chambers of commerce also often produce a yearbook or annual business directory, with lots of useful names, contacts and information about business. Organisations like Rotary, Lions Club or Kiwanis may also produce yearbooks.

Almanacs generally contain a great deal of general information, such a populations, economics, world religions and a host of other things, kept up-to-date. They also contain important dates for the year in question. Popular almanacs are:

- The World Almanac (USA)
- Whitaker's Almanack (UK)

There is another book which is published each year, which is a fascinating reference book to have in any newsroom it is:

- The Guinness Book of Records

It contains all known records in all areas of life, from the longest bridge in the world to the smallest ant in the world; from the loudest human voice to the biggest pizza.
All of these books have one thing in common - they get out-of-date very quickly. If you have an old yearbook or almanac in your office, take care in quoting from it. The information might not be true anymore. If there is an Online version, that should be more up-to-date but still check the date of the reference you wish to use.

Atlases and gazetteers

An atlas is a book of maps. A gazetteer is a book of place names. Both are extremely useful reference books to have in a newsroom.

It is useful to have a large map of your country displayed on the wall of the newsroom. Even so, you will need maps of other countries, and larger scale maps of your own country, such as town street maps, or planners’ maps.

One of the best world atlases is:

- The Times Atlas of the World

With more than 200,000 entries, this is a very comprehensive world atlas. You may also wish to have a more detailed atlas of your own region, such as:

- Atlas of the South Pacific (NZ Government)

It is especially important for radio and television stations to know how to pronounce foreign place names. An excellent gazetteer is:

- The Columbia Lippincott Gazetteer of the World

It has more than 130,000 entries, giving population, altitude and other details as well as pronunciation.

There are also specialist atlases, which could be useful. These include historical atlases, showing national boundaries as they used to be, and atlases with statistical information. Useful ones might be:

- Times Atlas of World History

Biography

Biographical reference books provide basic, factual information about important people, such as their date and place of birth, education, occupation, publications and other relevant information. There are two basic types of Who's Who - those divided by geography, such as Who's Who in Australia, and those divided by subject area, such as Who's Who in Education.

The following are also useful biographical reference works:

- Macmillans Dictionary of Biography
- The International Who's Who
- Current Biography
- Who's Who
- Who's Who in America
- International Who's Who in Music
- Journalist Biographies Master Index
Quotations

Books of quotations can be useful for identifying a quotation, where it comes from and who originally said it, and checking that you have the wording exactly right; for suggesting quotations about a subject which you are dealing with; and for supplying good examples of the work of an author you are writing about.

Three of the best and most popular books of quotations are:

- Oxford Dictionary of Quotations
- Stevenson's Book of Quotations
- Bartlett's Familiar Quotations

Specialist material

There may be some special subjects which are important in your country. What are the main industries, the main religions, the main forms of transport? Whatever is important in your country will feature in the news, so you should try to obtain relevant reference books;

The relevant government department or marketing board may be able to advise you which reference book to get on copper, or gold, or tin; on copra, or cardamom, or tea, or coffee; on timber, or rubber.

Your newsroom should have a copy of the important books of any main religion in your country. For Christianity, you should have the Bible - the New International Version is now a popular standard. For Islam, you should have the Koran, in translation for general use or in its original form for an Islamic readership. Other major world religions also have writings which are important to their followers. You should have a copy of whatever is appropriate for your society.

If air transport is important and you cannot get information Online, try to obtain a copy of the ABC World Airways Guide. This contains much information on world air travel in addition to the timetables. You may also like to get Jane's All The World's Aircraft, which gives full details of all aircraft in service. There are other Jane's titles for merchant ships and fighting ships.


You may wish to contact newspapers, radio or television stations in other countries, to share story ideas or to cooperate in other ways. Useful reference books for these contacts are:

- Benn's Press Directory: International
- Radio and Television Handbook

Whatever your area of interest, there are likely to be useful reference books. Sports reporters may wish to have The Rules of the Game, by the Diagram Group, which describes and gives the rules of more than 400 events in 150 sports. Movie buffs will want Halliwell's Film Guide, (Granada, London), which has brief descriptions of hundreds of movies, old and new. There are even books like Type&!,-;:?", which is a reference book for typographic artists.

Inquire at a library or bookshop for help in finding a good reference book in a specialist area which is important for you.

Reports
Copies of reports are often sent to newspapers, radio and television stations. Sometimes these get thrown away after a story has been written.

Don't throw them away. Keep them, neatly filed, for possible future reference. They won't take up much space, and could come in handy one day.

TO SUMMARISE:

Get a notebook, use it properly and keep it safe when it is full.

Get a contacts book and gradually fill it with useful names and phone numbers.

Use a newsdesk diary, to make sure events do not take you by surprise.

Develop a style book for your news organisation, and follow it consistently.

Get relevant reference books for your news organisation, and use them, to make your newspaper or bulletin accurate and authoritative.
Chapter 16: Interviewing basics

In this chapter we consider what interviews are, why they are important, and how to use them successfully.

An interview is a special kind of conversation. It is a conversation between a journalist and a person who has facts or opinions which are likely to be newsworthy.

News involves people. Whatever news story you are researching, there will be a person or some people who know what you need to know, or who have relevant opinions. They will usually be happy to tell you.

Your job is to find these people, and then ask them what you want to know. That is an interview.

Usually, you will hear about news first and find the details later. You may see something happening; you may hear about it during a social conversation; you may receive a press release telling you about it; you may receive a tip-off from a well-placed friend.

However you first hear about the news, the next step is to find out all the details so that you can write the story. The easiest way to do this is to interview the right people.

Speaking and listening

An interview is just a conversation, although it is a particular kind of conversation. As in any conversation, you and the person you are talking to will both be involved in speaking and in listening. Think, though, about which is more important to you - to speak or to listen?

Of course you will have to speak, to put your questions and explain what you want to know. But the purpose of the interview is to hear what the other person has to say. The most important part of the interview is for you to listen to what the person has to say, and to make sure that you understand what he or she is saying.

To make sure that you understand, it may be necessary to ask further questions to clarify what has already been said. For example, you might ask: "Did you say that the building would cost $725,000?" or "Did you mean that the members of the committee would all be sacked?" Don't interrupt, though. Let the person finish speaking first, and make notes of what you don't fully understand. You can ask questions for clarification when it is your turn to speak.

Making friends

Everybody talks more freely when they are relaxed and like the person they are talking to. If you want to get the best out of an interview, it is up to you to make sure that your interviewee (the person you are interviewing) feels this way.

For a start, you can try to arrange the interview in an informal setting - over a beer or a meal, in a club, under a tree. Otherwise, interview the person on his or her own territory - their office or home rather than the newspaper office. This will help them to feel at ease.

Then you have to gently take control of the situation, to guide the conversation where you want it to go. How you do this depends upon the person you are interviewing - an angry villager with a grievance which he is not expressing very clearly may need firm handling; a High Court judge will need very careful and polite handling.

Young journalists in developing countries often find it difficult to take control, especially if they are
interviewing somebody with high social status. Women journalists, too, find it very difficult in some cultures to take control if they are interviewing a man.

You cannot disregard the cultural setting in which you live and work, but you should remember that you are striving to be a professional person. Controlling and guiding the interview, to get the relevant information without wasting time, is an important part of your professional skill.

It is a good idea to start any interview with friendly questions, even if they are not necessary for the story you wish to write. It will help you to make friends with the interviewee. You should always look and sound interested in the answers you receive, too. If the interviewee once feels that you are not listening, he will stop bothering to answer your questions.

Save your nasty questions until last. You may have to ask a trade union leader why he has called a strike without consulting his members, or a managing director why he has sacked 25 people and thrown them out of their homes.

If you think that the interviewee will not be happy with the question, make sure you have asked everything else first. Then you can ask the difficult question - if he gets angry and tells you to leave, you have lost nothing; if he gives you an answer, you have a good story.

**Visualising**

One of the most important skills in interviewing is the skill of visualising.

As the person you are interviewing gives you more pieces of information, you need to add them to the picture you have in your mind.

Can you now visualise the whole story? Could you answer any question about this story if it was put to you - Who? What? Where? When? and especially Why? and How?

If there are any gaps in your understanding, this does not mean that you are at fault - it means that you lack information. Your next question should be to fill in this gap.

Some journalists write down all their questions before they begin an interview. This is not a good idea. You may write down a few very important questions in advance; but the next question you ask each time will depend on the answer you received to the question before.

Visualise the whole story throughout the interview. Be aware of the gaps in your picture. Ask the questions which will give you the information to fill those gaps.
Sometimes your interviewee will speak in reply to your question, but not answer it. This may be accidental, if they did not understand your question or lost their train of thought; or it may be deliberate, if they do not want to answer the question, but do not want to say so.

Either way, if you ever ask a question and do not receive an answer, you should ask the question again. This does not have to be rude. You may say:

"Thank you, Minister, but I’m not sure that I heard the answer to my question. I was asking you whether you agree with the World Bank recommendations."

The object is to be polite but persistent. If the interviewee does not want to answer a question, make them say so. You can then thank them, move on to the next question ... and include in your story that they declined to answer this question.

**Evaluating**

As well as listening and understanding what you hear, you will need to think while you are listening. Ask yourself what is the significance of what you are hearing? Is it a big news story or a small one? Is it news at all? What will be the effect of what you are hearing on people's lives?

In this way you can evaluate what is being said. When you have a picture in your mind of what the
news story means, you will know the sort of question to ask next.

**Recording**

However good you may think your memory is, you must keep a record of what you are told. An hour later, after a lot more talk and a journey back to the office and a chat with the chief of staff on your way to your desk, your memory of what was actually said will be unclear.

**Tape recorder**

You may record an interview with a tape recorder. If you are working for radio, you will need to do so, but even some newspaper and magazine reporters work this way. The advantage is that you record the interview accurately, without having to worry about note-taking, and can concentrate on what the person is saying. The disadvantage is that, after the interview, you may have to play the whole tape through again, sorting out what you want to use and what you don't want. This takes a lot of time.

If you are recording an interview with a tape recorder, you will need to follow a few simple rules:

- Know your tape recorder and what all the switches do. Practise with it in the office, until you are familiar with it.
- Check that the battery is fully charged before you leave the office. The best thing is always to put the battery in the charger whenever you finish a job, so that it will be ready for the next job.
- Take a spare clean tape with you. Keep an eye on the tape recorder during the interview, so that you can change the tape before it reaches the end.
- Put the microphone in a good position to record, and the tape recorder conveniently beside you. Check before you begin the interview that it is working and that the sound levels are right.
- Set the counter to zero at the start of the interview.

**Notebook**

The alternative is to make notes in a notebook. This can best be done by using shorthand, so that you note the speaker's exact words while he or she is speaking them. You can then use them as a quote later, if you wish.

The advantage of such notes is that you do not bother to take a note of stuff which is boring or irrelevant, and which you know you will not use. Notes are selective and save time later.

For newspaper journalists, this is the best method. However, you will need shorthand of at least 80 words per minute, and preferably 100 words per minute, if you are to use this method effectively.

For court reporting, this is often the only method of recording which is allowed.

**Combination**

Journalists who do not have good shorthand, or who work in a language for which there is no good shorthand system, can use a combination of the previous two systems.

You take a tape recorder to record the whole interview, but you also make notes in a notebook.

There is no need to write down the speaker's words - they will be on tape - but you can note when he says something interesting. By noting the number on the tape counter, you will be able to find
quickly the bits you want when you return to the office.

So, you may write in your notebook:

- Rice project 026
- Good quote 041
- Cash figures 063
- Quote 074
- Copra drying 093
- Quote 124
- V. good quote 138

When you return to the office, you will be able to ignore most of the tape, and fast forward to the bits you want. Rewind the tape and reset the counter to zero. Now, when the tape counter shows 026, you will find the start of the discussion of the rice project; at 041 there is a good quote; and so on.

This has a very important advantage, that you can quote accurately what people say. This method is slower and more cumbersome than just using a notebook; but it is a very good compromise for journalists who do not have shorthand.

**The interview formula**

Every interview is different, depending on the person you are interviewing and what you are talking about. All the same, there is a formula which you can apply to every interview, which will help you to get the best out of it.

### Preparation

Before any interview, you need to do some preparation. Talk to your colleagues and find out whatever they know about your interviewee and the background to the story. Get the cuttings out of the library and read what has been published before.

Check on the sort of story that is wanted - is it a hard news story, a background story, or a personality profile? Then make a list of the things which you need to know, so that you can ask the right questions.

Finally, make yourself look neat and tidy. Whether you dress formally or informally depends upon who you are going to interview, but you should always look clean and you should never look scruffy.

### Politeness

Nobody is obliged to be interviewed by a journalist, so be grateful and be polite. At the start of every interview, introduce yourself in a clear confident voice - "Good afternoon, Mr Wingti, I'm Joe Vagi of the Niugini Courier. Thank you for agreeing to see me."

Don't be in too much of a hurry to get down to business. Take a minute or two for appropriate small talk. You might ask about his health and his family and how he is settling into his job; this will indicate that you care about him as an individual and will help to establish a rapport. Don't overdo it, though. Remember that he may be a busy man and have better things to do than discuss his family with a total stranger!

It will be a matter for your judgment on each occasion how much of this small talk is appropriate.

### Open questions
It may be that you know most of the details of a story, and only need two or three details from an interview. In that case you can get straight to the point. More usually, however, you will have only a sketchy idea of the story. In this case, the ideal first question is something like: "What actually happened?" or "Could you tell me about..?" This will give you the broad outlines of the story.

Avoid asking questions with a yes/no answer especially if you want a recorded interview for radio; it makes very dull listening to hear long questions from the journalist and one-word answers from the interviewee. Ask questions which invite details, not agreement or disagreement. Remember, you want to spend most of your time listening, not speaking.

Visualise

Once you have the broad outlines of the story, try to build up a picture in your mind of what happened. If there is any part of the picture which is not clear, ask for clarification. You will want to know Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?

You must start with the most important areas of the story and gradually fill in the less important detail, because the interview might be brought to an end at any moment.

Don't forget to ask about the past and the future, too - what led up to the story, and what will happen as a result. Try not to interrupt.

Recap

To "recap" is short for "recapitulate". This means to go back over your notes before you let the interview end. Read them through, see if they make sense and check that no details you need are missing. Don't do all this in silence, though, or your interviewee will think you have finished. Keep talking, while most of your mind is on your notes. When you come across names, check the spelling; when there are figures, check that you have them right.

Finally, tell your interviewee what you understand the story to be. This will take time, as you tell back to the interviewee in an orderly form all that he has told you in bits and pieces. If you have got it wrong in any respect, you may be sure that he will stop you and put it right.

The final question

We are all human and fallible, so you may forget to ask something important in an interview. Or there may be something which you could not know about, which will make a good story.

For these reasons, when you have asked everything that you think you need to know, there is one more question to ask: "Is there anything else I should know?"

Before you go

You may find that you get back to your desk after an interview, start to write the story and then realise that you did not ask an important question. You then have to telephone your interviewee and put the question.

Before you leave the interview, therefore, check that you have their phone number and check that they will be available on that phone number for the next hour or two, "in case there are any other questions". If the interviewee is about to go out, try to get a number where you can contact them - most places around town have phones.

Leave your business card, if you have one, or otherwise a written note of your name, company and phone number, so that the interviewee can phone you if a thought occurs to them after you have
If you think the story needs a photograph, check whether the interviewee will be available to have a picture taken, and if so when would be convenient.

Finally, say "thank you", shake the interviewee's hand (or whatever is usual in your culture) and part as friends - you may well need another interview from the same person at some future date.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Work out a method of recording interviews which is best for you - tape recorder, notebook or a combination of the two.

In every interview:

- Listen more than you speak. Control the interview gently, but don't interrupt.
- Be polite but persistent.
- Ask open-ended questions; especially avoid questions with "yes/no" answers.
- Visualise the story as it is revealed to you.
- Evaluate the news story as it is revealed to you.
- At the end of the interview, recap what you understand the story to be.
Chapter 17: Telephone interviews

In the previous chapter on the basics of interviewing we looked at why interviews are important to journalists, how to plan and prepare for them and how to conduct them. In this chapter we focus in on telephone interviews, their advantages but also traps to be wary of.

Used properly, the telephone can be your best friend. It is especially useful for talking to people who are too far away for you to visit.

**Basic rules for the telephone**

Try to use the bright friendly manner, which you use for face-to-face interviews, for the telephone as well. You will inspire confidence in the person you are calling, and get your story much more quickly.

Don't be too hard on secretaries who are protecting the important people you are trying to contact. They are only doing their job. If they have been told by their boss to protect him from you, then you will not get anywhere by being angry. In that situation, the telephone is unlikely to succeed and you should visit in person.

Remember that when you telephone someone at home, at night or during the weekend, you are intruding into their private family life. You should not do so unless the story demands it. Even if it does, you should apologise for having to interrupt them and state your business quickly.

Because a journalist uses the phone so often, it is important that you should know the standard rules of telephone politeness for the profession.

**Ringing out**

The people you phone for news are often busy people doing important work. They protect themselves from trivia by employing secretaries to answer the phone for them, and to separate the unimportant or minor calls from those which require their personal attention.

So when you phone the Police Commissioner, you will probably first get the switchboard at police headquarters. You will ask for the Commissioner's office. There, his secretary will answer the phone. You must give her your name, the name of the organisation you work for and the nature of your inquiry.

For example, you may say: "This is Joe Vagi, of the Niugini Courier. May I speak to the Commissioner about his trip to Australia, please?"

She will ask you to hold on, while she speaks to the Commissioner to tell him that you are on the line, who you are and what you want. He will then decide whether to take the call, or to refer it to somebody else - his deputy, or the public relations department, for example.

If he agrees to talk to you, you will hear him come on the line. You must then repeat your name, your organisation and what you want. Do so quickly and efficiently. Don't waste time mumbling and thinking about exactly what it is you want to say. If you sound confused and unsure of what you want, you will probably get nothing. You will also give your newspaper or radio station a bad reputation.

The conversation should go something like this:
**Commissioner:** Yes?

**You:** Good afternoon, Mr Geno. This is Joe Vagi from the Niugini Courier. I wanted to ask you about your recent trip to Australia and whether it had been a success.

**Commissioner:** Certainly, ... etc

It is important to tell people who you phone, as soon as they come on the line, that you are a journalist and who you work for, so the person knows that what he says may later appear in print or on a radio bulletin. In everyday journalism it is unethical to try to get news by pretending you are not a journalist, or even by not telling people that you are a journalist at all. (In *Chapters 39 to 41 on Investigative Reporting* we discuss the rare occasions when it is permissible to hide your true identity as a journalist.)

**Answering the phone**

When the phone rings in the newsroom and you pick it up, you should say "Newsroom" and then give your name - for example: "Newsroom, Joe Vagi speaking." It is not enough to say "Hello?", as this forces the other person to waste time by asking if they are connected to the newsroom and who they are speaking to.

If the caller wants to speak to a reporter who is not in the newsroom, then you should say: "She is not in the office at the moment. I'll just find out where she is." Ask the chief of staff, or whoever else is around, where the person is. If she will be back in a minute or two, you may suggest that the caller waits; if she is out for a while, you must tell the caller so. You should then say: "Can I help you? Or can I take a message?"

The caller can now choose. If they think you can help, they can talk to you instead of the person they wanted. If they think you cannot help, at least they can leave a message with you. The message should contain:

- The caller's name and telephone number
- The date and time they called
- What they wanted
- Whether they will call back later, or whether they want to be called back
- Your own name

It should be clearly written, or better still typed, and left where the person will find it. The most usual place for messages to be left for reporters is on their keyboard. If you have an internal office email system, you can send them an email with the information.

**Using the telephone effectively**

It is possible to interrupt people at inconvenient times when you use a telephone. You must use the phone efficiently, so that you use as little as possible of your interviewee's time. Think before you make the call exactly what information you need from this person. If you ask for information which you could easily have found elsewhere, then a busy person will get cross with you - and rightly so.

**Timing**

The timing of a telephone call is important. If your deadlines allow, try not to phone too early or too late in the day.

People are not at their best within one hour of starting their day's work, and within half an hour of lunch they will not want to be bothered. People are very often late back from lunch, and again do not want to get a call within half an hour of the end of their day's work.

If you can call at the best times in between - mid-morning or mid-afternoon - you are more likely
to be helped.

If you want to phone someone at home, do so as early in the evening as possible - people do not like having to get out of bed to answer the phone.

Ask for someone by name

Whenever possible, find out the name of the person who can help you. The receptionist - if approached politely - might help you. You might ask her: "What is the name of the person in charge of property, please?" Or you can pretend to know the name, but have forgotten it: "Can I please speak to ... oh, what's his name? The person in charge of property? Mr...?" "Mr Hussein?" "That's it! Mr Hussein."

Having a name to ask for can save you from being transferred from one person to another ... and ending up after half an hour back with the person you first spoke to.

Start at the top

Try to talk to the boss - he is often more willing to talk to the press than more junior people are. He knows the answers and he usually understands the importance of journalists getting a story about his company or department right.

Even if he does not have time to speak to you, it can be useful to make that contact first. For example, if you have called Mr Hussein, the managing director, and he refers you to somebody else in his company, then you can say to that person quite honestly: "I was just speaking to Mr Hussein and he said I should speak to you." He cannot now refuse, if his boss says he must speak to you.

Listen carefully

When we interview someone face-to-face, we can see from the look on their face, or the gestures which they use, whether they are serious about what they are saying, or whether they are being funny, or sarcastic. When you use the telephone, you have only their voice to get this information - and it can alter the meaning of what they are saying.

Feed back what they say, to make sure you have understood it properly in the way they meant it. For example, you may say: "So the Foreign Minister called you `an imperialist lackey', did he?" If the reply comes back: "No, no, not really; I was just joking!", then you can apologise and you have avoided an embarrassing misunderstanding. But if the reply is "Yes, that's just what he said", then you may have a very big news story.

Smile

A smile shows in your voice. If the person at the other end of the telephone line can sense that you are smiling, that you are polite and positive, you will get a much better response.

Avoid pauses

In a face-to-face interview a short pause can sometimes help by making the interviewee feel he must continue speaking. In a telephone interview it does not help.

If there is silence, then the person on the other end of the line seems to have disappeared. Your interviewee may well think that the interview is over, and hang up. Keep the conversation flowing, even when half your mind is reading back over your notes of what has already been said.

It is helpful, too, to remind the interviewee from time to time that you are there and that you are listening. While he is speaking, you may say "oh yes" or "really?" or even grunt one of those little
noises that shows you are listening and interested. This does not apply, however, if you are recording an interview for radio - the reporter's grunts will become very annoying to the listener when the interview is broadcast.

Thanks

Thank the interviewee. Check that you can call back if you need more information. If it is appropriate, ask if a photograph can be taken. Politely say goodbye.

**Telephone problems**

Using a telephone has many advantages, but it also has its problems. These include the impersonal and inhuman nature of the telephone, the difficulty of knowing the situation you are phoning into, and the problem of clarity.

**Impersonal**

Telephones are most effective when you call somebody you already know. If you can visualise the person at the other end of the line, you can talk more easily to them.

Try not to use the telephone to interview somebody you do not know. Do not be lazy, and use the telephone just because you cannot be bothered to walk 100 metres.

The telephone is always second-best to a face-to-face interview, because it is impersonal.

**Unknown situation**

When you phone a busy person, you will almost certainly interrupt them from doing something. Busy people do not sit around doing nothing, waiting for the phone to ring.

It is difficult to know the situation you are going into. Is your interviewee angry or frustrated, worried, miserable or happy?

It is a good idea to start a telephone interview by asking: "Is this a convenient moment to ask you a couple of questions?"

**Lack of clarity**

Telephone lines are not always as clear as we would wish. A poor quality line can make communication difficult.

Also, a strange accent is even harder to understand on the telephone than it is face-to-face, especially when one or both of you is working in a second language.

Remember that it is as hard for your interviewee to understand you as it is for you to understand your interviewee. Make it as easy as possible by speaking loudly, slowly and clearly, with the telephone mouthpiece in front of your mouth and not under your chin.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Remember that a face-to-face interview is always better than a telephone interview.
When you must use the telephone, use it properly.

Be clear and polite to everyone on the telephone, however annoying they might be.

Record your interview properly and check you have all the information you need.
Chapter 18: Media releases

Here we look at media releases and how journalists can get the best out of them.

One of the main sources of news for journalists is the media release (sometimes called the press release). This is often a news story or feature, written by a press officer or information officer and sent to each newspaper and broadcasting station.

It is easy to understand why media releases are so important. Each newsroom may have only a few reporters to find out what is going on in the country. There is a limit to how much news these few people can find.

At the same time, there may be a great many press officers, information officers and even marketing staff employed by government departments, by statutory bodies, by universities, by large commercial firms and by many others. If all these people are prepared to tell reporters what is going on in their organisations, it helps the flow of information.

Some journalists, however, believe that media releases should take all the work away from them; they treat media releases as if they were finished stories, ready to be published in the paper or read out over the air.

They are very wrong to believe that. You should never use a media release in the form you receive it, without a great deal of thought and work. Let us consider why not.

Who wrote it and why?

Press officers, who write media releases, are employed by organisations to project a good image - to make sure that good news about them gets told and that bad news about them is kept to a minimum. There is nothing wrong with that, and it does mean that a lot of good news, which might otherwise never get published at all, finds its way to the readers and listeners.

All the same, it does mean that the reason why they wrote the media release was to promote the good image of their employer. Do not imagine that it was written because they were anxious about you having enough stories to fill tonight’s bulletin or tomorrow’s paper. While the media release should still be truthful, it may not contain the whole truth - it will probably contain a careful selection of facts to show the organisation in the best possible light.
The essential difference between the press officer and the reporter is that, while the press officer represents the interests of his or her employer, the reporter represents the interests of the readers or listeners. Remember that and make sure that the story which you put through to your chief of staff contains answers to the questions which your readers or listeners want answered, not just the things the press officer wants to tell them.

Bear in mind, too, that the clever press officer will send a media release when there is usually not much other news around - on a Sunday, for example, to make it more likely that you will use it in the Sunday evening bulletin or the Monday morning newspaper. Take special care at these times to do a proper assessment of the news value of the media release.

**How to handle a media release**

**Read and visualise**

It is not enough to read the first sentence of a media release before deciding whether to use it. You need to read it all and visualise the story. This is the most important skill of journalism, to visualise what happened, when, where, why and how and who was involved. You must do it when you read a media release as much as you do while you are interviewing somebody.

**Is it news?**

Just because a press officer has sent out a media release, it does not mean that there is a real news story there. They may be trying to impress their employers with how much work they do; they may be trying to get free publicity; they may be so close to their organisation that things seem important to them which are of little or no interest to the rest of society.

Treat the media release in the same way as any other source of news - ask yourself whether the information it contains is new, unusual, interesting, significant, and whether it is about people. If the answer is no, then throw it away.

**Does it have the right news angle?**

There may be a better news story buried late in the media release than the one in the intro; the press officer's job is to promote his employer, not to pick what is objectively most newsworthy.
That is your job, so do it.

What information is missing?

If there are gaps in the story as you try to visualise it, it means that information is missing. If you decide to use the story, you will need to fill in these gaps.

Contact for further information

Good media releases should contain a name and phone number of who to contact for more information - usually the press officer who wrote it. If there are gaps in the story, phone them and put the questions.

If you do not get answers, try someone else in the organisation. While you are talking to them, tell them that the press officer could not help - you will find that they will co-operate better with you next time, to avoid people hearing that they are not doing their job properly.

Write the story from all available information

Only when you have done all these things can you write the story, from the material in the media release and from your notes of your telephone or personal interviews.

All this takes more time than simply publishing a media release as you receive it, but it is time well spent. It will make your newspaper, radio or television station one which the readers or listeners know they can trust, rather than one which just repeats other people's propaganda.

Do not be rushed into publishing a media release before you have assessed it. If it arrives just before your deadline, it may be better to hold it for the next issue of the newspaper or the next bulletin than to use it at once. All the same, you should assess it as quickly as possible, so that it does not lie around the newsroom growing old, while the public would be interested to know what it contains.

**Be confident**

A media release is not sacred. It is just one source of news (and an imperfect one), so do not be in awe of it.

The man or woman who wrote it is probably not a better journalist than you are, so have the self-confidence to question their news judgment and to reject it if you disagree. However, do not reject the facts contained in a media release just because you don't like them; if you are in doubt, check them.

You will find, though, that some media releases will need no rewriting. There are some very good, experienced journalists working as press officers. After you have read, visualised and assessed a media release, you may decide that you cannot improve upon it - in that case, don't waste your time. Leave it as it is, give it back to your chief of staff and tell him that it can be used as it is.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Treat a media release like any source of news. Check to see if it contains anything which is

- new
• unusual
• interesting or significant
• about people

Gather any other information you need to write a complete story.
In this chapter, we will discuss ways of writing news stories from speeches and meetings. We deal with these together because there are lots of similarities in the way journalists cover such events.

Both are means by which people communicate with each other in public, although speeches are usually a one-way process (from the speaker to the audience) whereas meetings usually involve communication between the individuals taking part. In covering a speech, journalists are generally part of the audience, while at meetings such as councils or committees, journalists may find themselves the only members of the audience.

**The challenge for journalists**

Speeches and meetings are both unlike interviews, where the journalist is an active participant, putting questions and able to ask for more details. At speeches or meetings, a reporter usually has no control over where and when they take place, or the subjects under discussion. In an interview, reporters should guide their interviewees through questioning. At speeches and meetings the speakers themselves decide what they want to say. The journalist has to listen to what is being said and select which parts to make notes on before writing the news story.

It may seem that journalists have no control over collecting news at speeches and meetings. This is not so. There are several things you can do to help you get the information you need to write your story. If you follow these steps carefully, covering speeches and meetings can be a very interesting and rewarding part of journalism.

Although we are treating speeches and meetings as a special type of assignment, most of the skills needed are those found in other areas of journalism already covered in this manual. The essentials are:

- The ability to recognise the most newsworthy aspects of a story, and to select key points from a mass of information.
- Good shorthand or a fast writing speed to take down what is said. If the organisers allow it, use a tape recorder. (See Chapter 16: Interviewing basics.)
- A confident approach to new people and new situations.
- The ability to compress many thousands of words into clear, concise and accurate news stories.

**What are meetings?**

There are, of course, many different types of meetings. One could say that whenever two or more people get together there is a meeting. However, for the purpose of this chapter, a meeting is a gathering of several people with a specific purpose, usually in a planned and organised way, with a formal or semi-formal structure. Thus meetings range from small sub-committees to international conventions - and all are a possible source of stories for the good journalist.

The thing to remember about all meetings is that they do not only provide news for other people. Most of your readers or listeners will belong to some group or other, and they will like to hear news of their meetings, even if they were present themselves.

Many organisations will inform the newsdesk about dates, times and venues of their meetings, so
that these can be entered in the diary. Lots of organisations have regular weekly, fortnightly or monthly meetings, so it is worth making a note in your newsdesk diary of when they are held, for example, "the second Thursday in the month".

But you will get some of your best leads on meetings by regular and careful reading of the public notices columns of the newspapers, or from posters stuck on walls, trees or lamp-posts. If the organisers think that a meeting is important or interesting enough to advertise in the newspaper or on posters, it may be interesting enough to report. There are, of course, many occasions when a meeting is little more than a social get-together. In such a case, it might be a waste of time attending yourself, but you should check beforehand to assess the situation. If you decide not to attend, make a note to check up by phone with the organisers the following day, to see if anything newsworthy came out of the meeting.

Anyone can organise a meeting, although most can be classified under the following headings:

Government

These can be local, provincial, regional, national or international. As the decisions they reach will probably affect ordinary people, they are usually of public interest. These can range from, for example, sittings of national parliaments to meetings of local councils. Whenever they make decisions which can affect people's lives, they are newsworthy.

Company

Because companies produce consumer goods and services, they are generally newsworthy. They also usually provide employment and support economic development, locally, nationally or internationally. Most companies like to run their business meetings behind closed doors, away from the eyes of the media and their own competitors. However, public companies are usually forced by law to hold certain meetings in public, especially their annual general meeting. This may be restricted to shareholders, but there are usually enough people present who are willing to talk afterwards about what went on. Alternately, your media organisation could buy a nominal share in a public company so that it can send a representative as a legitimate shareholder.

Special interest groups

These can include such bodies as chambers of commerce, parents and teachers associations, the Friends of the Earth, trade unions and women's groups. Although some may wish to conduct much of their business behind closed doors, most welcome the attention of the media and provide single-issue stories which are generally newsworthy. Sporting clubs and associations are usually a good source of news.

Political parties

Most of the regular party meetings are held in private and are attended only by party members. However, because they often make important political decisions for people in power, they are a valuable source of news. In many countries, political parties hold local meetings to select candidates for elections and hold annual meetings to elect leaders. These national meetings are called conventions or annual conferences and are a special kind of meeting which we will discuss later.

Educational, cultural, social or religious

Some meetings are simply organised to inform or educate people. They make no decisions which directly affect people's lives, but opinions expressed can form the basis of a news story or a feature. For example, sermons in public acts of worship can be newsworthy. In some countries,
sermons are the only forum for political opposition or dissenting voices.

**Logistics**

The best way to report on a speech or a meeting is to attend it. That way you will know as much as possible about what happened, minimising the chance of making mistakes. Also, you will not have to rely on the reports of other people, who may not be trained journalists.

We said earlier that covering speeches and meetings can present special challenges, mainly because the events are not under your control. You have to cope with the practical aspects of getting there, getting the story and reporting it. We call these practical aspects the logistics of the task. The section which follows gives you practical advice on how to overcome any logistical problems you might find.

**Preparation**

You can save yourself a lot of time and effort if you prepare the groundwork before you go.

You must make sure that you have the correct date, time and venue of the speech or meeting. It should not take long to make a quick telephone check with an organiser to ensure that it is still going ahead as planned.

When you write your report, make sure you include details of date and place, but do not put them in the intro unless they are important by themselves. A mountaineering club which holds its annual general meeting on the top of a mountain is news. Holding the meeting in a hall is not.
Also, find out what kind of speech or meeting it is. Is it a regular or an extraordinary meeting? Will there be any guest speakers who might be interesting? What special issues might be raised? Who might object? Ask if the speech or meeting will be in public or in private. If it will not be open to the Press, arrange in advance for somebody who will be there to see you immediately it ends and tell you what happened. This is where a journalist who has good contacts scores over one who has not.

Find out about the organisation beforehand. Some meetings are obvious (such as a sitting of Parliament) but what do you know about Rotary, for example? (Rotary are business or professional people who meet to do charitable work.) You will waste time and be embarrassed if you turn up for
any event knowing nothing about the group organising it. There are newspaper files, directories and other references. You can ask colleagues in your newsroom what they know and also check at your local library. This is especially useful when you are covering a speech by an academic. Try to read something they have written.

Do not be shy of contacting the organisers themselves and ask for information. Journalists are thought to be experts on all subjects. We know they are not, but it is better to ask for more information after a bit of preparation than to approach people in total ignorance.

On arrival

- Try to arrive at the meeting a few minutes early. This will give you time to:
  - Introduce yourself to the organisers if necessary;
  - Get a list of names and copies of prepared speeches;
  - Arrange to meet people afterwards for comment;
  - Settle in your place before the meeting starts.

You will make your task very difficult if you arrive at the speech or meeting once it has started or with only seconds to spare. The organisers and participants will also find your late arrival distracting, perhaps rude.

If you get there a few minutes before the start, you can see people arriving. This is especially important at a big event, when you will find it difficult to spot people in a crowd once they have arrived. It also allows you a few minutes to introduce yourself to participants and make arrangements for interviews after the event.

If you are a reporter for radio or television, you should always arrive well in advance of the start, to give you time to set up your cameras and microphones, and to test your light and sound levels. Speakers get very annoyed when reporters try to attach a microphone to a stand or table during their speech. Some organisers may stop you doing it.

Finally, you may be told by your newsdesk to file a story immediately the meeting finishes, especially if it is likely to reach an important decision. If you do not have time to return to the newsroom, you will have to phone your copy in (see Chapter14: Copy presentation). If you do not have a mobile phone (cell phone), try to find a convenient telephone before you go in to the meeting. If you wait until the meeting has ended before you start looking for a telephone, you will waste valuable minutes and also risk being beaten to it by a rival. If you have a choice of phones, do not always choose the nearest - everyone will rush for this one. Find a phone which is near but not too obvious. Very often, secretaries will let you use their phone if you arrange beforehand and explain who you are. You should offer to transfer the charges to your newsroom.

Where to sit or stand

It is essential that you find a position where you can see and hear everything that is going on. If you arrive at a crowded event, do not hang around the entrance. Politely but firmly make your way to a position where you can see and hear well. At well-organised events, you will find an area set aside for the media. If this seems suitable, use it. You may find the organisers have left programs, leaflets, copies of speeches or other Press material there for you. However, if the media area is unsuitable, do not hesitate to move to somewhere better.

It is a good idea to find a position where you can see and hear both the speakers and the audience (if any). This allows you to watch both the participants and the audience reaction. However, you should never sit on the stage with the organisers or the speakers. You are not part of the event - you are there to report it for your readers or listeners. You should not be identified with the organisers or speakers. This is especially important at demonstrations or rallies, when you feel that you have to get close to the speakers to hear what they are saying above the noise of the crowd. Try to sit or stand in an area between the speakers and the crowd, slightly off to one side.
The end of the event

Although many meetings seem to drag on and on for hours, you must not be lulled to sleep. Such meetings often end suddenly and both speakers and audience rush to get away. At this point you may have to chase after people such as the organisers or main speakers to get essential details or to clear up a point not fully understood during the meeting. If you have to talk to more than one person in this way, keep your interviews short so that you do not miss your other interviewees.

There may also be pressure on you to file your story straight to the newsroom. This will depend on how important the story is and how near to a deadline the meeting ends. You may have to decide whether to phone the copy over or to go for any winding-up interviews. Check how urgently the newsdesk wants the story before you leave the newsroom.

If it is an important meeting attended by a large number of reporters, you may find your competitors beat you to the nearest telephones. If you have planned ahead, you can now go to the telephone you have already arranged to use. It may be in a secretary’s office a couple of minutes walk away from the meeting, but it may still prove to be faster than waiting in line for a busy phone.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

You will make your task easier and more efficient if you plan ahead.

Know where you are going, when the event is due to start and something about the people and issues involved.

Always arrive early, with plenty of time to prepare yourself and your equipment.

If you are facing a tight deadline for the story, plan ahead how you are going to get your report back to your newsroom.
In the previous chapter, we discussed the best ways of reporting speeches and meetings, how to prepare yourself and how to gather news at such events. In this chapter we discuss how to write your stories and we give advice on covering big events such as conferences and demonstrations.

There are two aspects to report on at any speech or meeting. The first is the setting of the event, the second the content of speeches. You should make notes on both these aspects.

**The setting**

Your job as a journalist is not simply to record what was said in the meeting; there will usually be a secretary present to keep the official record. You should try to bring the meeting alive for your readers or listeners. You should make notes of audience size and composition (for example, are they all women?), the mood of the audience and the tone of the speakers (although you should avoid such expressions as “shouted angrily” or “accused” are only your opinion, and could be wrong).

At any meeting, find out the names of the main speakers on the platform and anyone who says anything important from the audience. It will help if you find out their names and titles before the meeting or stay with someone who can tell you, possibly one of the organisers. If someone says something important and you cannot find out their name at the time, make a brief note of their appearance (such as “man, third row, yellow shirt, moustache”) alongside your notes and then track them down afterwards to get their name.

At big meetings where there are speakers you do not recognise, you may find it useful to draw a sketch plan of the seating arrangements. Then, as names are revealed (for example, when another speaker says: “I disagree with Councillor Rabola’s comments just now”), you can fill in the blank spaces on your plan. Remember to check correct names and spellings later.

**Estimating crowd size**

At speeches in particular, you should report the size of the crowd. This will interest your reader or listener, and may provide a news angle in its own right. For example, if the President or Prime Minister came to speak at a business lunch and only two businessmen turned up, that would be news.

In estimating the size of any crowd, do not try to count them all; that is almost impossible with a large and mobile gathering. The usual trick is to count, say, 20 people then estimate how many groups of that size there are. It helps if you are in a high position and you may get a better estimate by moving around if the crowd is an irregular shape, as at a protest march or rally.

Although the police will often give you their estimate of a crowd size, beware. They will tend to over-estimate a crowd they approve of (for example, people on a charity walk) and under-estimate those they do not like (such as an anti-government rally). The event organisers might also be able to help, although they too will have a bias. In some very organised events, you might get a clue from the number of plates served at a meal. The caretaker of the hall is a useful person to find, as he will know how many seats there are and you can work out how many of them are full.

Very often, if several journalists are covering a meeting, you can get together to agree on a figure for attendance. Although this can be useful, do not go along with the majority if you believe that their estimate is wrong.

You should also report audience reactions if they are significant. If the President was booed by the
two businessmen, that also would be newsworthy.

**The content**

Your notes must, of course, be accurate. You need a good shorthand speed and the ability to sift out the jewels from the rubbish in any speeches. Do not get bogged down with minor details of organisation which will only interest the people who planned the meeting. Radio listeners will be bored by a list of officers elected, but this can be included at the end of a newspaper report.

If you are given a copy of a prepared speech, make sure you follow it as it is presented, just in case the speaker adds anything or leaves something out. In your notes, mark in the margin or underline those parts which are most interesting and which might produce your story line.

If you do not have a prepared copy, make lots of notes at the start. If the speech proves to be interesting, you can be more selective about your notes later on. If it is short and dull, at least you will have some notes to write from.

Try to get enough notes to give balanced arguments if there are disputes during the meeting or during question time after a speech.

Many reporters today use tape recorders, even when working for newspapers. If you do use a recorder you should also make notes of the essential points. This will save time later when you are reviewing your material. It is also useful to have a recorder with a number counter. If you set this at zero at the start of the speech, you can write down the numbers at which interesting points are made. Then when you replay your recording, you can fast-forward or fast-rewind the tape to find the quotes you want at the numbers you noted.

**Writing the news**

As with any story, you should avoid starting with a quote, but you should use plenty of quotes elsewhere in the story.

Your story should be balanced. If a speaker makes some outrageous accusation, you should make some attempt to check whether or not it is correct. If it is an opinion, you should try to get a reply from anyone attacked. For example, if an opposition MP says in a speech that your country is about to declare war on a close neighbour, you should check such a claim very carefully, and certainly get a reply from the government.

It is also worth thinking about what the speaker did not say. If the Finance Minister was speaking on the eve of presenting his budget and did not mention economic matters, that would be newsworthy.

Finally, make sure that your story contains at least the following details:

- The names and titles of speakers;
- The major point of the speech plus necessary background;
- The time, place and purpose of the meeting;
- Plenty of strong quotes;
- The size and composition of the audience, plus any important people in it;
- Audience reactions if they are significant.

**Follow-ups**

Most news stories do not end when the meeting finishes. Although there may be decisions reached, you will have to check up later to see if they have been acted on. If strong opinions are expressed by a particular pressure group, or controversial decisions are reached, you may want to contact
someone with an opposing view for their reaction. For example, if the Cabinet decides on a new measure, you should contact the Opposition for their reaction.

Some meetings have effects long afterwards, and these may provide good follow-up stories. For example, a charity meeting may decide to set up a new home for orphans. You should then watch for news as the project develops - when they raise money, when they start building, when they appoint staff, when it opens and when it has been running for some time. The initial meeting is like a stone dropped into a pool. Watch the ripples as they spread out.

**Special kinds of meetings**

The advice we have given so far should apply to most types of speeches and meetings. However, there are special kinds of gatherings which may need extra care if you are to report them successfully.

**Conventions and conferences**

These are special types of meetings, usually held each year by political parties or professional associations such as doctors or scientists.

They can last for several days and provide a lot of stories. The basic rules for covering ordinary meetings apply to conventions, except that here you will have more chance to meet delegates and to chat informally with participants when the main work ends each day.

Your news editor or chief of staff will usually expect at least one story on the first day, setting the scene and giving details of the organisation, topics, participants etc. Once again, find someone knowledgeable to help you and start looking for stories straight away. Do not wait until all the speeches have been delivered. You should hunt around behind the scenes for such things as background stories, personality profiles, local participants or amusing events, either for the main news pages or for the diary column.

At conventions you should gather press releases, handouts, reports, and all kinds of leaflets whenever and wherever possible. When things get dull or you have a quiet moment, you can read through them looking for story leads.

**Demonstrations**

Although not strictly meetings, demonstrations such as rallies, parades and marches contain many similar elements. There are often speeches, there is usually a single issue at the heart of a protest, and your readers or listeners will want to know such details as size, mood and venue (or, in the case of a march, the route).

Once again, try to identify the organisers, but do not stick with them for the whole time. For one thing you may be identified as someone involved in the protest, not a good thing for your newspaper or radio station. For another, you will not be able to report on the number of marchers, their mood or their opinions.

Be on the lookout for picture ideas, not simply groups waving banners. There may be children holding placards, people in fancy dress or lines of policemen guarding the route.

But be careful. Protest marches can turn into riots. Although as a good journalist you should be where the action is, do not get so close that you get either injured or arrested. Your newsdesk will not get a story if you are in hospital or prison.
**TO SUMMARISE:**

You will make your task easier and more efficient if you plan ahead. Know where you are going, when the event is due to start and something about the people and issues involved.

Always arrive early, with plenty of time to prepare yourself and your equipment.

Make a full and accurate note of what happens and what was said.

Write the story in a lively, balanced way.

Use meetings as a way of making or renewing contacts.

Avoid trouble when reporting parades or demonstrations.
Chapter 21: Press & media conferences

In this chapter, we discuss how press conferences can help or hinder journalists. We give advice on what to do at press conferences and how to write stories from them.

What are press and media conferences?

Press conferences (also known as news conferences) are occasions when someone with something to say which they believe is newsworthy calls reporters together so that they can tell them all at once. The person calling the press conference usually makes an announcement or statement first then allows reporters to ask questions.

The terms, media conferences or media calls, are also used occasionally, though usually about an event to which a company publicist invites the media - not necessarily just journalists - in order to promote a product, performance or a celebrity, e.g. a visiting singer or actor. In this chapter we will concentrate on press conferences for journalists.

All sorts of people organise press conferences for all sorts of reasons. A politician may call one to announce a new policy or to deny an allegation. A scientist may call one to reveal a discovery. A police chief may call reporters together to give details of a crime or to ask for public help in solving a case.

Advantages

The main advantage of a press conference to the person calling it is that they do not have to repeat themselves to several different reporters at separate interviews. It also means that their announcement will have maximum impact by being in all the media at the same time (assuming that all the reporters think it is newsworthy).

The main advantage to the journalist is that it reduces the chance of individual newspapers or broadcast stations missing the story. It also allows them to share the workload of questioning the interviewee. If one reporter forgets or overlooks something, another reporter will probably think of it.

Disadvantages

There are disadvantages to the media in press conference, the major of which is that it is more difficult to get an exclusive story from press conferences. When every reporter hears the same words from the interviewee, they cannot keep secrets from each other. There are ways of getting round this problem which we will discuss later.

Press conferences can also give false importance to the topic being promoted. Promoters try to convince journalists that by getting them all in the same place at the same time the topic is of great importance, when often it is nothing more than free publicity or advertising.

Logistics

For the journalist, press conferences are similar in nature to speeches, and can be covered in much the same ways (see Chapters 19 and 20: Speeches and meetings). Here we will discuss the logistics or method of covering press conferences.

It is usual for the person who called the press conference to say what they want first then allow the journalists to ask questions. The speaker controls the situation from the start. They even control where and when the press conference takes place, although if journalists do not like the place or
the time of the press conference they should let the organiser know. This is especially important if someone plans to hold a press conference after your deadline for stories.

Many journalists regard press conferences as gifts from the organiser, not to be questioned. Remember, if someone calls a press conference it is usually because they need the publicity you can give them. That gives you some control over the situation.

As with covering speeches and meetings, there are several things you need to remember to make your task easier.

Preparation

As a journalist, you should never go out to cover any story without knowing roughly what to expect. Some research is vital. This can range from asking your editor or chief of staff what the press conference is about to a full-scale search through your local reference library for background material.

Press conferences are usually called to present the latest development of something, whether it is a financial policy or a mass murder. Your background material must, therefore, be as up-to-date as possible. It is not wise to attend a press conference at which a scientist is going to reveal a new source of energy without knowing something about what energy sources are currently available.

Your newsroom library or cuttings files should provide you with information. Don't forget to look in your picture library when appropriate, for example, in technical developments.

Ask other people in the newsroom. If a politician calls a press conference and politics is not your round, go to the political correspondent for advice. Also use your contacts outside the newsroom for background information. It is bad manners to ask a political opponent to provide you with questions for the politician, but an off-the-record talk with a critic might produce valuable background on which to base some questions.

Once you have done some research, try to prepare some questions in advance. These should be good enough to provide you with a story if the announcement itself is not very newsworthy. Remember, people who call press conferences will not always have your skill in recognising a news angle.

Your questions do not have to be on the topic the organiser of the press conference wishes to talk about. For example, if a public figure has been accused of corruption then calls a press conference to announce a new move in foreign policy, it is quite fair to ask them questions about the corruption allegations. They may not wish to answer them, but that should never stop a good journalist from asking questions.

Many people are suspicious of reporters' questions, and may ask you to provide written questions in advance. This is acceptable if their sole purpose is to give you more accurate answers. It may, however, be an attempt to stop unpleasant questions. If you suspect that this is the case, you should try to get a promise that you will be allowed to ask other questions at the press conference itself. These are called supplementary questions. If they will not agree, you must ask yourself (and your editor) whether the press conference is worth attending.

On arrival

As with covering a speech or meeting, you should try to arrive in good time for a press conference. Because some journalists are bad timekeepers, many organisers will wait until the major media organisations are present before starting the press conference. However, you cannot rely on this. Besides, it is bad manners to arrive late for any appointment.

Positioning is quite important, especially at large press conferences. You should always sit near to the speaker, so that you do not miss anything said (even whispers to an aide or adviser). If there
are many journalists present, sitting in the centre of the front row will ensure that you are not overlooked at question time. It is important that you hear questions from other reporters. If you are seated at the front and you cannot hear the question, you can be sure that the interviewee will not hear it either, so it will have to be repeated anyway.

If you work for radio or television, or wish to record the press conference to support your notes, arrive with enough time to set up your microphone in front of the interviewee. For recording question time, you should either sit beside the interviewee holding the microphone so that you can point it towards questioners at the right moment, or use a tape recorder which has two microphones (usually stereo machines), one positioned in front of the interviewee, the other pointed towards the questioners.

If you work for radio or television, you should also ask for an individual interview when the conference ends. Apart from the fact that you can get better quality sound and pictures in a one-to-one interview, every news organisation likes to give its audience the impression that it is the main supplier of news on an event. A babble of questions from other journalists at a press conference destroys that impression for broadcasters. Radio and television reporters should make a note of all interesting questions - whether their own or from other reporters - and ask them again during their one-to-one interview.

When the conference starts

Establish straight away whether what is being said is "on the record" (in which case everything can be quoted); "background" or "unattributed material" (in which the information can be quoted but not the name of the informant); or "off the record" (in which neither the information nor the informant can be quoted). "Off the record" information is for the reporter's personal information. Too much "off the record" information will undermine the credibility of your story, so try to get the interviewee to make statements "on the record" whenever possible. (See Chapter 59: Sources of information and Chapter 60: sources and confidentiality.)

You should also establish at the start who the speaker represents on this occasion, if it has not already been made clear. For example, is the Police Minister speaking as a minister or as an MP? Quite often, an organisation may provide a spokesperson to give a press conference. This could be a public servant, a secretary or a press officer. Ask immediately whether they are speaking personally, for a department or for the government.

As with a speech or a meeting, you should make good notes of what is said. Mark the important points in your notes as you go along. A statement may not be clear or may raise an interesting question. Make a quick note of anything you will want to ask at question time.

Question time

Always try to ask at least one question, if only to show your presence.

Phrase all your questions either (a) to clarify statements you did not understand or (b) to get new information. Avoid asking friendly questions simply to cover up an embarrassing silence.

It is difficult to get an exclusive story from a press conference, because every reporter hears all the statements, questions and answers. If you have gone to the press conference with some information which you think will give you an exclusive story and it is not mentioned during the conference, do not mention it during question time. Wait until the other reporters have left then ask your questions. If speakers are unwilling to give a private interview, tempt them with a statement like: "There is something important I want to ask you that I don't want anyone else to hear." It may spark their interest and you will probably get your interview.

Not only should you note what is said at a press conference, but you should also be aware of what is not said. If you go there expecting a certain announcement and it is not made, don't shrug your shoulders and leave. Ask about the topic. They may have something to hide.
At the end

Do not be in a hurry to get away, unless you are facing a tight deadline. Hang around on the chance of getting background information, picking up a bit of gossip or simply developing contacts.

If you have arranged a face-to-face interview, remind your interviewee and take them somewhere quiet to conduct it. If several reporters have been granted individual interviews, make sure that you get your turn.

If you work for a newspaper or television, you should ask for any pictures you think you might need. For example, if a police chief says they are hunting an escaped criminal you should automatically ask if they have a picture of the man for publication. Also, if you want to illustrate your story with a picture of the speaker, think how you can get a better picture than simply a shot of him at the press conference. For example, if the Health Minister is launching a campaign to test people for chest cancer, will he pose for pictures with an X-ray machine - preferably being x-rayed himself?

Writing the story

There are several things which you must include in your story. These are:

- The names and identities of speakers;
- The key points of any announcements, denials or questions, plus necessary background details;
- Plenty of strong quotes.

Unlike a speech or meeting, your story does not have to include details such as the time and place of the press conference. In fact, it does not have to include the fact that the news came from a press conference at all unless that is of significance to the story as a whole.

If a public figure calls a press conference to deny an allegation, that fact should be reported. If a police spokesperson is simply conducting a regular weekly press briefing, that detail is not necessary.

Certainly you should never include the fact that it was a press conference in the intro, unless that is significant. Such a case would be if a minister was expected to announce a major policy change and then cancelled the scheduled press conference at the last minute.

In the following example, we mention the press conference in the intro to the Right story, because the cancellation of the press conference is the news. It shows that there is disagreement in Cabinet - a fact which we report in the second paragraph. In the intro to the Wrong story, the news is the theft of the aircraft, so the press conference itself should not have been mentioned:

**RIGHT:**

The Foreign Minister today cancelled a Press conference at which he was expected to announce new sanctions against South Africa.

It is understood that the last-minute cancellation was due to a disagreement in Cabinet over the sanctions.

**WRONG:**

A police chief today told a Press conference about the theft of a light aircraft from Jacksons Airport.
If a press conference is called to discuss a single issue, your choice of intro should be fairly straightforward. You structure the intro around the main point and write the rest of the story in descending order of merit of the other key points.

**Press conferences that cover several topics**

Press conferences often raise a number of issues, especially when they are regular weekly or monthly press briefings. Good examples of this are White House press briefings in the United States or daily press conferences hosted by police departments to give reporters details of recent crimes, accidents or other incidents.

There are four basic ways you can write news stories from such multi-issue press conferences:

- write separate stories on each topic.
- write one big story covering all the topic, but with an intro on one angle.
- write one big story with a composite intro.
- write a composite story with subordinate stories.

This is not as complicated as it might seem. By "composite", we simply mean putting several things together in one place, for example in an intro. Let us look at each of the four approaches individually:

**Separate stories**

Write a separate news story on each topic. Each story should be self-contained, not relying on the other stories for any details. This kind of approach is used after press conferences where several quite different topics are discussed, such as the police press briefing to give details of the previous day's crimes.

**One big story with an intro based on one angle**

Choose the main key point, write your intro around that then continue writing your story on that topic. Later in the story you mention the other topics, using words like "meanwhile", "also announced" and "at the same time" to show that you are changing topics. Each of the subordinate topics will need some explanation, but they do not require the full intro treatment. Use this approach when there are several related topics, but one is much more important than all the rest.

**One big story with a composite intro**

Write a composite intro, mentioning all the key points in it, then give details, one topic at a time, in descending order of importance. An example of a composite intro is:

*The Prime Minister yesterday revealed plans to lower taxes, build a new airport in Madang and tighten the laws on foreign ownership of businesses.*

*In revealing new Cabinet initiatives, Mr Garea said...*

Use this approach when there are several related topics of roughly equal importance.

**Composite main story with subordinate stories**

Write a short composite story, with either a composite intro or a general intro summarising all the topics. Then write separate stories on each of the different topics. The main story will usually be in bold type or in a prominent position, so readers know to read it first. They will then go on to read
the subordinate stories. This approach is used in similar circumstances to the big story with a composite intro, but means that you can usually devote more space in your paper (or time in your bulletin) to each topic. You can also give the different topics individual treatment, such as their own headlines, pictures or diagrams.

Try to get hold of copies of some major regional or international newspapers, to see how the four approaches are used. You will normally get some idea from the stories themselves whether they came from a single press conference. You will probably find stories from one press conference are on related topics and contain comments from the same people.

Whichever style you select, you should write your story as you would any hard news story, never leaving the reader or listener with any unanswered questions. Background details are very important. If they are not given at the press conference itself, you must fill them in later by research or follow-up interviews.

Finally, although press conferences usually involve question-and-answer sessions, print journalists should avoid using the questions themselves in your story. This is a good rule for most interviews.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

**Press conferences are a useful way of getting information if you use them to your advantage.**

**Always prepare yourself before attending a press conference. Find out something about the possible topics and the people holding the press conference.**

**Arrive with enough time to settle in before the conference starts.**

**Always ask at least one question.**

**If you think you have an exclusive story, do not reveal it to other journalists at the conference.**

**Radio and television journalists should try to record an individual interview after the conference.**

**Write as you would any news story, bearing in mind that there are different ways to deal with press conferences which discuss several separate topics.**

**In newspapers, do not include your questions in the story - only the newsworthy answers.**
Chapter 22: Vox pops - what are they?

In this chapter - the first of two on vox pops - we look at this important way of making news into a two-way exchange of information and opinions, between leaders and ordinary people. We consider different types of vox pop, and look at the advantages of each, for newspapers and for radio and television. In the next chapter we look in detail at how to conduct vox pops and how to analyse and present the results.

One useful source of news is a vox pop. This is where journalists or special researchers go out into the street to ask members of the public for their views on matters of current public concern.

There are several different types of vox pop, and we shall consider them all a little later. "Vox pop" is a useful name, but it is jargon - that is, it is only to be used among journalists, because readers and listeners will not know what the term means. Call it a vox pop in the office, but call it a survey in the paper or on air.

"Vox pop" is an abbreviation of vox populi which is Latin for "the voice of the people" (vox = voice, from which English gets words like "vocal"; populi from populus = the people, from which English gets words like "popular" and "population").

What are vox pops for?

Consider for a moment two questions:

- Who usually makes news?
- Who receives the news?

The answer to the first question is that, while we know that anybody in the world can make the news, in fact it tends to be the leading figures of society: politicians, chiefs, landowners, businessmen, judges, bishops and so on.

The answer to the second question should be that everyone reads or listens to the news: the leading figures of society, townsfolk, villagers and everybody in between.

The danger is that news can become a one-way flow of information and opinions, from the leaders to the ordinary people. One of the important jobs of journalists is to make sure that the flow of information goes in both directions.

The ordinary people need to know what is being said and decided on their behalf, and how it is likely to affect their lives. At the same time, the leaders need to know the sort of lives that ordinary people lead, to stop them losing touch with reality as they become surrounded with big houses and big cars. They also need to know what ordinary people think and feel about current issues.

The first of these needs - the sort of lives which ordinary people lead - can be met by good human interest stories.

The second need is met by publishing Letters to the editor (an essential part of any newspaper in a free society), by talkback radio and by vox pops.

Timing

The media use vox pops for many reasons, but chiefly for the following:
to test public opinion and reaction
- to influence decision-makers
- to forecast results of events
- to stimulate public debate
- to promote the newspaper, radio or television station, and make it more popular

If the purpose of the vox pop is to forecast the results of future events, the results must be published or broadcast before the event takes place. You may gather material predicting accurately the result of an election, but if you publish it after the results are known, it will be meaningless.

If the purpose is to stimulate public debate and to influence decision-makers, the results need to be published while people are still deciding what they think. It is very much easier to influence somebody before they take a decision than it is to persuade them to change a decision which they have already taken.

If the purpose of the vox pop is to test public opinion and reaction, or to boost sales or audience, then the results must be published or broadcast while the issue is still in the forefront of the public mind.

All of this adds up to one thing: you have to plan a vox pop in advance, or you have to move extremely fast once you have decided to do it. Otherwise, you will end up publishing a report of what people used to think about a stale old issue which nobody cares much about any more.

If you are planning a proper public opinion survey, you need to plan it a long time in advance. This means you can only do it on issues which you know in advance will be newsworthy, and in practice this usually means elections.

For a simple street poll, you can do it at a moment's notice and broadcast the results the same day or publish them in the next morning's newspaper.

**Types of vox pops**

There are three types of vox pop, and each has its place in the media - the full public opinion survey, the limited survey and the simple street poll.

**Public opinion survey**

This needs to be conducted scientifically by a company which specialises in such surveys. The data which they gather from carefully prepared questions is statistically analysed by computer.

All this costs big money. General elections in the UK and USA are now so carefully covered in advance by such surveys that the result on election day is seldom a surprise.

**Limited survey**

This can be carried out by journalists, using a structured questionnaire, and some statistical conclusions may be drawn from it. Its accuracy is limited, however, so any findings should be treated with caution.

**Street poll**

This does not attempt to gather statistical information; it is looking for good quotes. A random selection of members of the public are asked for their opinions on a given topic, and the best ones quoted. It is good to photograph them and publish their quote with their picture, or record their
voices for broadcast.

**Different media**

Vox pops which are published in newspapers are often very different to vox pops on radio or television.

Radio and television tend to concentrate only on the third type of vox pop: the street poll. There would typically be only one or two questions, and very few interviews would be used. No attempt is made to say that this is what society generally thinks about the issue. It is just what these few ordinary people said when they were asked.

Newspapers can also operate in the same way, asking one or two questions which will get a few lively quotes on an issue. This can make a bright and interesting item in the newspaper. However, newspapers can also use the other two kinds of survey. If they can afford it, they may employ a market research company or a university to do a proper public opinion survey or, for much less money, they can do their own limited survey.

Many newspapers do a combination of the limited survey and the street poll. This can give a story with reasonable statistical evidence about the way people think and feel; but which also has some lively quotes to stop it becoming dull.

We shall talk first about newspapers, since their vox pops can be more complex. At the end of the next chapter we will talk about the ways in which radio and television vox pops are different.

Remember, though, that a lot of what we say about newspapers will also apply to broadcasters, so read the whole of both chapters whichever news medium you work in.

**Fair and honest**

It is never a journalist's job to twist or misrepresent the news. You must try to report fairly and honestly what is being done and said and thought.

It is especially easy to give a false impression of what the public are thinking, through a vox pop which is carried out in a careless or deliberately biased way. Special care is therefore needed to make a vox pop fair and honest.

**Fair questions**

There are questions which are designed to invite a particular answer. These are called loaded questions. If you ask people: "Do you think young people should have the opportunity for discipline and training in National Service?", the answer is likely to be "yes". If you ask the same people: "Should young people be forced into National Service?" the answer is likely to be "no".

The words "have the opportunity" in the first question suggested that National Service is something which young people want. The word "forced" in the second question suggested that it is something which they do not want.

It is not fair to ask loaded questions in a vox pop (or in any other kind of interview). Try to make your questions neutral, such as: "Do you think there should be National Service for young people?"

There are also tricky questions, to which there is no answer that cannot be twisted. If you ask a man: "Have you stopped beating your wife?", what is he to reply? If he says "yes", he is admitting that he used to beat her; if he says "no", it appears that he is still beating her!
It is not fair to ask tricky questions in a vox pop. Keep them simple.

Make all questions so that they can be answered in a way which truly represents the views of the people you are interviewing. In a street poll keep the number of questions to no more than six.

Representative sample

In a proper public opinion survey, the company will have elaborate ways to make sure that the sample interviewed is a fair cross-section of society. For a limited survey or a street poll you cannot be so precise, but you should still try. Do not just ask your friends; do not just ask supporters of one political party; do not just ask people from one province; do not ask only men or only women.

Accurate answers

You must record accurately and precisely what your interviewees say. Ideally, take an accurate shorthand note as they speak. If you prefer you can record each interview with a tape recorder, but you will still need a notebook for the spelling of the person's name, and to note any information you may want about them, such as their sex and age group. It is worth remembering, though, that it is much more difficult to analyse results which are on tape than to analyse results which are on paper.

Fair reporting

Once you have all the replies and quotes in front of you, you must ensure that your finished report fairly represents the views expressed. If half the people thought one thing and the other half thought something else, then devote roughly half your quotes to the one and the other half of your quotes to the other. Do not give undue prominence to a minority view, making it look as though most people think that way.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Choose which kind of vox pop you are going to conduct according to the needs of your organisation and of the individual story.

If you are conducting a survey for newspapers, make sure that you:

- ask fair and honest questions
- ask a representative sample of people
- record your answers accurately
- report what they say fairly.
Chapter 23: Conducting vox pops

In the previous chapter we looked at this important way of making news into a two-way exchange of information and opinions, between leaders and ordinary people. We considered different types of vox pop, and looked at the advantages of each, for newspapers and for radio and television. In this chapter we look in detail at how to conduct vox pops and how to analyse and present the results.

Preparation

Whether your vox pop is to be an expensive public opinion survey or a quick street poll, you must prepare if it to be of any use.

What information do you want?

You must have a clear idea of what you are trying to find out. That sounds obvious, but it all too easy to design a questionnaire badly, so that it fails to give you the information which you want.

For instance, if you are conducting a pre-election survey and you want to know who is likely to win the election, you ask people for which party they will vote. If you also want to know the probable shift in political influence, you need to know how these same people voted in the last election. Without this information you cannot do the job properly.

This is where the difference between the types of survey becomes clear. In a structured questionnaire, avoid open-ended questions like "what do you think about..." or "what would you do if..." The answers to these questions are impossible to collate and analyse. You should ask questions requiring yes/no answers, or multiple choice.

For example, a pre-election survey might ask: "Who would you like to be the next Prime Minister?", with the six possible answers: "Julius Chan", "Rabbie Namaliu", "Michael Somare", "Paias Wingti", "somebody else" (asking them to specify who) and "don't know".

For street polls, exactly the opposite applies. What you want is good quotes, and the questions must be open-ended to encourage them. You might ask questions such as "what do you think about photographs of election candidates being included on ballot papers?" or "what do you think of election candidates offering gifts to voters?"

What newspapers can do is to have five or six questions with yes/no answers or multiple choice answers, followed by one or two open-ended questions. In this way, they are able to run a story which has statistical information, but also has some good lively quotes.

For example, your list of questions might be:

- Will you vote in the next election?
- Which political party will you vote for?
- Did you vote in the last election?
- Which political party did you vote for?
- Who would you like to be the next Prime Minister? Julius Chan, Rabbie Namaliu, Michael Somare, Paias Wingti, somebody else, don't know.
- Why should he (she) be Prime Minister?
- What would you most like the next government to do?

The first five questions will give us results which we can analyse. The last two questions should give us some good quotes.
How many interviews?

You cannot interview everybody: it would take too much time and involve too many reporters, who have other things to do. However, too few interviews will produce results which are unlikely to be representative.

A compromise is difficult but necessary. One good way is to have a team of reporters, each placed at a strategic location in the district on the same day - the market, the shopping centre, the post office and so on. Each one should be able to talk to about 30 people in three hours, as long as the questionnaire is sensibly short. For a street poll you will not need to interview so many.

A target figure for each interviewer gives balance. It avoids the situation where one person interviews only 12 people, another does 25 and a third does 89. This would give undue weight to the views of people in one particular location.

Proof of identification

Have some form of official identification with you, in case you are asked to produce it.

Conducting vox pops

Remember that the people you wish to interview are under no obligation to answer any of your questions. You are a representative of your newspaper, so be polite at all times.

For each person you interview, you must do these things:

- tell them who you are, where you are from and what you are trying to do
- ask for their help and apologise for any inconvenience
- start a new page of your notebook for each interview
- make sure that you get their full personal details - name, age, home province, address, job etc
- if you are asked, try to give them some indication of when the interview might be published; never say that it will definitely be used, as that will only disappoint them later if it is not used
- take a head-and-shoulders photograph of them

Analysing the results

With a street poll, it is enough to find the liveliest and best quotes, and use them. However, you will also need to calculate roughly how many were "for" or "against" any particular issue, and choose the quotes so that they reflect that balance as well as giving you the best quotes.

With a questionnaire survey, the analysis is more important and more difficult. You will be faced with a mass of statistical information: what should you do with it?

Count the sample

First, count the number of people interviewed in the vox pop by adding together the number interviewed by each reporter. You can then divide them into different categories, if you wish.

For example, if every reporter makes a note by each interview as to whether it was a man or a woman; and which age group the person was in; then you can divide the sample into useful categories.

Perhaps you had five reporters working on the vox pop, and they each did 30 interviews. In this
case, you have a total sample of 150 people.

Add up the number of men and the number of women - it might be 81 women and 69 men. Of course, the numbers must add up to 150.

Perhaps you asked the reporters to put each person into an age group - 18 and under, 19-50, or 51 and over. (You would need to choose appropriate age groups for your society.)

Add up the number of people in each age group - it might be 41 aged 18 and under, 83 aged 19-50, and 26 aged 51 and over. Once again, of course, these numbers must add up to 150.

You could categorise your sample in any way you choose, depending upon the make-up of your society.

Add up the answers

Next, take each question in turn, and add up the answers. For example, for the first question, "Will you vote in the next election?" your answers may be:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>DON'T KNOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is misleading, though. We know that 41 of our sample were aged 18 or under; they are too young to vote. We need to look at the remaining 109 and add up only their answers. Our answers now are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>DON'T KNOW</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can give this as the answer "from those old enough to vote". You will need to continue, analysing each answer in the same way.

But are we going to ignore all the answers from the people aged 18 and under? We are not. When it comes to the last three questions, their answers will be relevant. Let us take the fifth question as an example: "Who would you like to be the next Prime Minister?" You might add up all the answers and find the following:

- Chan: 24
- Namaliu: 39
- Somare: 22
- Wingti: 38
- Others: 15
- Dk: 12

The news angle in this case would be that opinion is evenly divide between whether Mr Namaliu or Mr Wingti should be the next Prime Minister. (It must be stressed that these figures have been made up for this exercise: they are not the results of a real vox pop.)
However, when you break these figures down, according to categories, other interesting things emerge. First, you break them own according to sex:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chan:</th>
<th>Namaliu:</th>
<th>Somare:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wingti:</th>
<th>Others:</th>
<th>D k:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can see from these figures that Mr Namaliu appears to be more popular among women, while Mr Wingti has equal support from men and women.

Now you can break down the figures according to age group (in the following figures Y means young, or 18 and under; M means middle, or 19-50; and O means older, or 51 and over):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Chan:</th>
<th>Namaliu:</th>
<th>Somare:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wingti:</th>
<th>Others:</th>
<th>D k:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can see a very interesting pattern emerging from these figures. While support for Mr Namaliu and Mr Wingti is evenly divided, we can see that it is coming from very different age groups. Mr Namaliu is very popular with the 19-50 age group, while Mr Wingti is by far the most popular with the young age group. This is significant for the political future of each man and his party, and therefore for the country, so this would make an interesting news angle for your story.

**Historical comparisons**

The last thing to do, especially in a vox pop about voting intentions, is to compare the way things are now with the way they used to be. This might mean comparing the results of this vox pop with the results of a previous vox pop; or it might mean comparing answers to different questions in the same vox pop - as with comparing the second and fourth questions in this example.

Perhaps the answer to the second question, "Which political party will you vote for?", was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pangu</th>
<th>PPP</th>
<th>PDM</th>
<th>PAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
National........ 3
Alliance.........3
Don’t know.....7
United.......... 2
Others.......... 9

(Note that the numbers total 92, which is the number of people who said they would be voting.)

We can now compare this with the answer to the fourth question, which asked the same people how they voted at the last election. The result might be:

Pangu...........26
PPP..............10
National........3
Alliance.......4
Don’t know...7
PDM..............24
PAP............4
United..........2
Others...........9

Most of our sample seem to be fairly constant in their political support, if these figures are anything to go by. However, PPP’s support has dropped by 33%, PDM has dropped 12%, PAP has almost doubled, and support for other parties (and independents) has increased a lot.

This, too, is significant material, and could provide some indication of which parties can expect to do better than last time, which parties can expect to do less well, and which can expect to perform at about the same level.

Writing the story

Once you have the results analysed, you must treat them like the raw materials for any news story. Pretend that you have just encountered them for the first time; look at them; assess their news value; decide on the most newsworthy angle and make that your intro.

Clearly the story has to be presented to the readers or listeners as a normal news story, written in words. You cannot throw a pile of statistics at them and expect them to sort it all out for themselves.

Nevertheless, once you have presented the most interesting information in a well-written news story, you can give detailed information tabulated at the end. In this way, the readers who are particularly interested can do some of their own interpretation and analysis from your statistics.

As we mentioned earlier, though, do not try to conclude too much from a limited street survey, and even less from a street poll. From an accurate opinion poll you can extrapolate. This means that, for example, if 30% of the women of a particular age and social group interviewed held a particular view, you can confidently say that 30% of all women of similar age and social group hold this view. You cannot extrapolate in this way from our more instant and amateur surveys.

You can say "more than two-thirds of the people interviewed thought...", but you cannot go on to say "most people in Papua New Guinea think..."

Vox pops for radio and television

Radio and television stations usually only conduct the simplest kind of vox pop - the street poll - with a single reporter asking one or two questions to a small number of people. Its only purpose is to gather a few comments on a current issue, to hear what some ordinary people are thinking. No attempt is made to draw any statistical conclusions from the answers or to suggest that the comments are a guide to how people in society as a whole react. They are a way of illustrating a story, not a way of discovering any new information about what the population thinks about an
issue.

Very few radio or television stations attempt the kind of statistical survey you have just seen demonstrated for newspapers. Wealthy television stations may pay a specialist public opinion company to conduct a survey for them, usually at election time. Radio stations seldom pay for such surveys for the simple reason that they cannot use the information properly, as newspapers or television can. Listeners will be bored by a mass of statistical figures.

Conducting a vox pop

Although many of the principles of the street poll vox pop apply equally to both print and broadcast journalists, there are some obvious differences. The most important is that, although television can use film or video of people interviewed, vox pops are useless for radio and television unless you can hear the actual words people use - what we call the actuality. (See Chapter 48: Radio and television basics.) So you must always use a tape recorder or television camera. Before you leave the newsroom, check that all your equipment is working properly.

Choosing a location

Choose a busy place to conduct the interviews, but keep away from loud background noise. For television vox pops the background might be relevant; vox pops about buying habits can be conducted in shopping centres, vox pops about travel at bus stops or train stations.

People are always interested when they see a reporter approach them with a microphone or camera, but some may be shy and try to avoid you. If you let all the shy people escape, you will not get a wide sample of people; you will only get those people who are happy to appear in your report. So try to talk people into giving you "a quick interview". Tell them it will not take more than a couple of minutes. Be polite and if they refuse again, let them go.

You will usually attract quite a crowd, which you can occasionally turn to advantage by bringing in observers for quotes. On television, try to avoid young children standing behind the interviewee, making faces into the camera. Choose a location which will not allow them to do it, for example against a wall or on a piece of high ground.

Using your recording equipment

Once you have them in front of the camera or microphone, help them to relax. If your vox pop is on a humorous subject, maybe relax them with a little joke. Although you must hold the microphone close to the interviewee, do not frighten them with it. Many people are uncomfortable with strange technology like microphones or cameras. So do not push the microphone or camera into their mouth. On television, the camera operator should be a little distance behind the reporter, shooting over the reporter's shoulder.

Asking questions

It is best to ask only one question of everyone. Although it is possible to ask two or more questions, this will create problems later when you come to edit your tape. Decide the exact wording of the question before starting the vox pop. Keep the question short and simple.

Never ask questions to which people can give "yes" or "no" answers. Ask open-ended questions, especially ones beginning with "How", "Why" or "What". For example, instead of asking "Do you agree with the proposed law to ban smoking in public places?" you should ask "What do you think about the law to ban smoking in public places?"

Avoid interrupting their answers unless it seems that they might go on talking for too long, then politely thank them for their time and move to the next interview.
It is not usual for radio vox pops to use people's names, but television reporters might occasionally take people's names to use in captions.

**Ending the interview**

Your interviewee might want to hear what their voice sounds like, and ask you to replay the tape. Refuse politely, as it will only slow you down. They may also ask when the program will go to air. Because you are not yet in a position to guarantee that their particular interview will be used, do not promise them anything. But tell them approximately when the report will be used. They can then tell all their friends and relatives to tune in at that time, increasing your audience.

**How many interviews?**

There is no fixed limit on the number of interviews you should conduct. Some of the interviews will be better than others and you may not use some of them at all. If you have only a two-minute space for your report, you may be able to use up to 10 short answers or only four or five longer answers - perhaps an average of 6 voices. It is always better to have some in reserve, so always do a few more interviews than you think you will need. As a rough guide, two or three interviews are not enough, twenty will be too many.

**Editing your tape**

Whether you report for radio or television, the principle is the same. The quotes must be strong, easy to understand and in good taste, with no swear words or other bad language.

You must listen through the whole of your tape again when you return to the editing suite, making a written note of the best quotes and their location on the tape. If you have had to use multiple questions or a large number of interviewees, make a grid with the interviewees down one axis, the questions down the other. Once you have filled in remarks about each answer, you can look at the grid to choose the best and fairest sample for editing.

You do not need your own questions between the voices of your interviewees. You should write your cue or intro script to explain the issue and what question you asked, but then allow the people’s voices to be heard replying one after the other. Edit their comments very tightly, taking out all unnecessary words and pauses.

It will make your tape more interesting if you mix a variety of voices, male and female, young and old, well-educated and uneducated and so on. In multilingual societies, you can also mix languages, although you should check with your producer that this will be all right for the particular program chosen.

Finally, make sure that all the sound is adjusted to the same level. There is nothing more annoying than trying to listen to a bad sound recording.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Choose which kind of vox pop you are going to conduct according to the needs of your organisation and of the individual story.

If you are conducting a survey for newspapers, make sure that you:

- ask fair and honest questions
- ask a representative sample of people
- record your answers accurately
- report what they say fairly.
Before you start your survey, you must decide:

- what information you want
- how many interviews you need.

When conducting your survey, you must:

- introduce yourself
- be polite
- start a new page in your notebook for each interview
- get personal details such as name, age, job
- take a head-and-shoulders picture of them.

When analysing results, you should:

- Count the sample
- add up the answers
- compare the figures against each other.
- Treat the results of your analysis like any news story.

When conducting vox pops for radio or television:

- prepare a simple, open-ended question
- make sure your equipment is working well
- choose a good location
- be friendly and relaxed with the interviewees
- interview enough people for your needs - but not too many

When editing your tape:

- choose strong comments
- do not keep repeating your question
- mix the voices to give variety
- make sure all your sound levels are correct.
Chapter 24: Follow-ups

In this chapter, we describe what follow-up stories are, why we use them and how we write them. We also give advice on how to use your diary to plan follow-ups and pre-lims.

A follow-up is a journalist’s term for a story which is written so that you can report more of a story which has already been published or broadcast. Those extra details can be new facts, later developments, reactions or new issues which have been raised by the original event. What all follow-ups have in common is that they depend for some of their news value on a story which has gone before.

Why are follow-ups needed?

Follow-ups are needed because one story on its own may not cover all aspects of an event or controversy properly. Although life goes on second-by-second, day-by-day, journalists cannot report it all. Journalists have to concentrate on bits of life and report them to their readers or listeners in 20 centimetre stories or 40-second news reports, three-minute current affairs segments or half-page features. Journalists impose space and time limits on their reports which do not always reflect how important the event is in the real world.

Journalists also attempt to show continuing events in self-contained "chunks" called news stories. With the amount of information now available from throughout the world, you have no alternative if you are to share out your limited time effectively.

However, just because you as a journalist have described an event in a single-column story or a 30-second report does not mean that the event itself has been described completely. There are often side-issues which have not been touched or later events which will need reporting themselves.

We have to distinguish follow-ups from what we call breaking stories, which are reports of events (or controversies or debates) which are still happening as we report them. The hourly reports on a hijacking are part of a breaking story, the report of the eventual trial of the hijackers is a follow-up.

We normally catchlines the latest version of a breaking story UPDATE (for example "HIJACK UPDATE") because it still relies on the same news angle (what is happening at the hijack) but gives us a more up-to-date report. By contrast, we would normally catchline a follow-up according to the angle of the follow-up story itself. For example, we might write a follow-up story about the Transport Minister announcing new security measures to prevent further hijackings. We might catchline it "SECURITY PROMISE". (For more details on this, see Chapters 44 and 45: The breaking story.)

Because events are often connected, it is not always easy to know the difference between a follow-up and a new story or an update of a breaking story. However, a special feature of a follow-up is that it relies for its significance or interest on at least one previous story. Remember though that just because your follow-up describes the effect of a previous story, you cannot expect all of your readers or listeners to remember the original story, even if they did see or hear it. Later in this chapter we will discuss how you should use background information to remind your audience of the original story.

The term follow-up will have no meaning to your readers or listeners; it is simply a label we use as journalists.

We use follow-ups for a variety of reasons:
Continuity

Follow-ups show how different parts of life are connected. Whenever we finish writing a story, at that point we limit our report of the event or debate to a single moment in time. Follow-ups help us to set stories in context over a longer period of time and to explain cause-and-effect. Most events are like dropping a stone into a pool of water: the stone forces ripples to spread out, disturbing the water in all directions. Just because we stop reporting an event (such as the stone dropping) does not mean that the ripples themselves stop spreading. We must watch and report the ripples too.

To satisfy curiosity

When we arouse the reader’s or listener’s curiosity with a news story, we have a duty to satisfy that curiosity. With issues or events which are self-contained, a well-written news report or feature article will tell your audience everything they want to know. However, very few events and issues can be packaged so conveniently. Many news reports raise questions, particularly: “But what happens now?” Having given your audience an appetite for the story, you have a duty to provide answers to those kinds of questions. Every time you think that you have finished with a story, put yourself in the place of your readers or listeners and ask: “Is there anything else I want to know about it?” If there is, perhaps you should research and write a follow-up.

To add balance

Because of a shortage of time or because sources were not available when you needed them, you are often forced to run stories which are not properly balanced. The follow-up gives you a second chance to provide that balance.

If the Finance Minister announces a controversial new tax, you need to report what the opposition and people affected by it think. If you cannot get them in time for the first story, you must write a follow-up which concentrates on the reaction rather than the measure itself. Such reaction stories are vital in maintaining your reputation for fairness.

Also, major events or controversies produce large amounts of information. Your readers or listeners need time to absorb all that information. Giving it all in a single story may only confuse them, so you can split it up into a series of follow-up stories run over a number of days or weeks.

To cover missed stories

No matter how good a journalist you are, you will occasionally miss stories which the competition gets. Perhaps the first you know of this is when you hear the story on another station or read it in another newspaper. By that time, it is usually too late to report the same story yourself. It is usually best to accept that you have been beaten for this story, and try to produce a follow-up.

The follow-up in this case still needs to have the information from the original story (which you did not carry), but should have a fresh news angle. For example, the competition may beat you to a story about a government decision to deport someone. Rather than repeat this in your next edition or bulletin, try to interview the person or a relative, to get their reaction for a follow-up. The story will be up-to-date, and anyone comparing your story with the competition’s will not think that you are copying from them.

The structure of follow-ups

Although follow-ups rely on previous stories for their news value, you should still treat them as separate stories when writing them. They should be written in the inverted pyramid style, with the most important aspect (the news angle) first, in the intro. Although the news angle will usually refer to a previous story, your story will not be news if it only reports something your readers or listeners already know. The strength of the follow-up is that it tells your audience about a new
aspect of an old story, preferably in a refreshing and lively way.

For example, the original story may have been that the Finance Minister imposed a consumption tax of 10 percent. In the follow-up, the opposition attacked the tax, so you would write:

The Opposition has attacked the Government's new consumption tax as unworkable.

Labour leader Filo Toro said the 10 percent tax would be a nightmare to administer and impossible to collect.

Finance Minister Jo Hero announced the tax in an emergency debate in Parliament on Wednesday etc...

Background

All follow-ups must contain at least one paragraph of background to put the whole story in context. That background can come anywhere in the story. The more essential it is to understanding the latest aspect, the higher up the story it should come.

If the follow-up is full of new and very important material, you may have to put the background near the end of the story, even in the last par. If you do this, it is sometimes useful to insert a few words of background higher up the story, again just to place the story in context.

For example, in your consumption tax story, the third par on Hero's announcement is enough to set the story in context. The real background details (what will be taxed and how) can come at the end of your story.

With major events or arguments, you may have to do several follow-ups over a period. You could use the same background pars, but it is more usual to shorten the background as you get further away from the event. Besides, each follow-up may provide material which needs including as background in subsequent stories.

Sources

Some follow-ups, such as a reaction, automatically suggest a different source to that used in the original story. With other kinds of follow-ups it may be more natural to go back to the original source for more information.

Such stories could be news of a plan, with the follow-up a story about the plan in action. In this case, you might go back to the same source for new information.

However, it is better to find new sources for follow-ups. They not only add variety (with a new name or voice), but they also add a different view, even though your new source may only be another spokesman from the same department.

The diary

A journalist without a diary is totally at the mercy of events. The diary allows you to plan ahead and keep track of current events and controversies. If you see the chance for writing a follow-up some time in the future, make a note in the diary to remind you. (You must, of course, look at the diary every day, otherwise the reminder will be useless.)

It is important to enter details of possible follow-ups whenever they suggest themselves. The police may announce that they are charging a man with murder. If you run the story, you should also make a note in the diary of where and when he will appear in court. An association may launch a
charity appeal; you should make a note to check how much they raised.

If you are working with other journalists, it is a good idea to keep one central newsdesk diary so that everyone is kept informed about what stories might be coming up. In such a case, your entry needs to be slightly longer than a single word, but not too long that it wastes space - a reference to the original story is usually enough. A diary entry for Monday, June 12 could look something like this:

*Check Alfred Nagi appearing in Central Magistrate’s court on Chinatown murder charge (See story of May 23).*

**Anniversary follow-ups**

It is also useful to do the process in reverse - to go back over old stories to find ideas for follow-ups and updates. One useful method is to go through the diary, cuttings or copy files for six months, a year or five years ago. There will be many stories which have developed since, but you have not covered recently.

Anniversaries are a useful time to update stories. If a politician promised action a year ago, now is the time to ask him what he has achieved. If police were hunting a murderer six months ago, ask whether they have any new clues.

Some people regard this as manufacturing news. This would be true if all you are doing is rewriting old stories. However, events often have long-term effects, promises should be kept or explanations provided as to why they were not. Journalists have a duty to monitor the consequences of events or controversies which we regarded as newsworthy in the past. Very often, the journalist will be the only person who tries to make people accountable and reminds them of their responsibility to keep promises.

**Prelims**

Preliminary stories (called *prelims*) are the opposite of follow-ups. Prelims are stories you write before the event happens. When you are told about an important forthcoming event, as well as putting the date, time, place and other details in your diary, you can also write a preliminary story. These are particularly useful on "slow news days", when there is not much happening elsewhere.

Be careful, though, to guard against giving free publicity to any forthcoming event which is not itself newsworthy. The organisers of a sale, a concert, a demonstration or a conference will want you to write a prelim story to promote the event. If it is newsworthy, write your prelim story. But if you have any doubts, you can always wait till the event happens, when you can judge the newsworthiness directly and decide whether or not to write a news story. Remember that your job is to serve your readers or listeners, not the organisers of events.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Follow-ups are stories you write so that you can report more of a story which has already been published or broadcast.

- Journalists write follow-ups to:
  - show how different parts of life are connected
  - answer questions left unanswered by earlier stories
  - provide balance and reaction
- cover missed stories.

You should still treat follow-ups as separate stories. They should be written in the inverted pyramid style, with the most important aspect (the news angle) in the intro.

All follow-ups must contain at least one paragraph of background to put the whole story in context.

Some follow-ups, such as a reaction, can use different sources to those used in the original story.

Make a note of possible follow-ups in your newsdesk diary whenever they suggest themselves.

Make a note of any possible anniversary follow-ups.

When you are told about an important forthcoming event, as well as putting the date, time, place and other details in your diary, you can also write a preliminary story.
Chapter 25: Advanced news writing

In this chapter we build on what we learned in Chapter 3: The shape of the news story. Here we look at more complex stories, and how they are written.

Review of the inverted pyramid

In Chapter 3, we saw that the basic shape of the news story is the inverted pyramid. This means that the most newsworthy key point comes first in the story, in the intro. This is followed by the other key points, in descending order of newsworthiness, so that the main detail comes first and the minor detail last.

This is a good basic pattern, and works well for simple news stories. This "shape" of the news story, with a "broad" top and a "narrow" base, is in the weight of the news itself. You can look back at the example of the Hohola house fire in Chapter 3 to see how the first paragraph of the news story is the biggest news, and how the story begins to taper down towards the minor detail.

Remember the first paragraph, which is called the intro, contains the most newsworthy part of the story - the newest, most unusual, most interesting and most significant - told clearly and simply. This is followed by a full explanation and all the details. The most newsworthy parts of the story will be written nearest to the top of the story.

The later part of the story - the tapering point of the inverted pyramid - contains detail which is helpful, but not essential.

However, when you have to write a more complex news story, a more complex structure is necessary.

Chronological order

We have already seen an alternative structure. In Chapter 6: Writing the news story in simple steps, we decided to start the story about the cyclone as if it was an inverted pyramid, and then change to telling the story in chronological order - that is, the order in which things happened, from the first to the most recent.

This is an especially useful way of telling stories about sequences of events, rather than single events. We can picture this news story structure as in the diagram on the right.

When the Minister of Transport opens a new bridge, there is one simple event to report. This story can be reported as a simple inverted pyramid.

However, when a group of angry landowners breaks up the ceremony, fights the police who are on duty and kidnaps the Minister, it is better to tell the news as in inverted pyramid intro, followed by a telling of the story in chronological order. We shall tell the reader or listener...
at the beginning what the news is going to be in the story, and then tell the story as it happens.

There is still one more story structure to discuss, however, and it is an important one. It is one which is widely used to tell complex stories. It is one which you will need to master.

**Pyramid of pyramids**

When a story has a number of different parts to it, it is better to tell the story one part at a time than to jump backwards and forwards between the different parts. This means that you go to the end of one part, telling the minor details about that, before moving on to the major details of the next part.

This story structure is a *pyramid of pyramids*, in which each part of the story is told in a mini-inverted pyramid of its own. The sequence of these mini-pyramids will depend upon the newsworthiness of each one. The most newsworthy part of the story will come first, followed by the other parts in decreasing order of importance.

Just as you have to rank key points in their order of newsworthiness in order to write the intro, so you have to rank these mini-pyramids into their order of newsworthiness in order to write a complex story.

The story will start with an intro, followed by two or three paragraphs written as though the story was going to be a simple inverted pyramid. In other words, you start by telling the most important key points in their order of importance.

After a few paragraphs, you will have introduced the most important parts of the story. You can now concentrate on the first part of the story, told in its own mini-pyramid. When you have finished that, you can move on to the next part, and so on, until you have told the whole story.

Note how each mini-pyramid is smaller than the previous one. The story is still basically structured like a pyramid, going from the most important to the least important.

How many mini-pyramids there are will depend upon the story. There may be only two - perhaps a minister's announcement of a new policy, followed by opponents' criticism of it.

There may be three or four or five mini-pyramids, if there are that many parts to the story.

The important thing is for you to understand the story clearly and then to tell it clearly.

**TO SUMMARISE**

*Use the inverted pyramid style of newswriting to give your readers or listeners the most important facts first.*

*If you need to tell part of the story in the order in which events happened, use chronological order after the opening paragraph - the intro - or first few paragraphs.*

*If a story is complex with lots of different sections, speakers or issues, use the pyramid of pyramids style.*
Chapter 26: Rounds

In this chapter, we look at what is meant by “rounds” (called “beats” in American English). We look at the advantages and the problems of rounds reporting, and how to do it well.

In many newsrooms, reporters have the opportunity to concentrate on particular areas of the news. One person may become the political reporter, another the education reporter and another the agriculture reporter. Each of these areas is called a round because journalists used to go round to all of their contacts in their specialist area on a regular basis, known as “doing the rounds”.

Even today, reporters have to make sure that anything newsworthy in their round is reported; and they have to make sure that the readers or listeners are helped to understand the full significance of the news.

This is what is meant by the term round, or beat in American newsrooms. It is a specialist area. It is an opportunity for a reporter to become a bit of an expert, at least enough to ask the right questions, even if not to know all the answers.

In a small newsroom, with perhaps six journalists or fewer, everybody is generally expected to do everything. There is usually little chance for reporters to become full-time specialists in any particular field.

Even in a small newsroom, however, you can build up a reputation as the best person in a particular area. You can effectively become the education reporter, even if you have to do other kinds of stories, too.

Advantages of rounds reporting

The advantage of having a reporter assigned to a round is that they will know more about it than a general reporter. In particular, there are three areas in which a rounds reporter is likely to be more knowledgeable.

News value

As we saw in Chapter 1, news is whatever is new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people. Reporters can only assess newsworthiness when they know whether something is really new; whether it is really unusual; whether or not it is significant.

The rounds reporter has the chance to know all this, by keeping in touch day after day, week after week, with all that is happening in the round.

To begin with, of course, the rounds reporter has no such advantage. When you are first assigned to a round, you will probably know no more about it than anybody else. You can start to remedy that at once (and we shall return to that a little later in this chapter), but there is really no substitute for experience.

The longer you spend on a round, the more you will find you know about it. You will know when something is new, and when it has been reported already; you will know when something is unusual, and when it is standard procedure; you will know when something is truly significant, and when it is of no importance.

People
News is about people - the people who make things happen and the people whose lives are affected by what happens. Rounds reporters have the advantage of getting to know the people on their round, and can therefore tell the news in more human terms.

Knowing the people on the round has another advantage, too. Some of the people you deal with will be honest, and others will be dishonest; some will be ambitious; some will be actively political, and others will not. As you learn the nature of each person, and find out their network of family and other obligations, you will be better able to judge where the truth lies. You will know when you are being used, and will be able to avoid writing an inaccurate story which a person wants you to write for reasons of their own.

History

When you know the history of your round, you can put the news in context. If $1,000 has gone missing from petty cash, that is news. If this is the second time in a year that $1,000 has gone missing from petty cash, then the news is bigger and apparently more significant: it looks less like incompetence and more like dishonesty.

It is an important part of the rounds reporter's job to put news into its correct historical context. This enables you to go on to the next step, which is to analyse and interpret the news, so that your readers or listeners can understand better what is going on in their society.

Dangers of rounds reporting

The advantages of rounds reporting, which we have just described, do not come easily. They are won by the rounds reporter spending a lot of time with the key people in that round, getting to know all about them and the work which they do.

The danger of this is clear; it is hard to spend so much time getting to know people without starting to feel like one of them. The danger is that the rounds reporter forgets that he or she is an observer of the round, looking after the interests of the reader or listener, and starts looking after the interests of the key people in the round.

Police reporters are often asked by police to keep information secret, in case it harms their investigations. Very often, the police reporter can agree, on strict condition that the information can be made public at a later date. However, the police can gradually take advantage of this, asking that ever more information be kept secret; and police reporters can be drawn in to feeling that they are policemen themselves, and start keeping more things secret than they make public.

Similarly, political reporters can be told things in confidence by politicians. Sometimes, this can be a subtle attempt to exert control over reporters. At other times politicians may try to exert very obvious control over journalists, by buying them gifts or giving them other favours.

Instead of telling news in terms of the people who make the news and the people affected by it, the rounds reporter may begin to tell the news only in terms of the people who make it.

If you wish to be a good journalist, you must resist all attempts to sway your judgment, or to buy you. You must remember at all times that you are there to represent the interests of your readers or listeners, not the interests of the police, or politicians, or whoever your round involves. (See Chapter 58: Pressures on journalists.)

Do not worry whether or not these people like you. It is much better that you cultivate your close friends from outside your round, so that you do not have to worry about losing them. What should matter to you is not whether the people in your round like you, but whether they have a professional respect for you. That can only be achieved by doing your job honestly and well at all
times.

There is another danger, too, from spending too much time with people in one area of life. The rounds reporter may begin to take things for granted, and to lose the sense of surprise and wonder which a reporter needs. Things which the reader or listener would find unusual and interesting can begin to look ordinary and dull.

The rounds reporter needs to make an effort at all times to see things as the reader or listener would see them, but also to understand things as an expert would understand them.

**How to do a round**

Let us imagine that your editor has just given you a round - let us say that he has made you education reporter. What should you do in order to do this job well?

Let us look at the steps you should take in order to be a good rounds reporter.

**Prepare**

We have already seen that one of the main advantages of having reporters assigned to rounds is that they become more knowledgeable in that field. We have also said that, on the day you are first given your round, you will probably know no more about that field than anybody else.

You have to start by doing some preparation work: not just during working hours, but in the evenings and at the weekends, too, if you are serious about being a good journalist.

You need to find out about the history of the subject of your round. For your education round, you can ask at the public library about any books or papers which they may have on the history of education in your country. A good source of information might be the teacher training college or education faculties at universities. In many developing countries, missionaries played a large part in setting up education systems, so you can write to the head office of each mission and ask them for pamphlets, books and other information. If you tell them who you are and why you want the information, they will probably be very willing to help. If so, they might be a useful source of information again in the future. Put their details in your contacts books (see Chapter 15: Newsroom books).

You need to learn the laws and regulations under which the education system operates. Get hold of a copy of the Education Act and read it. It will not be easy, since legal language is very hard to understand, especially if you are a second language user. So ask the Ministry of Education whether they have a summary of the Act, in simple language; or arrange to meet a lawyer who can explain to you what the Act is all about. This is not easy, but it is vital if you are to ask intelligent questions and explain to your readers or listeners why things are happening in your education system.

You need to find out who's who. Who is the Minister of Education and the Secretary of the Department of Education? Who are the influential teachers? Are there any organisations which represent the interests of teachers, students, or parents? If so, who are the leaders? All these people are likely to be your contacts.

You also need to understand the structures of organisations in your round. What is the relationship of the Minister of Education to the Secretary of the department? Who has the most power? Who can order who to do something? At what levels are decisions made and how are they carried out down the chain of command? Once you understand the structures of organisations you can go straight to the correct person for information - and you can explain to your readers or listeners how the system works in practical terms.

You will need to take every opportunity to become more knowledgeable and better educated about your round. Read books and magazines on the subject; attend conferences; attend part-time classes at college if they are available. The more you understand the subject, the better you will
Establish contacts

Any reporter is only as good as their contacts. If you do not have ways of finding the news, you cannot tell it.

You will need to establish contacts, people who understand who you are and what you want, and are prepared to cooperate with you.

Many young journalists feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about asking people to provide them with information. They may feel shy or inferior compared with such an important person, and find it difficult to ask for anything at all; or they may feel like a beggar, asking for charity. A journalist does not need to feel like this at all.

A young female doctor may have to attend an important person - perhaps the Prime Minister. It will not help the Prime Minister if the doctor is so shy that she cannot ask the Prime Minister to remove his shirt for the examination. So the doctor does not think of herself as a young woman, but as a professional person; and she does not think of the Prime Minister as an important person, but as a patient. In this way she can command proper professional respect and do her job - and so give the help which the Prime Minister needs.

Is the job of journalism worth doing? Is it important? If you have got this far into the book, you must think so. In that case, remember at all times that you are a professional journalist, and approach important people with the self-confidence which that brings. You will still be courteous, of course, just as the doctor will be.

You will also be helped if you remember that many of the people you wish to be your contacts can benefit from having direct access to a journalist. There may be times in the future when they will be cross with the things you must write - especially if you have bad news to tell - but there will also be times when they will be glad to have the opportunity to get their point of view across to the public.

So, you believe that you are doing an important job and you are aware that many of these people want to know you as much as you want to know them. Now you must get acquainted.

Get acquainted

Start by arranging to visit each of them in turn. Explain who you are, and that you have just been appointed education reporter. Explain that you want to do a good job, reporting honestly and accurately all that is going on in the field of education. (Your potential contact will surely approve of that!) Then say that, in order to do this, you will require their help and cooperation. Will they help you in this way, please? It would be a strange person who refused such a request.

You then need to explain the nature of the relationship you are suggesting. You will visit or telephone from time to time, either to ask specific questions or just for a general chat about what is going on; but you will also want your contact to take the initiative and telephone you whenever anything important is happening. Above all, in return for your special attention in this field of education, you will expect your contact to give you information (quietly, as a tip-off) before they give it to any other journalists. In return, they can have your cooperation in a number of fields, which we shall return to at the end of this chapter.

You will also need to explain clearly and honestly that your first duty is to your readers or listeners, not to your contact. It is unlikely that there would ever be a conflict between the two duties, but if they did ever conflict - for instance, if your contact asked you to keep a conspiracy secret, so that he did not get into trouble - your clear duty would be to do your job and write the story. It is important that your contacts understand this from the very beginning.
After you have established contacts, you must keep in touch with them. Often you will just telephone, but remember that there is no substitute for personal contact: call in and see them as often as possible. Build their trust in you and their respect for you, by taking great care to understand whatever you are told and to report it accurately. Do not ever be ashamed to admit during an interview that you have not understood something. It is better that you admit this in private, and have the matter explained, than to demonstrate your ignorance in public, by writing a silly story.

When you go on holiday, try to arrange for another reporter to cover your round while you are away. You do not want there to be no news about education for two weeks, just because you are away.

Let your contacts know that you will be away. If another reporter is going to cover your round, tell your contacts who it will be.

Finally, be cautious when any of your contacts is a press officer. Your relationship with such a person will not be the same as with most other contacts. You will need to remember at all times what the press officer's job is, to understand their motives. See Chapter 18: Media releases, for a more detailed consideration of this.

Use your news sense

However good your contacts are, you cannot expect them to have good sense. They are not journalists. So you cannot always expect them to know when something is newsworthy.

There are two answers to this. First, you can spend some time explaining to them what you mean by "news", and the sort of information which you are looking for. Second, you need to spend time regularly just chatting with your contacts, asking them what is going on. Do not just ask them: "Is there any news at the moment?"

As you chat, you may find out things which are unusual and interesting, but which are not major policy issues. These are the news stories which you will spot, but which a public servant may well overlook.

For example, on one visit to a headmaster you may notice that he has a gold medal in a frame on his wall. If you do not remember seeing it before, you will ask him about it. This can make an interesting news story, although the headmaster may not have thought you would be interested.

Your news sense will also tell you the right time to follow up what has happened in a running story. If you learn that a cost comparison is to be done on using white-boards and spirit marker pens in schools rather than blackboards and chalk, you can ask when they expect results. When you know, make a note in your diary for that time: "January 13: Ask Secretary Education about white-board costs."

When the time comes, make sure that you call in to see the Secretary, and during the conversation you can casually say: "Oh, by the way, what was the outcome of that cost comparison you were having done on using white-boards in schools?" You are now showing real interest in your round, and will get information which other journalists will only find out about by reading or hearing your reports.

Translate jargon

In any field of human activity, experts develop their own jargon. Other experts in the same field will understand them, and the use of this jargon enables them to talk about complicated things in fewer words.

However, anybody who is not an expert in the field is excluded by this jargon. What does a computer expert mean by a "serial port"? What does a policeman mean by "sus" or "GBH"? What
does a doctor mean by a "contusion"?

As you become more expert in your round, you will hear a lot of jargon, and you will understand what it means. Indeed, you will start to use it yourself in talking to your contacts. You must take care that you do not use it in your reports; you must translate it into plain language first.

For example, U.S. military spokesmen in time of war use a great many jargon words, many of which are chosen with great care to soften the real meaning. They will talk of "ordnance" when they mean bombs; they will talk of "collateral damage" when they mean civilian casualties; they will talk of "neutralising", when they mean killing. It is understandable that people whose job is to do unpleasant things on society's behalf should mask harsh reality in this way; but it is the job of the journalist to say clearly to the reader or listener what all this means. Journalists should talk plainly about bombs, and about civilians being killed and injured. See Chapter 11: Language & style - words, for a more detailed consideration of jargon.

Incidentally, journalists should also avoid passing on their own jargon to the public. We know what we mean by an "intro", but the reader does not. We tend to use the word "story" to mean a news report, but most people use the word "story" to mean something that is not true. It is better to refer to "reports" than to "stories" when talking to the reader or listener, and save the word "story" for jargon within the newsroom.

Give and take

We said earlier that you do not need to feel like a beggar in your relationship with your contacts, because you can give as well as take. This is important. If you only take from your contacts, and give nothing in return, your contacts will soon lose interest in you.

What, then, can you give? There are three things.

First, you give the opportunity for your contact to get their point of view across to the public. If you never use any quotes from a particular contact, or if you misrepresent what they say, then you are not giving in this way.

Second, you can give good news about what is going on in your contact's organisation. A lot of reported news is bad news, because bad news travels much faster than good news and is therefore easier to gather. However, people are also interested in good news, as long as it is real news. Always be on the lookout for good news stories about your contacts, and encourage them to tell you about good things which you can publicise. They will like this, and of course it is likely to enhance their prestige.

Third, you can do little favours for them, like getting them a print of a photograph which you published, and which they liked; or getting a photocopy of a back-issue of your newspaper; maybe even giving them a copy of the program in which they appeared.

Take care here, though. There is always the danger that a dishonest person could ask you to do something dishonest as a "little favour". Do not be naive. Whatever you do, imagine yourself being asked later by your editor, your parents, your wife or husband, your priest, about what you have done. If you would be ashamed to admit it to any of these people, then it is probably wrong.

TO SUMMARISE:

Specialist rounds reporters improve the quality of their newspaper, radio or television station
Rounds reporters must be careful to stay emotionally detached from their round.

To do a round well you need to:

- do preparation work
- establish good contacts
- rely on your own news sense
- translate the jargon
- be as helpful as you can
Chapter 27: Political rounds

In this chapter, we discuss some of the ethical issues in reporting on politics and we look at some of the skills you need to be a good political reporter, especially how to gather information. In the next chapter we discuss how to write in an informed way which your readers or listeners can understand.

Politics is a big area which provides a very large part of the media's diet of news. Politics is about relationships within and between societies, about the use of power and authority, and about the government of countries or communities. For journalists, politics can range from stories about individuals competing for power in minor organisations to nation competing against nation in international affairs.

It is difficult to define where politics ends and government begins - or even if there is a dividing line. In this and the following chapter, we will look at the ways of reporting power struggles as news, at the coverage of elections, and at government - the practical application of politics.

Principles of political reporting

The most important thing to remember about politics is that it involves people. It involves the politicians who make decisions, the public servants who carry out their orders and - most important - the people affected by their actions. Your job as a journalist is to serve the people affected, to explain how the decisions will affect their lives. You should also give them knowledge they need to take part in debates and vote for the people who will serve them best. You should not be writing for the politicians or public servants concerned in particular issues; they should know already what is going on. Whenever you report on any political story, always ask yourself: "How will it affect my readers' or listeners' lives?"

There is a further reason for reporting politics. If you tell the people what is happening, they can give their reactions to it. They can write letters to the editor, give their opinions in vox pops or express their feelings directly to the politicians and public servants themselves. In this way, those in power know what the people they are governing think. This is important in any democracy.

Explain events and issues

One of your main tasks as a journalist is to explain events and issues in a way your readers or listeners can understand. If you only report what happens or what is said, you will give your readers or listeners a fragmented picture of the world. They also need to know how and why things happen. Your stories must always put events and issues in context, showing how they affect people.

Explanations do not have to be long descriptions. It can often be done in one or two sentences. In the following example, we explain why it is significant that Parliament has extended its sitting to debate a finance bill:

Parliament is to sit for an extra day, to complete debate on a bill to introduce deep sea fishing licences. The Government wants the Fishery Control Bill passed this session, in order to raise revenue. Fisheries Minister Alva Maifu hopes that the licensing system will raise more than $1 million. If the bill is not passed by Parliament tomorrow, it will have to wait for the next session in three months time.

Such explanations are particularly important in politics, where there is often a lot of debate and dealing in the background before decisions are reached which affect the lives of your readers or listeners. The change of one key person in a political structure may alter the whole nature of that
structure and, as a result, change the lives of your readers or listeners.

**Explanation not advice**

There is an important difference between explaining events and giving advice on how to alter situations. Explanation is clearly one role of the journalist. Leave the political activist or the expert in that field to give advice. Your job as a journalist is to report different opinions, not to judge them. Be objective.

For example, while you should report that your country has signed a new trade treaty with Japan, and explain what it will mean for imports, exports, prices and jobs, you should not give your personal opinion on whether you think the treaty is a good or a bad thing. Your job is to tell the news, put it in context, report some expert opinion - and leave your audience to make up their own minds (see Chapter 56: Facts and opinion).

**Know your audience**

As with any area of news, it is important that you know your readers or listeners. You can then adapt your news-telling style to their general level of interest and understanding, remembering always that you should aim to inform the less-educated members of your audience as well as the educated ones.

It is worth adding here that some societies or communities are more "political" than others. By this we mean that they see politics at work in issues more often than the members of some other communities.

An awareness of the general level of political consciousness in your community will help you to determine which issues you need to cover - and how.

Do not confuse your community's general level of political consciousness with your own interest in political affairs, which might be greater because you work in the media. If readers or listeners are not interested in politics, you should not force them. However, even a lack of interest in politics should not cut them off from receiving news of a political nature about things which affect their lives.

For example, your readers or listeners may have little interest in debates in parliament over transport policy. However, if the debate ends in a decision to increase bus fares by 20 percent, you must tell them this.

**Be suspicious**

It may seem obvious, but remember that you cannot believe everything you are told in politics. Always be suspicious about what people say, especially when they make promises or boast about their achievements.

When a politician or political activist speaks just to appear good (or to keep in the public eye for the next election), you should treat what they say as personal advertising.

When they speak on a current issue, you should ask whether their comments add to the people's understanding of the issue. If they do, that is news. If they do not, that is just personal advertising.
Cultivate sources and contacts

Even though you may be suspicious of the motives of politicians, you should still try to make a wide range of contacts among them. You may need to put aside your personal dislike for a politician or his philosophy. You should judge politicians you dislike in the same way as you judge those you admire. Whenever they speak on an issue, you must ask:

- Do they have the power to do anything practical about what they are saying? Can they change words into deeds?
- Are they influential in shaping opinion?
- Does their specific comment increase your audience’s understanding of the issue?

If the answer is "yes" to any of the above, they may be worth reporting.

On a practical level, even politicians you personally dislike will give you stories if they believe that you will treat them fairly.

Politicians in opposition often provide useful information about abuses by those in power. Both you and they are there to monitor the performance of the rulers, whether national or local.

You may, of course, be working in a country where confrontation is not encouraged in politics. In some countries, politicians not in power are meant to support the leaders, not oppose them. Everyone is urged to work together to achieve certain national goals. Even in situations such as these, criticism is usually allowed as long as its aim is to suggest improvements to the system, not simply to oppose it on ideological grounds.
In most political systems, the leaders and the people try to work together to improve their society. They can do this by exchanging views. Try to keep a balance between reporting the achievements of the powerful and reporting the concerns of the powerless.

Protect confidentiality

Because political reporters have to deal with both sides in an argument, you have a duty to respect the confidentiality of sources - you must keep any promises you give to keep certain information to yourself. For example, you should not tell an interviewee what you have just learned in confidence from their opponent unless you know that the opponent will not mind. If people feel that they can talk in confidence to you, they will often give you plenty of material, both on and off the record. On the record comments can be reported. Off the record comments are usually given on agreement that they will not be reported. (For more details, see Chapters 59 and 60 on sources of information.)

Know your subject

Knowing your subject and being properly prepared is vital in all fields of journalism. Before you do any interview, you need to know something about the issue, its latest developments and history; the interviewee's background and politics; and the political system applicable to the issue. It could, for example, be pointless interviewing a local council leader about defence policy when defence is a central government responsibility. Equally, it could be embarrassing to ask a person why he opposes a measure when, in fact, he supports it in principle.

Always try to prepare some searching questions. Some stories will demand a very critical approach, others may only need a clear explanation and some questions to make some points clearer.

You must always pursue a line of questioning until you get an answer that will satisfy your readers or listeners. They cannot ask the party leader, association chairman or minister directly, so your readers or listeners rely on you to know what kind of questions they want answering. You may think you already know the answers, but the purpose of journalism is not to educate you. You exist as a journalist to inform your readers or listeners, so keep asking questions until you are sure that they will be satisfied with the answers.

It is important that you keep up-to-date records of any changes in government structures or political office. Whenever you write a story about any political or government changes, also make the necessary changes in the newsroom reference file. For example, if there is a cabinet reshuffle, get a full list of the new ministers and put it in the newsdesk file. Regularly update your files and check contact numbers.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Tell your readers or listeners how political decisions will affect their lives

Your job is to report different opinions, not to judge them; be objective

Cultivate a wide range of contacts
Politics should be reported in the same way as other news, giving the same thought to the selection, gathering and presentation of facts and opinions.

**Story structure**

Political stories can be written in the inverted pyramid style. However, because political issues can usually be seen from a number of different viewpoints, political stories are often more complicated to write than a simple report of an event. You need to include factual details of any measure or decision, but also report the different opinions on the issue.

The simplest way of doing this is to start by giving one angle in the intro and first part of the story, then switch to other views later.

However, this approach can be unfair, especially in newspapers where the reader might lose interest before coming to the other comments. The best way to structure a news story to overcome this problem is to include a reference to the other opinions early in your story. You do not have to give them in full at the beginning of your story; you just need to mention them, then you can explain them in more detail further down. (For a full explanation of how news stories can move from the main inverted pyramid structure into a pyramid of pyramids, see Chapter 25: Advanced news writing.

In the following example, we mention the alternative viewpoint of Mr Choo in the fourth paragraph.

The Finance Minister has introduced a bill to tax foreign property investments.

Mr Ben Bali says the tax is an attempt to stop people buying houses if they have no interest in living in this country.

The Bali plan will increase stamp duty on house purchases by 100 percent, but give all residents a full tax rebate on the extra amount.

The plan has been attacked by Opposition Leader Jo Choo, who says it will be difficult and expensive to operate.

The bill was first drawn up in 1987, but was not introduced into Parliament because of a lack of support in the Government ranks.

Mr Bali says the measure now has the support of all Government MPs etc...

In the example above, you would need to return to Mr Choo’s comments later in the story, after you have discussed the bill in more detail, explaining how it would affect your readers or listeners.

This structure can also be used for long reports on radio and television. However, for short reports, it does not make sense to change from Bali to Choo, then back to Bali, then back to Choo, all in the space of just six or seven sentences.
News first

As with other news stories, you should give the news first, the comment second (as in the example above). The only time you give the comment first is if you are writing a follow-up or reaction story, in which case you refer back to the facts already revealed.

In cases where your intro interprets an event or announcement in different terms - perhaps putting a human face on a political announcement - you should immediately explain it.

In the following example, we give the human interest angle in the intro - the holiday - then explain in the second paragraph why children are getting an extra day off school:

**Schoolchildren throughout the country will have an extra day's holiday this year.**

This is because the Education Department has made November 1 a day of national stock-taking.

More than 2,000 teachers in primary and secondary schools will be expected to spend the day counting books, pencils, rulers and other equipment.

The human face

The example above shows the value of putting a human face on what could have been a very boring story about stock-taking.

Most political stories are about people, but many politicians and bureaucrats hide the human face behind the way they talk about issues and events. This is because they are specialists in politics and government, not in communications.

They see things from a different angle, and sometimes concentrate so much on solving a specific problem that they forget how it will appear to ordinary people.

So it is your job to express stories in human terms - what is happening to your readers or listeners where they live, work and play.

For example, if the politicians talk about "urban renewal", get further details and write the story in terms which the people in the areas affected can understand. Compare the stories on the following page. See how the correct version concentrates on how the policy will affect the readers’ or listeners’ lives, while the wrong version lacks this human face.

**RIGHT:**

Five hundred homes in the National Capital District will be pulled down to make way for a new entertainment centre and shopping arcades.

The demolitions are part of the NCD Commission's urban renewal policy which will affect three areas of the NCD.

More than 300 homes will be pulled

**WRONG:**

The National Capital District Commission has announced an urban renewal policy.

The policy will mean that about 500 houses across the city will be demolished to make way for an entertainment centre and shopping arcades.
down in Boroko to build an entertainment centre. A further 100 homes in Hohola and Gordon will be demolished to build shopping arcades.

Politicians and public servants often hide the human face of events and issues behind difficult official language we call jargon. Sometimes they use it to disguise the real meaning of unpleasant facts or decisions. The enemy is no longer "killed", they are "neutralised"; where there used to be "the unemployed", now we have "a pool of reserve labour" - the list is endless. When faced with a complicated idea, do not be tempted to repeat it word-for-word and hope that some of your audience will understand. Your job is to cut through the jargon to show exactly how policies, rules and regulations will affect your readers or listeners. A good dictionary or advice from other journalists is necessary if you are to avoid passing on your own ignorance to your readers or listeners.

**Elections**

One of the most important functions of the media in democratic societies is to act as a forum for the discussion of issues, especially during elections. The media also provide platforms for political hopefuls to be judged by the electorate.

It is important, therefore, that in the run-up to an election, you are fair to all sides and do not favour one candidate or party over another. One practical way is to keep a running table of the amount of space or time you give to each party or political group, then adjust their coverage accordingly (see Chapter 57: Fairness).

Balance is best achieved by focusing on issues rather than on personalities. If you give all candidates the chance to discuss the issues, you will get an approximate balance. You should be particularly concerned with issues which will affect your readers or listeners. These include such things as housing, education, health, law and order, transport, agriculture and fisheries.

As well as discussing the issues, you should also try to educate your readers or listeners about the political and electoral process. Whenever you use a story about the forthcoming election, you should ask: "Do I need to put in extra words of explanation?"

For example, you might need an occasional brief explanation of which parties belong to the opposition coalition, or that the Upper House is not due for election for another two years.

There are also basic concepts such as "electoral rolls" and "registration" which need explaining from time to time. Try to combine the explanation in the news story itself, rather than adding it on to the end:

Voters in the Southern Highlands have been warned that they have until Friday to get their names on the electoral roll.

Electoral Commissioner Fred Blani says that only people whose names are listed on the electoral roll will be able to vote in next month's provincial elections.

**Election results**

When writing news stories in the run-up to an election and during the count, take special care that you give only those features which will be of interest to your readers or listeners without confusing them with unnecessary detail.
You should report the winning party and winners in electorates relevant to your audience, as well as any significant losers (perhaps the defeat of the sitting member).

You should indicate how big the winning margin was, and remember that in many countries the new government does not exist until it is sworn in by the Head of State.

If you are presenting a special edition or programme on election night, you have to plan well in advance. You must make sure you can get results quickly and accurately from reliable sources and prepare material for background features to fill in gaps.

Journalists producing special radio or television programs should invite expert guests on to the show at certain times to break up what could otherwise be a very long and boring program. Try to mix interviews or profiles with up-to-the-minute reports on the latest state of polling or counting, giving regular summaries of the results so far. Many people will tune in during the program just for the latest results. If they do not hear a summary within ten or 15 minutes, they will tune elsewhere or switch off.

Although radio and television have the advantage of being able to present election results faster than newspapers, broadcasters are not able to give such detailed coverage. They can tell their listeners who has won, but radio in particular is not able to present the figures in the form of tables which people can examine for detailed information.

Newspapers, on the other hand, can present all the mass of detail for the readers to absorb slowly, studying the results which particularly interest them and ignoring the others.

Newspapers will usually wish to publish a special results supplement, with all the election results in it. This, too, will need careful planning, especially accurate calculations of how much space the results will need. The rest of the space will need to be given to stories summarising the most interesting and significant results, giving information about people elected for the first time and similar stories. It should also include a table showing the new state of the political parties as a result of the election.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Tell your readers or listeners how political decisions will affect their lives

Your job is to report different opinions, not to judge them; be objective

Cultivate a wide range of contacts

Write bright, interesting stories with a human face

Be fair to all sides; this is especially important during election time
Chapter 29: Reporting industry & finance

In this chapter, we advise on ways of simplifying the news gathering and writing of stories about business and money. We briefly discuss how to cover industrial disputes. We show you how to read a balance sheet. In the following chapter we provide a short glossary of economic terms.

This is an increasingly important field of journalism, and covers such areas as industry and agriculture, commerce, finance and economics - the ways wealth is created and distributed. It is important to readers and listeners, even though they may only be interested in knowing about wage or price rises, house buying or currency exchange rates.

Basic principles

Although at first sight it may seem a very complicated area - full of theories, rules and numbers - you can report it well as long as you remember some simple principles.

Understand the basics

Like any specialist area, there is a basic core of knowledge which you must understand before you can write competently. You do not need to know every aspect of economic theory or possess a degree in business studies, but it is not possible to be a competent journalist without the ability to understand a simple balance sheet or explain profit and loss. Once you understand the basics, you can ask other people to fill in details. Then you can explain what happens in the financial world in a way your readers or listeners can understand.

Report the human face

Because economics is about human actions, it should be possible to tell all economic news stories in human terms. If it is not possible, you must question whether you should really use the story at all.

For example, a story about an increase in import duty should not be written in terms of financial policy, but in terms of what it will mean to your readers or listeners who buy imported goods:

**GOOD:**
The price of sugar could rise by as much as 20 cents a kilo from next week.

**BAD:**
The Government wants to increase the duty on imported sugar by 15 percent, to protect local industry.

The Government is to increase the duty on imported sugar by 15 percent.
The increase is an attempt to protect local growers from cheap imported sugar.

Of course, simplification should not be taken too far. There are some economic issues which affect society as a whole and need serious treatment. It would be an over-simplification to view a plunge in the exchange rate of your currency only as if it will make travellers' cheques more expensive. There would be much greater consequences, both good and bad, such as a rise in the cost of imports and a boost to export industries.

Even these more serious effects should be put in human terms. The travellers' cheques aspect is a very minor side effect. The cost of imported goods on shelves and in showrooms is the right angle.
Give the local angle

Economics is often expressed in terms of cooperation or competition between nations. Economic stories on the major international wire services are usually written from the viewpoint of the major developed nations (and figures are usually quoted in United States Dollars). You have to avoid presenting the issues through the eyes of foreigners.

Your readers or listeners will usually be interested in the economic effect on their own country. Imagine that you are a journalist in Fiji, and have been given a wire service story about a new fishing agreement with New Zealand. While your Fijian audience might be interested in economic stories about New Zealand, they will be more interested in the Fijian side of the deal. So you should research the story with the Fijian government, then write it from the Fijian angle:

**GOOD:**
Fiji is to be a major partner in an expansion of New Zealand's fishing industry.

The project will be worth $F10 million to Fijian companies and could mean an extra 500 jobs locally.

The World Bank is to give New Zealand US$200 million ($F300 million) to expand etc...

**BAD:**
New Zealand is to receive US$200 million dollars from the World Bank to expand its fishing industry.

The money will be used to buy boats and build processing factories in New Zealand and overseas.

Processing plants will be established in Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Fiji. Each country will get etc ...

Notice how, in this example, we also converted US Dollars (US$) into Fijian Dollars ($F). You must always convert foreign currencies into your country's currency, which your readers or listeners can understand. In some cases you may need to give both the original currency and the conversion in brackets.

Do not overload with numbers

Many economic concepts are quite complicated. You should lead your readers or listeners gently but firmly through your explanation. Your job will not be helped if you scatter numbers through the story like rocks on the path. Your readers or listeners will be held up whenever they stumble over a difficult number.

In the chapters on news writing, we suggested that two or three concepts (ideas) were the most that readers or listeners can handle in each sentence. Each number in an economics story must be regarded as an extra concept because the readers or listeners have to think about it separately before continuing their understanding of the sentence.

Your task is to select only those numbers which are most important (i.e. those which tell the story best) and then spread them throughout the story. Do not pile them like a barrier of rocks across the first paragraph.

**GOOD:**
Teachers in the Cook Islands will get an average of $10 a week extra from next month.

The rise is the first instalment of an

**BAD:**
Teachers in the Cook Islands are to get an average of $10 a week extra next month as the first instalment of a 15 percent wage rise spread over 18 months.
agreement reached in November.

Under the agreement, teachers will get a rise of 15 percent over the next year-and-a-half.

Notice how much simpler the good version was, compared to the bad version which tried to crush four sets of figures into one sentence.

In radio especially, you should never give your audience complicated sums to do during news stories. They will either fail to do them and so miss an important aspect of the story, or they will be so busy doing mental arithmetic that they miss the rest of the bulletin.

You should have the figures in front of you as you write the story. Do the sums before you present the information. Money figures and fractions are usually easier to grasp than percentages. Almost two thousand is easier to grasp than 1,963.

Instead of saying "wages will be cut by 50 percent", say "wages will be cut in half". Instead of "the price of Gurgles beer is to rise by five percent on June the first", say "Gurgles beer will rise by eight cents a can next month".

Visualise what numbers mean

Whenever you deal in figures, try to visualise what each of the numbers means. This will help you gain a complete picture of the way the finances fit together. See if the numbers make sense by working them out into meaningful units. Spending $500,000 to build 120 houses may sound OK, but divide 500,000 by 120 and you have an average of just over $4,000 per house. Is that a likely price for a house? If we are talking about simple village houses, then perhaps it is; if we are talking about big fancy town houses, then it may not be. Perhaps someone has missed out or added a zero when typing the figures. One zero missed can mean a ten-fold increase or decrease.

Visualising the figures also helps you question people's claims. In our housing example, the politician who offers to spend $500,000 on public housing may seem to be promising a lot (half-a-million dollars!), but if each house costs $40,000 to build, he'll only build 12 houses.

Avoid jargon

The world of commerce and economics, like politics and science, is full of specialist words we call jargon. These are phrases which mean a lot to those who use them every day. They do not, however, help your readers or listeners to understand what can already be complicated ideas (see Chapter 11: Language & style - words).

Sometimes jargon is too long and can be easily shortened - "a medium of exchange" becomes "money". Sometimes jargon is a shorthand for a longer concept and needs explaining in more detail - "hot money" becomes "money coming into the country to take advantage of high local interest rates".

If you get jargon in a press release, do not hesitate to go back to the source for an explanation. If you do not understand it, there is a good chance that many of your readers or listeners will also be confused.

Investigative journalism

Another of the main problems journalists face in reporting the world of commerce is that information may be hard to get. The people who have power over wealth often like to keep their
knowledge as secret as they can. This is partly because they do not want competitors to know what they are doing, but also partly because many of them see wealth as a personal thing, not the concern of the rest of society. But if their power over wealth affects other people, particularly your ordinary readers or listeners, you have a duty to let them know what is happening in society. If people are employed or buy goods, they have a right to know what employers, manufacturers and retailers are doing.

If people in the world of commerce are doing things which are illegal or unethical, they should be exposed. Because many people in the financial world bend rules or take advantage of gaps in the law to make quick money, the field of investigative journalism is a rich one.

It is also a varied one. You may not be exposing financial wrongdoing. You may simply want to find out how much money a foreign company has invested in your country. Finding the information you need may be simple or difficult, depending on what you need to know, who you need to get it from and what they may have to hide (if anything).

Finding information

If you want some information about a company, the first place to look is in your own records or newsroom files. There may be previous stories which you can use. If you are investigating a foreign company, some public or college libraries have editions of overseas newspapers, often on microfiche.

You should ask the company itself for information. If they have nothing to hide, they may be willing to help.

However, if you are researching a story which could be critical of the company in any way, they may refuse to give the information you need. Sometimes they will plead the need to keep information from their competitors.

You should also try to get hold of the company's annual report. You may be able to get this direct from the company itself, from a good library or from the embassy or high commission concerned.

Finally, you can ask the Company Registrar's office (it may be called something like the Registrar General or Corporate Affairs Commission in your country). These offices keep records on registered companies and often investigate complaints of misconduct against companies. In some countries, they maintain records for public searches.

Usually all you need to do is go to the Company Registrar's office and ask to see the records of the particular company. You may have to pay a small search fee. You will not be allowed to take any files away, but may be allowed to make photocopies of relevant documents.

You may not be allowed to see all the company’s files. Some are kept confidential for legitimate commercial reasons (for example, so that competitors cannot copy their ideas or see their pricing structures). However, with plenty of spare time and by cross-referring to other files, it is possible to construct a very accurate picture of a company's business links and activities from these public records.

You might, for example, want to trace how directors of one company are linked to other companies which are supposed to be competitors. You might find that politicians or public servants are directors of companies which are bidding for public contracts.

If your country has a Freedom of Information Act, you may be able to get copies of a company’s records through a government department with which it does business. Unfortunately, many Freedom of Information Acts exclude public examination of commercial documents held by government departments.

Of course, investigative journalism is much more complicated than simply asking to be shown
documents (see Chapters 39 to 41 on investigative reporting).

**Reading a balance sheet**

Although the world of commerce seems full of documents containing figures, there is one kind of document which is at the heart of all business. It is called a balance sheet. As the name suggests, it shows how any organisation which deals in money balances the money coming in with the money going out. If more comes in than goes out, the organisation makes a profit; if more goes out than comes in, it makes a loss. If the loss is big enough, the organisation can die. It is essential, therefore, that you are able to read a balance sheet.

There should be nothing frightening about it. A balance sheet is not usually designed to hide figures, but to explain a mass of figures in a logical way.

Below we have provided a sample of a balance sheet showing government income and expenditure over three years. Following it there is an outline of how the individual totals relate to each other. Study the balance sheet and the outline until you can understand how all the figures fit together.

There are a number of simple steps to follow whenever you are faced with a balance sheet:

- Read the title at the top of the sheet carefully. Make sure that the balance sheet is really what you thought it was. Many journalists have made the mistake of thinking that they were looking at the company’s overall balance sheet when, in fact, they were simply looking at a balance sheet of one small aspect (for example, the capital account). There could be several balance sheets in an annual report, showing different aspects of the organisation’s finances.
- Note the currency and units in which the figures will be expressed. Glance down at some to make sure you can work out whether the figures are in units of one, tens, hundreds, thousands or millions. There is normally an indication of the multiples used, either at the top of the sheet or at the top of each column.
- Look at the dates showing the periods under review. Simple end-of-year statements will usually have only two dates at the top - this year and last year. Some - like our example - may also have a budget estimate for the following year. Check whether the report periods are for a calendar year or - more usually - a financial year. Calendar years run from 1 January to 31 December. Financial years vary from country to country; in some countries it is the same as the calendar year, in others it may be from 1 July one year to 30 June the following year or from 1 April one year to 31 March the following year. If in doubt, ask someone who knows.
- The easiest way to come to grips with the table itself is first to try to see it as a whole and then break it down into smaller units. First of all, can you find the expenditure and income sections? In old balance sheets, these were put side by side, like the scales on either side of a measuring balance. In modern accounting they follow each other.
- Notice which lines of figures are sub-totals of each section, and which are totals. Do some quick mental arithmetic to check that you understand how all the figures relate to each other.
- Finally look at the bottom line of figures. Does this show the balance is in credit or deficit (profit or loss)? In some cases, the deficit is distinguished from profit by being inside brackets or having a minus sign in front of it. Occasionally on colour documents the negative amounts might printed be in red ink, which is the origin of the phrase “to be in the red” which means to be making a loss or in debt. On company balance sheets, the bottom totals usually balance (hence the term ‘balance sheet’), with the profit or loss shown as one element of a section higher up the sheet.

The profit/loss line is often the news angle, but you should search around for any unusual aspects. For example, are there any very large figures or any dramatic changes from one year to the next? Don't forget to read any notes at the foot of the balance sheets for explanations.
The following is an outline view of the balance sheet above. Take a few minutes to compare the two so you can see what the figures mean and how they relate to each other. While this is a simple form of balance sheet outline, most balance sheets will have similar features, even if they are more complex.
Unions and employers

The relationships between trade unions and employers play a very important part in the economic life of many countries. It is far too big a subject to discuss in detail here, although one or two facts are worth pointing out.

The first is that you must be fair in dealing with disputes. Unions traditionally exist to represent employees in negotiating with employers, whether these are companies, governments or individuals. In many countries they exist to fight for better wages and other working conditions, while in other countries they may exist only to keep workers informed of what their employers
want. In whatever form, they are usually a means of airing complaints.

The essential point is that, wherever one group is arguing against another (such as union against employer) you must be fair to both sides. It is rare for one side in an industrial dispute to be totally right and the other totally wrong. There is usually some right and some wrong on both sides. It is not your job to judge. Simply report the facts, give comments from both sides, and leave your readers or listeners to judge for themselves. (See Chapter 57: Fairness.)

Unions, where they exist, are useful for journalists because they provide identifiable people to comment regularly on industrial matters from the workers’ point of view. Most companies or government departments have a boss or a person responsible for speaking to the media. It is more difficult to get comments on the workers’ case unless there is an identifiable leader. Union leaders make useful contacts and may give you tip-offs about industrial disputes which the employers want to keep out of the media because of bad publicity. As in all cases of conflict, do not get too close to either side. Just as the company’s press officer may try to feed you biased information from one side, so the union leader might try to feed you their propaganda. You will be able to deal with both sides fairly and also serve your readers or listeners if, every time they offer you new information, you ask yourself: “Is this news?”

Remember that unions and employers can both be powerful forces in society. In some countries, unions are affiliated to a Council of Trade Unions or a Trade Union Congress, which tries to agree common policies and co-ordinate industrial action such as strikes or boycotts. Employers also often join together in associations to defend their interests. The major employers’ association is often called something like a "Confederation of Industry" or a "Federation of Employers", although at a lower level there may be such bodies as Chambers of Commerce, Chambers of Trade or a particular industrial federation. As with all powerful groups, whether unions or employers, you should not be afraid to report the truth if you work in a free press democracy.

TO SUMMARISE:

You must understand the basics of economics and finance before you can report effectively

Try to write your stories with a human face, in a way your readers or listeners can easily understand

Do not overload your stories with figures

Avoid economic jargon where possible; if you must include technical terms, always explain them

Balance sheets contain lots of useful information on financial organisations; learn to read a balance sheet

Be fair in reporting industrial conflicts
Chapter 30: Quick guide to economics

In the previous chapter we looked at reporting on industry and finance. We mentioned investigative reporting and showed you how to read a simple balance sheet. This chapter is a quick guide to the language of economics.

The field of economics and finance is massive and growing every year. From being a specialist area employing relatively few people 50 years ago, the finance sector in particular has grown to employ hundreds of millions of people throughout the world, in fields as diverse as government, banking, investment, trade and accountancy.

It is not the intention of 'The News Manual' to teach the specific areas you may cover as a journalist, only to teach you how to cover them. However, to be a good journalist in any field you need to understand the basic concepts of economics and finance. You should read about it in books or on the Internet and follow the finance sections of newspapers and magazines until you gain at least a basic understanding. And do not switch off the radio or television when the newsreader says: "And now news on finance!"

You must also understand the basic language of economics and finance. As we mentioned in Chapter 11: Language & style - words, specialist areas of life often have their own specialist language; this is especially true of economics and finance. This "jargon" may seem mysterious and complex but you must make some attempt at least to understand the basics.

It is not possible here to cover the whole range of terms and concepts used in economic and financial reporting. However, the following is a list of terms which you should know. Although based on the British economy, most of the meanings are universal. We also provide links in the Links page to some further resources.

Words which appear in bold type are alternative terms for the word being defined; the full definitions of words in CAPITALS can be found in the list under that heading; words which appear in italics are important terms which you should note.

account: Record of financial dealings, such as a bank account.

assets: Something you own which has a monetary value. These include current assets, usually cash or SHARES which can be converted into money; fixed assets such as buildings or land: intangible assets such as regular customers. Liquid assets can be quickly converted into other forms (money is the most liquid of all). Non-liquid assets (such as specialist machinery) cannot quickly be converted into other forms.

average: A single number intended to represent a range of numbers. Also called the arithmetic mean, it is the sum of all the numbers divided by the number of numbers. Other ways of describing representative numbers include the median, which is the middle number in a range, and the mode, which is the number which occurs most often in the range.

balance of payments: An indication of the financial dealings between the source country and other nations. It consists of the CURRENT ACCOUNT, which is what we spend abroad compared to what other countries buy from us; and the capital account, which is the inward and outward flow of investments, grants and loans.

balance of trade: The BALANCE OF PAYMENTS on the CURRENT ACCOUNT.

balance sheet: The statement of the value of a company on a given date, showing the ASSETS and LIABILITIES.
bankruptcy: A declaration by a court that an individual (or company) cannot meet their debts on a given date. They are said to be insolvent. Bankruptcy proceedings can be started by either the debtor or their unpaid creditors. The court appoints a receiver to administer the company until it either recovers or is sold off (LIQUIDATED).

debt: Money or property owed by one person, company or country to another.

deficit: The amount by which spending is greater than income. Thus we have budget
deficits and balance of payments deficits.

**deflation**: A fall in the CONSUMER PRICE INDEX in a country. The opposite of INFLATION.

**demand**: The willingness and ability to pay for goods or service.

**deposits**: Money placed in an account at a bank or other similar institutions.

**depreciation**: The drop in the value of an ASSET through using it. Companies make an allowance for depreciation of such things as machinery or vehicles before they calculate their PROFIT.

**devaluation**: The reduction in the official rate at which one CURRENCY is exchanged for another. It lowers the price of EXPORTS to buyers in other countries and raises the price of IMPORTS for consumers at home.

**discount**: A temporary reduction in price.

**dividend**: The amount of a company's PROFITS which the board of directors decides to give out to shareholders each year or half-year. It is usually expressed as either a percentage of the nominal value of each SHARE or as an amount of money, such as three cents per share.

**Dow Jones Index**: An index showing the overall values of SHARES on the Wall Street Stock Exchange in New York, compared with their value in the base year the index started.

**earnings**: The return for effort put into a job or the income of a business.

**entrepreneur**: The term usually applied to the owner-manager of a company.

**equity**: The value of a company's ASSETS left over when all LIABILITIES have been taken out (except for payments to shareholders).

**European Community (EC)**: An association of European countries with shared economic, political and social interests. The EC has grown out of the European Economic Community (or Common Market), which was originally formed to encourage the freer movement of goods and services between members.

**exchange rate**: The price (rate) at which one CURRENCY is exchanged against another.

**exports**: The goods and services which are sold to people in other countries.

**Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) Indexes**: A number of price indexes which are published by The Financial Times newspaper, showing changes in the London finance markets. The FTSE 100 Index averages the performance of the top 100 companies trading on the London STOCK EXCHANGE to show how active SHARE trading has been. The initials "FTSE" are usually pronounced as "footsie" in broadcasting.

**financial year**: The annual period at the end of which government and company ACCOUNTS must be completed. Tax returns, for example, are filed at the end of the financial year. Financial years vary from country to country, although typically they start on the first day of January, April or July. Also called the fiscal year.

**fiscal policy**: The part of government policy concerned with raising money through taxation and other ways of controlling spending within the country.

**foreign exchange**: The amount of money and other liquid ASSETS that are held by a country in foreign CURRENCIES.
foreign investment: Spending by people in one country on income-yielding ASSETS in another country.

free trade area: An association of countries where all or most barriers between trade (such as QUOTAS, TARIFFS or SUBSIDIES) have been removed.

fringe benefits: Rewards to employees in addition to the wages or salaries they are paid. They can include company cars, subsidised housing and education, employer-paid health INSURANCE and clothing allowances.

futures: Contracts made in the present to buy or sell ASSETS at a future time. Futures allow manufacturers and traders to protect themselves against price changes.

G8: An international forum of the world’s eight wealthiest nations – The USA, Britain, Germany, Japan, France, Italy, Canada and Russia.

GATT: The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was an international body through which countries could bargain with each other over TARIFFS and QUOTAS. That work is now done by the WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION.

gilt-edged securities: Fixed-interest government SECURITIES. These usually involve less risk to the investor because they are backed by a government.

goods and services tax (GST): See VALUE ADDED TAX.

Gross Domestic Product: GDP is the total market value of the goods and services produced within the nation.

gross income: The total income before tax and other deductions are taken away.

holding company: A company which controls one or more subsidiary companies, usually by holding a majority of SHARES in these subsidiaries.

imports: The goods and services which are bought from people in other countries.

import restrictions: Restrictions on the IMPORT of products into a country, usually by means of TARIFFS and QUOTAS.

income tax: A tax on income, usually the individual’s, not companies or corporations.

indexation: The automatic linking of a monetary obligation (such as a salary, a pension or repayment of a loan) to price levels. If prices rise by a certain amount, so will the obligation if it is index-linked or indexed.

inflation: A rise in the general level of prices.

insolvency: See BANKRUPTCY

insurance: The payment of a PREMIUM to an insurer, who in turn promises to pay compensation in the event of certain events such as fire, theft, accidents or illness.

interest rate: The price of borrowed money. It is normally calculated as the difference between what was lent and what will be repaid, expressed as a proportion of the amount lent. This is usually calculated over a year. There are many interest rates, such as MORTGAGE rate, OVERDRAFT rate etc.

interim dividend: Part payment of the annual DIVIDEND by a company, paid part-way through
International Monetary Fund: The IMF was established to help trade between nations by reducing trade barriers and stabilising EXCHANGE RATES. Member countries put money in according to the size of their economies. Money is lent to countries which have BALANCE OF PAYMENTS problems, to stabilise EXCHANGE RATES. See also WORLD BANK.

investment trust: A company whose only object is to invest CAPITAL in a range of other companies. Members of the trust are issued with SHARES.

invisible earnings: The items on a BALANCE OF PAYMENTS account which a country earns without exporting physical goods. These usually include such things as returns on foreign investment or commission on services provided to other countries.

liabilities: Outstanding debts which have yet to be paid off.

liquidate: To pay off debts. A company is liquidated when it is sold to pay off debts, especially during BANKRUPTCY.

liquidity: Having enough money readily available to meet all current debts.

liquidity ratio: The amount of money a bank can get hold of immediately from cash and other ASSETS, expressed as a proportion of the bank's total DEPOSITS.

market forces: The forces of supply and demand - the prices for which people are prepared to sell goods and services, and the prices other people are prepared to pay for them.

means test: An investigation into an individual's income and wealth to determine whether or not they should receive special benefits.

merger: The joining of two or more companies into one, usually with the consent of all the companies. See also TAKEOVER.

money market: The financial institutions which deal in borrowing, lending and FOREIGN EXCHANGE, over a short period.

money supply: The amount of money which exists in the economy over a given time.

monopoly: An individual, firm or collective which produces all or almost all of a product or service in a market.

mortgage: A loan agreement between two parties (one is usually a bank or other financial institution) by which the lender of money (mortgagee) takes temporary ownership of an ASSET (often a building) and returns the ownership to the borrower of the money (mortgagor) once the debt is settled.

national debt: The total outstanding borrowings of central government.

net income: Income after the deduction of tax and any other compulsory charges.

nominal value: The face value at which a BOND or SHARE was first sold. This is not the same as its current market price.

option: An agreement between a buyer and a seller in which the buyer agrees to buy (or the seller to sell) at a fixed price within a certain time.

ordinary share: SHARES in a venture whose holders will only be paid a DIVIDEND after the
holders of DEBENTURES and PREFERENCE SHARES have been paid.

**OECD**: The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development was formed to promote stable economic growth among members, encourage international trade and help developing countries. As well as publishing regular economic reports, it is a forum for discussing international money problems.

**OPEC**: The Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries represents the world’s main producers and exporters of crude petroleum.

**overdraft**: An agreement with a bank allowing a customer to take more money than they have in their ACCOUNT, up to a certain limit. The customer is charged INTEREST on the overdraft.

**payroll tax**: Also referred to as *withholding tax*, it is a tax levied on an employer’s salaries and wages bill. The employer often takes the major component from their employee’s pay through systems such as *Pay-As-You-Earn* (PAYE) or *Pay-As-You-Go* (PAYG).

**pension fund**: A sum of money laid aside and invested to provide a regular income on retirement or in the case of disability. See also *SUPERANNUATION*.

**per capita income**: An AVERAGE of how much people in a country earn. The total income of a population is divided by the number in the population.

**preference shares**: The holders of preference SHARES lie between DEBENTURE and ORDINARY SHARES in risk and expected income from their investment. They are paid after debenture shareholders (but before ordinary shareholders) in the distribution of DIVIDENDS and in the case of BANKRUPTCY. This is the least common form of shareholding.

**premium**: A regular payment made in return for an INSURANCE policy.

**prime rate**: The basis for commercial INTEREST RATES. It is the rate charged by commercial banks to extremely low-risk corporate borrowers for short-term loans.

**private enterprise**: Production and sale of goods and services by privately-owned businesses, as opposed to government economic activity (*called public enterprise*).

**productivity**: The ratio between output and input. *Labour productivity* is a measure of how efficiently workers produce their goods or services.

**profit**: Revenue minus costs: the difference between what is put into an activity and what is received from it (a negative figure is called a *loss*).

**protectionism**: Imposing TARIFFS and QUOTAS to restrict IMPORTS and thereby protect a domestic industry from overseas competition.

**public company**: A company which has been legally *incorporated* and which may offer SHARES for sale to the general public. Also known as a *corporation*.

**quotas**: The limit set by a government on the amount of a product which can be IMPORTED.

**real terms**: Something is expressed "in real terms" when its value has been adjusted to take into account changes in the purchasing power of money (usually due to INFLATION or CURRENCY changes).

**reflation**: Economic policy designed to increase demand for goods and services and so bring down unemployment. It is often achieved by increasing MONEY SUPPLY and lowering INTEREST RATES.
**Reserve Bank**: A central bank established by the government to control the issue of CURRENCY within a country - or economic area - to maintain a stable economy. The Reserve Bank holds reserves of funds in case commercial banks cannot meet demands for funds by depositors. In many countries it sets *official interest rates* by determining how much it charges other banks to borrow from it.

**revenue**: Money coming into a company. Money which is earned, rather than ASSETS which are owned (often called CAPITAL).

**rights issue**: An offer of new SHARES to existing shareholders.

**seasonal unemployment**: Unemployment due to the seasonal nature of some trade. For example, employment among agricultural workers is highest during harvests.

**securities**: Usually the word to cover BONDS, and also stocks and SHARES. Securities can be bought and sold. The term is also used for property or income promised as a guarantee that a loan will be repaid.

**share**: One of a number of equal parts by which the CAPITAL of a company is divided. Each share entitles the owner to a portion of the company DIVIDENDS and the value of the company if it is LIQUIDATED in BANKRUPTCY. See also DEBENTURES, PREFERENCE and ORDINARY shares.

**stock exchange**: A market in which SECURITIES are bought and sold.

**subsidy**: Government payment to the producer of goods, intended to make prices lower than they would otherwise be (and/or increase the income of the producer).

**Superannuation**: Often shortened to "super", it is a system whereby workers and/or their employers set aside money from their wages in a separate fund to pay for their retirement, either as a PENSION or a *lump sum*.

**take-over**: The buying of one company by another, either by paying money for SHARES or (in the case of larger companies) by exchanging SECURITIES (usually shares).

**tariff**: A government tax on imports.

**trust**: Money invested by an individual or group for the benefit of someone else (often the person making the money available to them).

**turnover**: The total sales revenue of a business.

**unit trust**: An organisation which takes money from subscribers and invests it in a wide range of investments to minimise risk. In return, it issues units to the subscribers, which it promises to buy back at any time. Unit trusts are aimed at small investors.

**Value-added tax (VAT)**: A tax which is imposed at every stage at which goods or services are exchanged, from primary production to final consumption. In some countries it is called a *goods and services tax (GST)*.

**World Bank**: An international organisation which lends money gathered from its members (usually the richer countries) to help development in poorer nations. It is generally controlled by the seven wealthier nations. See also G8.

**World Trade Organisation (WTO)**: An international organisation representing 151 member countries with responsibility for developing international trade and supervising trade agreements between members.
**yield**: The income from a SECURITY as a proportion of its current market price. The *dividend yield* is the DIVIDEND as a percentage of the market price of the security.
Chapter 31: Reporting science & technology

In this chapter, we discuss the challenge facing journalists in reporting science and technology. We advise on the ways of preparing yourself and of using experts to make your task easier. In the following chapter we discuss ways of writing bright, interesting stories and conclude with some solutions to common problem areas.

Many journalists are afraid of reporting on science and technology. They think these subjects are either too complicated for them to understand or too boring for their audience. This does not need to be so. With the proper preparation, and by following a few simple rules, reporting science and technology can be one of the most interesting jobs a journalist can do. And it certainly does not have to be difficult.

**What is science and technology?**

Like good scientists, let us start by defining what we mean by science and technology.

Science is the organised study of Man and the universe by means of observation, measurement and experiments. Scientists try to find the rules which govern the universe.

Technology is the practical application of science.

Although there is a distinction between them, science and technology overlap in so many ways that we will treat them as a single field in this chapter.

Science and technology have always played an important part in Man’s existence, even though our ancestors may not have called their knowledge and skill by these names. When our ancestors decided on the best season for planting yams, they usually took into account the season, the weather, the amount of water available, the fertility of the soil and a host of other factors. This was simple science. When they dug the soil with a pointed stick or built paddy fields, this was technology.

Today, science and technology have become more complex as we learn more about our universe and develop ways of changing it. Also, because there is so much more knowledge available, scientists are forced to specialise in particular areas, to keep pace with advances.

Science and technology today range all the way from basically theoretical subjects such as quantum physics to more practical subjects like medicine, agriculture and engineering.

Some subjects, such as agriculture and medicine have everyday practical benefits for mankind. Others, such as astronomy, help us understand our universe but do not have an immediate practical effect on us.

There is a host of other fields such as physics, chemistry, zoology, marine biology, geology, ecology, medicine, psychology, mechanical and electrical engineering - the list is enormous and growing every year. Science and technology is too important for journalists to ignore.

**The challenge facing journalists**

Although large news organisations often have reporters with some scientific education to specialise in writing about science and technology, in most smaller newspapers, radio and television stations, this task is left to general reporters. Whether you are a specialist or a general reporter, you should remember the following basic facts principles:
• You are a bridge between the world of science and your community. You do not need to know as much as the scientists. You simply need to be able to put the relevant parts of their knowledge into words which your audience can understand.
• You do not have to understand the whole of any field of science yourself, but you must not write anything you do not understand. If you write something you do not understand, you risk making errors.
• Although the aim of scientists is precision, and the aim of journalists is simplicity, there should be no conflict between the two. You must be able to express the precise details of science accurately in simple terms. That is the real challenge of reporting science and technology.
• Most science and technology will have human applications. For every story, you must ask yourself: "How will this affect my readers' or listeners' lives?" Your job is to describe what those affects are. Remember the four criteria for what makes news.
• Some science, such as astronomy, has no impact on our everyday lives, but is interesting in what it tells us about our universe. The task here is to report it in an interesting and informative way.
• You must always be accurate. Science is built on accuracy.
• Your readers or listeners usually trust science. Often, in fields such as medicine, their lives may depend on it. You should not alarm them by making sensational claims which may not be true.
These are some general rules. How can you apply them in practice?

**The basics of reporting**

You should use the same techniques for good journalism we have discussed earlier in this book. In particular, when reporting science and technology, you should remember the following:

**Build up a basic knowledge**

Science and technology is a huge field, but each subject usually has some basic rules which govern it. If you understand these rules, you will be able to work out the rest of the topic, even though you will not understand all the details. In medicine, for example, you need to understand the basic parts of the body and their functions. You do not need to know all the ingredients in blood, but you should know that blood is the main system of transporting nutrients, chemicals and waste throughout the body.

A good high school education in science should give you enough knowledge of the basic rules to get started. After that, you must take every opportunity to increase your knowledge.

**Read widely**

Science and technology advance so quickly that you must keep up to date. Read articles on science and technology. Read books on basic science (encyclopedias are a good place to start). Avoid textbooks which are too complicated. Instead, look for books which explain their subject in simple terms for ordinary, non-scientific readers. Ask people expert in each field for advice on the best books for your needs - something clear and simple.

**Make contacts**

Get to know as many scientists and technologists as you can. They can give you advice on subjects you do not understand and, like any good contact, they will be a useful source of story ideas.

Do not expect an expert in one field to be able to help in another. Few electrical engineers, for example, will know what lymph glands do in the body. Make as wide a range of contacts as you can, across all the fields of science and technology.

Choose people who can give you (a) story ideas, (b) background information and (c) the names of people you should ask for further details.

Try to establish at least one contact from each major scientific field (such as medicine, environmental science, agriculture and fishing, geology, engineering or any other fields which are especially important in your society). Keep in regular contact with them.

You can quote them in your stories if they are experts in the particular field about which you are writing, but it is better to go to the expert who is best able to give you the specific information you need.

Some scientists are better at explaining their work in simple terms than others. When you are researching a story, go to the contact most suited to your particular need. For example, one zoologist may be able to explain the background to a new development, but you may have to ask the head of the university department or the director of the research station for any official comments.

Do not forget that scientists often work in teams. If one member cannot help, another might be able to.
Technicians and laboratory assistants can be a very good source of story ideas, but do not rely on them for the official version of a story. If they give you a story idea, seek out the scientist concerned for details.

Building trust

Many scientists do not trust journalists. They may not think you are capable of reporting their work properly or they may have had a bad experience with a journalist in the past. They may have been misquoted or seen errors in a story.

You have to show that you can be trusted. It will help if you do some background research of your own before interviewing them, so that you can show you know the basic facts about their field.

It is not enough to tell them you can be trusted; you have to show it in every story that you write. If you make careless errors or do not keep a promise, you will lose their trust for ever.

Dig for the truth

Being friendly does not mean you have to believe everything a person says. Much of science is built on experiments and on trial-and-error. In many fields, a number of scientists may be working on the same topic, and may reach different conclusions. They are often competing against each other to be the first with a result. They may occasionally make big claims to show how important they are or to justify money being spent on their research.

Be especially careful about scientists who say their work will benefit mankind. In many cases it will, but in others it may not. For example, a scientist may tell you that a new drug will help people to relax, but he may not tell you that it increases their risk of getting cancer. The side-effects of science can be more damaging than the benefits from it.

Therefore, you must question their claims by asking probing questions. If you still feel unhappy about what you have been told, go to other experts in that field and ask for further information.

Be sceptical

Both science and journalism are based on being sceptical and questioning what people say. Galileo would never have proved the world was round by believing what most other scientists of his era were telling him. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein would never have exposed the corrupt Watergate Scandal if they had trusted the White House press denials. As a journalist with the power to influence people, you will be asked to accept at face value all sorts of claims.

Science and technology companies will offer you all sorts of free samples, advice and even prepared news stories to promote their products. They will disguise this by saying these are important medical breakthroughs. Always question their claims and always balance what they say by seeking and reporting opposing views. Drug manufacturers and research companies are increasing offering television journalists ready-made and professionally-packaged news reports of a new medical breakthrough or wonder drug. In many cases they may be beneficial but a good journalist – like a good scientist – must always ask hard questions and inform readers and listeners honestly and fairly. Do your own work, even use some of the video footage if it is relevant – then go out and get alternative views to balance or moderate the claims.

Newsgathering

Once you have established some basic knowledge and good contacts, you can put them to work in reporting science and technology. Your task will not be too different from reporting general news, but there are some essential elements to focus your attention on if you are to report science and technology successfully.
Is it about people?

Wherever possible, look for the human angle in your stories. The human angle can be about any or all of the following:

- The people who will be affected by the development will often be your readers or listeners; the people who eat bread made from a new variety of corn or patients who can now be treated with a new piece of medical equipment.
- The people who use the new developments directly will usually be interested in any new resources and they might make interesting subjects for stories themselves. The farmers who use the new corn seed or doctors who use the new instrument will be of interest to others working in similar areas.
- The scientists or technologists responsible for the development or discovery can make interesting human interest stories. Perhaps their work has been long and difficult; perhaps they discovered the new seed or the principles behind the new instrument by accident. They are human beings, probably excited by their work, and so may make interesting subjects for stories.

A word of warning, however: Do not bury the importance of a development beneath details of the scientists who developed it. By all means explain about the scientists’ search for a new drug to fight cancer, but remember that most of your readers or listeners will want to know about the drug itself, and its possible effects on their lives.

Understanding the details

As we mentioned earlier, you must understand what you are told before you can write clearly and accurately about it.

It is always wise to prepare for any interview. Before interviewing a scientist, make sure you know the basics of his or her field. Meteorologists will not be happy if you think they look for meteors. If you do not have information available, why not ask one of your contacts for some basic background facts before interviewing your chosen scientist?

Science can often be too complicated to explain over the telephone. If you are not entirely clear, visit the scientist yourself and get them to sit down with you, to explain the details until you understand.

It often helps if they show you the new chemical or equipment, the plant or animal involved. Get them to draw diagrams. If their diagram helps you to understand, why not include a diagram in your story for newspapers or television?

If, when you are back at your desk writing the story, you discover that there is still something you do not understand, contact your scientist again and ask them to explain. You may find that they have forgotten to tell you or that your notes are incomplete or incorrect.

Some reporters actually show their story to their informants before publishing it. This is more common in feature articles than in hard news stories. If you do this, you must make it clear that they are only being asked to check the facts. You must not allow them to dictate how you write the story. They may be the experts on science or technology, but you must be the expert in what is newsworthy.

It will help if you explain your needs clearly to your informants before you start interviewing. You can explain whether this will be a lengthy feature, a documentary or just a short news item. You can also explain who your audience will be and how simple (or complicated) the information needs to be. This will avoid a lot of misunderstanding and possible bad feelings.

For example, you may interview a botanist about a new type of disease-resistant seed-corn she has developed. She may give you lots and lots of detailed information about it, enough to satisfy
the readers of a farming magazine, when all you need are a few basic details for a general news story. Unless you have warned her first, she may be upset about how little of her information you eventually use.

Remember, most scientists are so involved in their work that they often cannot understand that everyone else - especially you and your readers or listeners - do not have the same depth of interest.

News sense

Scientists are usually very clever and know a lot about their own subject, but they are not trained like you to recognise a news story. They may feel that their own work is not newsworthy or they may disagree with you over what is the real news angle in their research.

You must always be on the lookout for news stories in everything you hear or read. Perhaps a casual conversation with a visiting professor might give you an idea for a story. Perhaps you will find clues in the agricultural college's annual report. There are news stories everywhere in science, just waiting for you to spot them and bring them into the light. Your contacts may be able to spot a news story for you, or they may be able to give you help once you take your story idea to them.

Some scientists may disagree with you about the news angle you are taking on their particular information. The botanist may believe that the breakthrough for fellow scientists is the most important aspect of her new seed, whereas you see it more from the angle of the farmer or the person who eats bread. Always listen to the scientist's advice, but you cannot always follow it, because your job is different to theirs. Try to convince the scientist to look at the story from the point of view of your readers or listeners, and they will usually cooperate.

Objectivity

Like many things in life, science can have good and bad effects. And like many things, people will disagree about what these are. Your job as a journalist is to report the facts as known in a fair and honest way. You should not take sides on issues, unless you are writing a commentary column for your newspaper.

This is especially important in controversial areas such as the environment or medical ethics, where even the experts will disagree. And always be wary about people who try to get your help as a journalist to present only their side of a scientific argument. Give all sides and let your readers or listeners make up their own minds.

For example, if you write a story about a new wood pulp mill, you obviously need to talk both to the company and to any environmental opponents. But you should also speak to the local people and perhaps the government for their reaction. Try to cover every aspect of the story and present them all fairly.

TO SUMMARISE:

You must understand the basic principles of any scientific field before you can report in it; you can get that understanding by:

- Having a basic scientific education
- Reading books and magazines about science and technology
- Taking an interest in scientific and technological developments
- Establishing good contacts with experts who can help you with information
Chapter 32: Writing about science & technology

In the previous chapter, we discussed the challenge facing journalists in reporting science and technology. We advised on the ways of preparing yourself and of using experts to make your task easier. In this chapter we discuss ways of writing bright, interesting stories and conclude with some solutions to common problem areas.

The language of science and technology is one of the main reasons why some journalists are afraid of reporting in this area. In many cases, it is like listening to a foreign language which you cannot speak.

You can overcome most problems by following some simple rules.

**Understand the jargon**

Scientific names and technical terms (sometimes called jargon) are necessary for scientists. It enables them to speak more accurately to one another about things they have in common. If a surgeon told his assistant to cut “the big tube” during an operation, all sorts of mistakes could happen. Instead, the surgeon might talk about a patient’s “aorta” or “vena cava”, so that there was no mistake.

That kind of language is acceptable between doctors and nurses, but your ordinary readers and listeners will understand better if your story refers to the aorta as “the main tube carrying blood out of the heart”, and the vena cava as “one of the two main tubes carrying blood into the heart”.

Remember, you are the bridge between the scientists and the readers or listeners. Where possible, you should explain the jargon in language your audience will understand. To do this, you will need to understand the scientific terms yourself. Find out the simple meanings by asking the scientist concerned, or your contacts or look it up in a dictionary.

It is possible - and sometimes it is informative - to include scientific terms in reports, as long as they are explained immediately in words your audience can understand. For example:

Researchers in California say they have found a new way of testing unborn babies for spina bifida - a deformity of the spine which can cause paralysis.

(For more on jargon, see Chapter 11: Language and style - words.)

**Use concrete words where possible**

People understand solid, concrete things which they can feel, smell, see, touch, taste or hear. Because much of science is about ideas, where possible you should explain the scientist’s abstract ideas in concrete words your ordinary readers or listeners can understand.

For example, instead of describing the strength of a new sewing thread in scientific terms saying that it will resist a force of so many kilograms - you might write a story telling the same facts, but in concrete terms, like the example on the next page.

Scientists in China have invented a sewing thread so strong that it could take the weight of a fully-grown elephant.

Obviously no-one is going to hang an elephant from a crane to demonstrate the new sewing thread, but the image shows people how strong it can be.
Later in the story you should give the scientific figures in kilograms for readers or listeners who can understand them.

Similarly, when reporting sizes - especially the very large or very small - translate them into terms which your ordinary readers and listeners can understand. For example:

Breeders in Papua New Guinea have produced a new breed of super pig which can weigh up to 750 kg - about the weight of a small car.

Of course, some scientific numbers are so large - or so small - that you will never be able to put them into concrete terms for your ordinary readers or listeners. For example, the concept of a light year in astronomy is meaningless to most people, even though you can explain that it is the distance that light travels in one year. Because light travels at more than a thousand-million kilometres per hour, one light year is a distance of almost ten million million kilometres - impossible to imagine. The nearest you might come to a concrete example might be to explain that to reach the nearest star outside our own solar system (the star Proxima Centauri, which is four light years away from us), the fastest man-made rocket so far invented would have to travel for more than 18,000 years - but even that concept will be too big for many people to grasp.

**Do not overload with figures**

Do not overload your stories with large numbers or lots of figures. In many cases, especially at the start of a story, you should round figures off to make them simpler to understand. For example, 19,750 kilometres becomes “almost 20,000 kilometres”. This is especially important in radio, where listeners do not have time to grasp complicated numbers.

**Write brightly**

Your audience will not like long boring explanations. This is especially true in radio, where the listeners can quickly grow tired of concentrating on lots of facts and figures. So you should develop a bright style of writing.

As we have already discussed, keep your words clear and simple. Do not use too many scientific terms and explain them in simple words.

Keep your sentences short and simple. Try to limit the important ideas to one (or two at the most) per sentence, as in the following example:

**RIGHT:**

Pig farmers on New Ireland are battling an insect plague which has already killed more than 500 pigs on the island.

The insect, which is related to the horse fly, has already devastated herds in Africa and South East Asia.

The new species called penetrens lugoles lays its eggs in pigs' ears. When the eggs hatch, the maggots burrow into the animal's brain in

**WRONG:**

Farmers on New Ireland are battling a plague of the new insect species penetrens lugoles which is related to the horse fly and has devastated large herds of pigs in Africa and South East Asia and already killed 527 pigs on the island by laying eggs in their ears which eventually hatch into maggots which burrow their way into the animal's brain in search of food.
Enjoy the challenge. Write with enthusiasm and this will show itself in your stories.

Do not, however, mistake shallow writing for bright writing. However lively your writing style, you still need to explain the essential facts properly. Simply telling your readers or listeners how "wonderful" or how "awful" something is does not make proper journalism. If a scientist gives you some facts which amaze you, it is not enough to tell your audience that you were amazed. You should present those facts in terms your readers or listeners can understand - and perhaps they too will be amazed.

Also, do not make jokes about scientific developments unless they are recognised as humorous. You may think it funny that people's hair falls out when they are treated with a certain drug, but the sufferers will not see the joke, and neither will the doctors using the drug. Science can be cheerful and even funny, but you have to understand it properly before you can start making jokes.

**Do not sensationalise**

To sensationalise means to state something in such a strong and extreme way that it has an effect on people's emotions. Bad journalists sensationalise stories because they are more concerned with grabbing the attention of their readers or listeners than with telling the news accurately. There might be some truth in what they write, but they exaggerate it to grab attention.

Sensationalising science can often lead to harm by falsely provoking strong emotions such as hope or fear in readers or listeners. This is especially dangerous in fields such as medical research. Scientists researching a new drug will seldom claim that they have found a cure for a certain disease. They are more likely to say it is "a step towards a cure" or "a possible way of preventing the disease" or even "a way of reducing the symptoms". They do not want to raise false hopes. If you then write that "scientists have found a cure for cancer", it will raise the hopes of everyone with the disease and all their relatives. When they discover that they themselves cannot be cured, they will feel even worse than before your story. You may even destroy what little hope they may have had. It is a cruel thing to do.

Sensational claims in other fields, even as remote as astronomy, can cause harm. People will panic if you report that a giant meteor is heading towards earth but fail to point out that it will arrive in a thousand years from now and miss us by a million miles.

In some cases of sensational reporting, there is little difference between exaggeration and lying. Exaggeration often leads so far from the truth that it becomes a lie. If a child claims she was bitten by a dog two metres tall, she is exaggerating the truth - but she is also lying. You must never lie to your readers or listeners.

The scientists themselves will also be offended. They like to deal in plain facts, to be accurate and not emotional. Therefore they are offended by sensational reporting which becomes a lie. It probably offends them more than simple errors, which they might forgive.

So never sensationalise a story. State the facts in a clear, simple and interesting way. It is a great challenge to write a medical story without using words like "miracle cure", but it can be done - and it is more rewarding than the easy lie.
**Give background details**

Very few new scientific or technological developments happen by accident. Most are the result of work over time. Discoveries may come suddenly, but they usually come because a scientist is looking for something anyway.

Your job is to place all developments in context. Explain how we got to the situation today. In a story about an AIDS drug, explain what scientists know about the disease and how many people it has so far killed, especially in your country or region. In a story about a new pocket computer, explain a little about the history of computers and how the new small version compares with existing computers. When reporting the results of a study into water cleanliness, give some of the history of the project.

You need these kinds of background details in most stories, because they help your readers or listeners to understand what has happened and how important (or disappointing) the latest development is. The background details should be written as simply and clearly as the rest of the story. They should be kept as short as possible because your audience is mainly interested in the latest news, not in history.

**Illustrate your story**

Try to provide illustrations which will bring your story alive.

In newspapers and on television, pictures or diagrams can say very quickly what it might take you a thousand words to describe.

Any captions must explain the picture, but they do not have to explain the whole of the thing you are describing. For example, you might use a picture of a new coffee drying machine. Your caption can give some details about the machine, but save your explanations of how it works for the story itself. (In television, your explanation can be illustrated by film of the different parts of the machine in action).

Diagrams should be simple and well-drawn. If you take a diagram from a scientific report, decide what details you need and leave out the rest (either cover them up or get your artist to re-draw the diagram in the style you want).

If you use pictures or diagrams offered by other people or taken from books or magazines, make sure that you have permission from the rightful owners to use them. Sometimes you will need to add a short sentence to the caption telling where they came from. (See Chapter 47: Captions and graphics in news pictures and Chapter 63: Introduction to the law.)

You obviously cannot illustrate radio stories with pictures or diagrams, but you might be able to add interest to a radio report with some sound effects. You could include a short recording of the sound of the coffee processing factory at work, if that will add something to your listeners’ knowledge. Sound effects are especially important in radio features or documentaries (see Chapter 48: Radio and television basics).

**TO SUMMARISE:**

You must understand the basic principles of any scientific field before you can report in it; you can get that understanding by:

- Having a basic scientific education
- Reading books and magazines about science and technology
- Taking an interest in scientific and technological developments
- Establishing good contacts with experts who can help you with information
Always try to write your stories with a human angle; remember the people who make the developments and the people who will use them

Never write a story until you understand all the information you will need to use

Do not take sides in scientific controversies - just report the arguments

Avoid jargon

Use concrete images to explain abstract ideas

Write brightly and simply

Do not sensationalise

Think of the best ways of illustrating any story
Chapter 33: Religion

In this chapter, we look at how to report on people's spiritual lives. We look at how to report on religious organisations, and on the things which they and their members do.

News is about people. It is about everything which people do and everything which affects people.

There are three parts to people's lives - physical, mental and spiritual - and it is important that journalists take an interest in reporting all three. In this chapter we shall look at how you should report the spiritual part of people's lives: what is termed religion.

Many faiths

There are many different religions throughout the world. They differ in many ways and it is not easy to write about them all in one chapter. Nevertheless, despite their great differences, they do have in common Man's search for the meaning of life and (in most cases) Man's response to a Creator.

In this chapter, we shall try to cover the principles of reporting religion. You must apply those principles to the faith or faiths in your society.

The words which we use will tend to be Christian terms. However, we hope that Moslems, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists and others will be able to translate the ideas into their own words. For example, when we use the word church, we mean the body of all believing people; but the principle of what we say applies to a body of faithful Moslems as well as to a body of faithful Christians.

Three areas

There are three aspects of religion which need to be reported. They will all produce things which are new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people.

Church organisation

The business of the churches goes beyond this world; but to carry out that business they have to organise themselves in this world. They acquire religious leaders, who may be elected or appointed; religious communities, to dedicate themselves to prayer and study; financial and business sections to look after the money which is needed to run the church and maintain buildings.

They hold councils or synods, to discuss and debate the way in which the church is run. In some churches, these councils may take decisions which are binding; in others, there will be one leader (such as the Pope or the Dalai Lama) and the role of the councils may be to guide and advise him.

Whatever the constitution of the church which you are reporting, such meetings are significant. Even meetings of councils of elders or church councillors, who help to organise and represent the church in one small place, are significant to the people in that place.

They may affect people's spiritual lives in the same way that meetings of parliament or local councils may affect their physical lives. They should be reported, along with news of retirements, appointments, reorganisations and all the other aspects of organising and directing a large number of people.
To this extent, the churches should be reported in just the same way as any other organisation.

**Church activity**

The organisation of the church is the means to an end; it is not an end in itself. The purpose of the church is to bring people to their God and to encourage them to grow in the faith. That is what church activity is all about.

For example, Mother Teresa and her Little Sisters of Mercy worked among the homeless poor of Calcutta and in many other parts of the world, demonstrating their faith in their work. That was church activity.

Each year, many devout Moslems make their pilgrimage to Mecca, perhaps from as far away as Indonesia. That, too, is religious activity.

At many times of the year there will be special feasts and festivals - Easter, Ramadan, Diwali. Although aspects of all these festivals may become secular, they remain for the faithful examples of church activity.

Some church activity will be of a practical and seemingly physical nature, as the faithful attend to the material needs of other people. Other church activity will be practical but not material, such as the work of Bible translators. Other will seem to be neither practical nor material, such as days of prayer and fasting.

However, all of these, and many more, are forms of church activity. They are the outward signs of people’s faith.

**Church opinion**

In some countries, the moral standards are so firmly based upon religious teachings that the law itself is taken directly from scripture. This is especially true in certain Islamic countries.

Even where the link between church and state is not so strong, the views of the churches on moral issues are important and influential. It is important to ask their opinions whenever you are reporting social issues with a moral dimension.

In some cases, you will need to speak to church leaders, to find out what the established doctrine is on certain issues. The churches generally have clearly formulated views on such issues as euthanasia, abortion and *in vitro* fertilisation, and you can find out what it is by asking a church leader.

In other cases, the church may not yet have made up its mind on its moral position, because the issue is a new one - such as stem cell research; or recent debate may have begun to cast doubt on long-held views, so that church members no longer all agree - such as homosexuality; or the church may always have found an issue too complex for it to formulate a simple view - such as the acceptability of war. In all these cases, it will not be easy for a church leader, however well-intentioned, to give you a statement which accurately sums up the view of the whole church. To do this, you would need to do a vox pop of church members (see Chapters 22 and 23).

**Sermons**

Every week, in churches, mosques, temples and synagogues everywhere, somebody stands up and delivers a public speech. Usually this speech deals with at least one of the three areas we have just listed as being worth reporting - church organisation, church activity and church opinion.

These sermons can be reported in the same way as any other public speech (see Chapters 19 and 20 on speeches and meetings). The more people in your society who attend public worship
each week, the more popular reports of sermons are likely to be.

Reporting sermons has other advantages, too:

- People who do not usually attend public worship have the opportunity to hear what preachers are saying. This may be instructive to these people, and even win them back to the faith; or it may just allow them to monitor who is saying what.
- People who regularly worship in one place have the opportunity to hear or read what preachers are saying elsewhere.
- Preachers have the opportunity to hear or read what other preachers are saying, to gain new ideas and insights.

In general, decisions on when, where and how you report sermons will be made using the same criteria for judging the newsworthiness of other issues and events (as discussed the Chapter 1: What is news?):

- Is it new?
- Is it unusual?
- Is it interesting or significant?
- Is it about people?

You must decide whether to inform a preacher in advance that you will be reporting the sermon. You do not have to do so - it is a public speech - but if you think it would be considered rude in your society to report the sermon without saying so in advance, then you may tell them.

**Keep in touch**

If you want to be a good reporter, you need to keep in touch with the people who make the news. If you are reporting politics, you will keep in touch with politicians and public servants; if you are reporting education, you will keep in touch with teachers and educationists. If you are reporting religion, you must keep in touch with church leaders and members.

That means making contact with leaders of churches which you do not usually attend. It means making contact with other sects or denominations, even though you may not personally agree with all their beliefs.

It means finding out about at least the basics of other faiths in your community, to avoid giving offence and to encourage greater understanding.

By keeping in touch, you will know when things are going to happen and you will be able to report accurately and well on an area of people's lives which is of fundamental importance to them. See Chapter 26: Rounds for more detail on this.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Report on the spiritual part of people's lives, as well as the physical and mental

Look out for news in three areas:

- The religious organisation as a political unit
- The religious activity of the members
- The views of religious organisations on moral issues

Report sermons for their news value
Chapter 34: News for minorities

In this chapter, we discuss the best way of providing news for minorities within your society. We consider the special news needs they might have and how to serve them properly. We also touch on multicultural journalism and reporting diversity.

As a journalist, you may have to report on issues for minorities within your society. These could range from a small religious sect living in your local community to large ethnic groups living side-by-side with the majority, mainstream population.

Throughout this chapter, we use the terms minorities and mainstream population to define communities on numerical grounds. The terms do not imply that minorities are in any way inferior or second class. They are simply smaller in number than main groupings in society.

There are several reasons why your society may contain minority communities. These include:

- Ethnic or language groups which were absorbed into your nation when borders were redrawn, possibly by colonial powers or on independence. Examples of this are the Kurdish minority in Turkey or the Ndebele people in Zimbabwe.
- People who were brought into your country, perhaps centuries ago, either to provide special labour, such as the Indians in Fiji and South Africa or the Chinese and Tamils in Malaysia; or to deal with overcrowding in their home country, such as the Gilbertese in the Solomon Islands; or for some other reason.
- People who have escaped neighbouring countries as refugees, such as the Palestinians in Lebanon or the West Irianese in Papua New Guinea.
- People who have come to your country as individuals looking for a better life, such as Afro-Caribbean people in Britain or Italians in Australia.
- Indigenous people who have become a minority in their own land because of migration from elsewhere, such as the Amazonian Indians of Brazil or the Maoris of New Zealand.
- People who have developed separate identities because of their religion, such as the Sikhs in India or the Bahais in Iran.

Minorities will differ from your mainstream readers or listeners because they may not be of the same race, religion or language group; they may have different customs; they may not share the same likes and dislikes, interests or concerns as the majority in your population. They may require different types of news, on different issues, presented in different ways.
For example, the minority Aboriginal people of Australia often have quite different news needs from the rest of the population, who in general have a European background. While Aborigines may wish to know about government, taxation, prices, education and similar concerns of other Australians, they also have special needs. They also want to know about their sacred places and schemes to preserve their disappearing languages. In general, they want to know what other Aboriginal people are doing in Australia and what indigenous people like themselves are doing in other countries.

If there are minorities within your community - whether within your country, region, province or town - you will have to know how to provide news relevant to them. You should do this both because they deserve it as part of your whole society and because it helps to build links between different parts of society.

This chapter is written for two types of journalists reporting on minorities:

- Those working in the mainstream media;
- Those working within the media of the minorities.

**Know your audience**

It is important for journalists to know who their readers or listeners are. The nearer the journalist is to the finished product (whether a newspaper or magazine, a radio or television bulletin), the more important that need becomes.

For example, journalists who write for the major international wire services cannot tell exactly which media will use their copy, let alone the kind of audience they have. So they aim their stories towards the widest possible audience. Journalists nearer to the audience end of the process (working on a newspaper, radio or television station), need to know more specific details about their audience. After all, the news agency journalists are not writing directly for the listener or
reader - they are selling their stories to the people who run newspapers, magazines, radio or television services.

Similarly, reporters and sub-editors who work in media serving small communities need a more specific knowledge of their audience than those whose news organisations serve larger communities. They have to know the nature and history of their area, the kind of people the schools and colleges are producing, what are the religious, moral and economic beliefs in the community. In other words, they need to know the character of their audience, both in the mainstream community and in any minorities.

Making assumptions

Do not make false assumptions about your readers or listeners. Do not generalise from your own personality and narrow group of friends and relatives and assume that your readers or listeners are "like us". Your audience may not all be like you, especially when it includes minority groups. The most accurate way of understanding minorities is from scientifically conducted surveys. Unfortunately, in most developing nations there are very few of these around, and even fewer devoted to the kind of questions you need to know about the minority's response to news.

The next best way is to conduct your own survey. This may be possible in a small and tight-knit minority, but it is usually impossible in larger minorities, especially those in which members are scattered throughout society in general. Any attempt runs the risk of not getting a good enough sample, and this could produce results which are not typical. You could simply be asking your own group of acquaintances slightly more scientific questions.

A third possibility is to draw up a rough profile or picture from the information which is already available. You need to approach this task with an open mind and to do three things:

- Consider what you know already about the specific minority;
- Divide that knowledge into a number of categories which you can analyse individually;
- Ask members of the minority and experts (such as social workers or teachers) for details on these categories.

The categories you can examine and the kinds of questions you need to ask will include the following:

How big is the minority?

You may need to split this into components along racial, religious or language lines.

You may, for example, have a large Hindu minority within your country. You may be able to find an approximate number for them through an official census or by asking the organisers of their associations or priests in their temples. Be aware, though, that the people giving you figures may over-estimate or under-estimate the size of their community, depending on how they want people to see it.

There is also the fact that many people exist on the fringes of minorities, either as racial mixes or as people trying to fit into the mainstream society.

Where do they live?

Do they live in one area, or are they scattered throughout the rest of society? This is important to know because minorities which live in specific, well-defined areas often share and keep those features which make them minorities (such as language, religion, culture or nationality), whereas those who are scattered are often more like the wider society - they may be more integrated into it.
What languages do they speak?

If the minority uses its own language, you need to estimate how many speak only the minority language, how many speak the national language with equal fluency and how many know the minority language from parents but no longer use it.

If you find that a large proportion of your population rely on a language other than the national language or languages, you may want to consider setting aside special editions or sections of your newspaper or bulletin for their language.

Are they mainly of one or two age groups?

If most of a minority are elderly, they may have different needs to those minorities where the bulk is of school age. Age differences can occur depending on the history of the minority in your country. If the minority is a separate ethnic group which is being absorbed into the mainstream community, the only people left following the old culture may be the old people. If they are refugees fleeing to your country with their families, they may be mainly younger parents and their children.

Are they mainly male or female?

Although most minorities are roughly equal male to female, you should be aware of any different needs either of the sexes has. For example, most of your readers or listeners may be men. Do the women also want to join your audience but find nothing to interest them? Do the women find other media give them a better service than yours?

How educated are they?

What kind of educational background do they have? This will help you to decide not only what kind of news they might be interested in, but also the best way of presenting it for maximum understanding. Should you use simple language? How long will they pay attention to an article or a programme?

What are their socio-economic backgrounds?

This question helps you to picture the kinds of incomes your readers or listeners have, an important element in deciding which news to cover in areas such as family finance, taxation, wages, hobbies etc. Also, if the minority is very poor, you may want to produce a low-cost newspaper or magazine aimed specifically at them.

Providing news

Once you have a clear estimate of your minority audience or audiences, you must find out what kind of news they want. This is slightly different from the question "What kind of news should they get?", a question which suggests that they might not always choose everything we think they should know.

What news do they want?

From your profiles, do your readers or listeners need you for their total news, features and current affairs intake, for none of it, or for something in between? If they need you for some but not all of their news, which parts should you be supplying and which parts are being supplied by other media, either the mainstream media or by any newspapers, magazines or broadcasting stations in their own minority language?
It might help to decide what kind of news you should be supplying if we put it in categories, with some brief descriptions. (While doing this, we should remember the general criteria for what makes news):

*World news*

We will define this as news from anywhere in the world except your country and the country the minority may have come from originally or have special connections with because of shared race, history or religion. World news generally follows the patterns set by the international wire services. It usually concentrates on a few recognised trouble spots or specific issues which interest their major clients in the Western democracies.

Because most countries are now related to each other, it is possible to argue that important events in some countries will influence everyone. An arms agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union is an example.

Also, people are interested in unusual things happening in countries with which they have no connection. For example, a major bus crash in Scotland is tragic in human terms and will interest your readers or listeners who otherwise have no connections at all with Scotland.

*National news*

If you work for the mainstream media, you have the duty to tell all your people about what is happening in the country.

It is impossible to generalise about exactly how much extra you should give to minorities to help them understand national events and debates. If a minority is different only because it is an offshoot of the major religion, they may share majority interests in every other aspect of national life. If, however, they are a minority because they have a different language and culture, they may have little in common with mainstream society, beyond sharing national borders and a national government.

In the first instance, you may only have to provide additional religious news of interest to the minority. In the second case, you may have to devote large segments of your newspaper or bulletin to news of specific interest to the ethnic minority.

Your coverage may be limited by government policy. In Turkey, for example, the central government long followed a policy of trying to suppress the ethnic identity of the Kurdish minority (including their language and culture) for reasons of national unity. At the other extreme, in Papua New Guinea where there are 869 indigenous languages, the government provides state-funded radio in a number of languages and has designated three national languages to help communications between the different language groups.

If the minorities are new immigrants or refugees, they may choose to make their lives in your country, have their children educated there, receive pensions there, buy their goods there, use your country's medical services, visit sporting venues and be able to take part in the life of the country. They need to know the laws (and how people offend against them) and the conventions of your country. Citizens entitled to vote should be well informed about the political system and the choices open to them.

It could be argued that they can get all this information in the same way as the majority population, but very often the mainstream media takes for granted things which new minorities wish to know.

There are also specific areas affecting new minorities, such as citizenship or immigration issues. The mainstream media may not generally cover these in depth or, if they do, they view them from the perspective of a problem for the mainstream society. You should aim to write for the minorities themselves on issues which could affect their life or status in your country. Readers or listeners
from minorities may be making great attempts to fit into the larger community. They need to be as well-informed about what is happening around them as their fellow-countrymen and women.

**News about the minority community itself**

This is where a journalist sensitive to minority issues can be especially important, in providing an informed and balanced view of what is happening in minority communities. Minorities may have their own newspapers or broadcasting stations, although these may give a one-sided view of local affairs. For other minorities, your newspaper or station may be the only regular source of news for many people.

The danger is in assuming that, because news from minority communities is generally less high-powered than international, national, regional or even city events, that it is therefore less important. All news items should be given the same treatment to make them interesting and significant. They should be structured properly, with the same care taken to maintain accuracy and objectivity.

**News about other minority groups**

Minorities often find themselves in unusual circumstances in relation to the rest of society. They will probably be interested in knowing about other people in similar circumstances, whether or not they come from their own group. The news provides a valuable way of sharing experiences. If yours is a Christian country, a Moslem father's battle with a local school over his daughter's education will probably interest Hindu parents too. A community raising money for its own mosque will clearly interest other Islamic communities. You should try to be informed about what is happening in all the minority communities and ask whether any of their events are newsworthy for your other readers or listeners.

**News from special countries overseas**

Minority communities often feel a special link with another country or region, especially if it is where they originated. They may also have a special interest in other people of the same race or religion elsewhere in the world. There is an obvious need to tell members of minority communities what is happening in these special countries or regions, where they may still have friends and relatives or where they see people facing similar problems to themselves.

For example, if a significant minority of your readers or listeners are Roman Catholic in a non-Catholic country, they will want to know about events or announcements in the Vatican. If the minority are black people in a white society, they may want to know about the civil rights movement in the United States or the struggle of the Indians in Brazil.

**Sensitivity**

You will probably need to be very sensitive when reporting on issues involving minorities. Very often, their place in mainstream society is unsure. This does not mean that you should ignore the existence of tensions, simply that you should not make them worse by your reporting.

There may, for example, be a feeling among some members of the majority that the minority population is taking away jobs or following strange customs. If you report on such areas, you should try extra hard to present a reasonable and balanced picture of the situation. Do not disguise problems, but neither should you exaggerate them. Beware of adopting stereotypes about members of minority groups such as "All Scots are mean" or "All Americans are noisy". Stereotyping is the process by which we think we recognise a common feature in members of a particular group (whether a race, religion, sex, occupation etc) and then attribute that feature to every member of the group, whether they possess it or not. Stereotypes are based on generalisations, and are usually wrong. Repeating such stereotypes will increase tensions and drive
away readers or listeners from the offended minority.

You should also be sensitive when reporting on minority communities within which (or between which) there are very strong social, ethnic or political divisions. You have to try even harder to tread a middle path of objectivity in your choice of words. You might personally believe that one side has such extreme views and is so socially divisive that they do not deserve fair treatment. Treat all factions fairly and allow the reader or listener to judge.

You must also be fair in your choice of news sources. Do not rely on the same sources time and time again. It is very tempting to keep returning to the same sources, especially if you share similar views. It is usually more difficult to develop other sources within the minority community, but you must try. Finding new sources can often prove rewarding, because such new sources are often so pleased at being given a fair hearing that they lead you to other stories, helping to build up a network of information.

Reporting on small communities has both good and bad points. On the positive side, you get to know people well, you can find out quite quickly when someone is not telling the truth, you can get a fairly good idea of what is happening, and you get feedback from readers or listeners on your work. On the negative side, you may feel exposed and threatened when covering difficult issues and it is often hard to keep secrets when preparing material for news and current affairs. This is especially so when you are a member of the minority yourself.

You may be the only journalist working on a particular story in a minority community, unlike the mainstream media which tends to hunt in packs and give moral support in difficult situations. It takes courage to hunt alone, but it is often the most worthwhile form of journalism you can find.

Accuracy

When reporting on minorities from the outside, you must still maintain a high level of accuracy. It is not good enough to argue that your mainstream readers or listeners will not notice mistakes. They may not, but members of the minority you are reporting on will notice them.

You should be particularly careful about getting the correct spelling of people's names. If they come from an ethnic minority, the spellings may not be familiar to you. Even if you think you know how to spell an interviewee's name, double-check. They will not mind. If you are a broadcast journalist, you also need to check the pronunciation of names. Write them down phonetically. For example, you might write the English name Gloucester as GLO-sta, or the Jewish name Chaim as HI-me.

Be careful with titles or designations, especially of organisations or individuals. If you have interviewed the president of the "Mollok People's Welfare Club", quote the name correctly. If you say he is the president of the "Mollok People's Social Club", you may be referring to an altogether different group, possibly enemies.

Similarly, check how people wish to be known. Many Asian societies put a person's family name first, followed by other names, so that the first Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr Lee Kwan Yu, is known in second references as "Mr Lee". The full name of the first Prime Minister of Fiji was Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara (Ratu being a Fijian title). He was known in second references as "Ratu Mara". Roman Catholic priests are known as "Father", whereas Methodist ministers are usually called "Mister". The list is endless. You should always check to make sure that you are using a person's correct title.

If you are reporting on a minority for mainstream readers or listeners, you may have to explain briefly what a particular title or designation means. Thus the Dalai Lama could be described as "the head of the Tibetan Buddhist religion". Of course, you may have to do similar kinds of translation if you are reporting on mainstream issues for a minority audience.
TO SUMMARISE:

Be aware of the different minorities and different kinds of minorities which may exist within your society.

In order to assess the news needs of a specific minority, you must first know some essential facts about such things as its size, location, languages, average age, education and lifestyles.

 Minorities will probably need additional news to that provided for the mainstream society.

 You may have to present news to minorities in a different way or from a different viewpoint.

 You must be sensitive to the special pressures on minorities, and avoid stereotyping people.
Chapter 35: Crime reporting introduction

In this and the following three chapters, we discuss what makes crime newsworthy. We suggest some basic principles of reporting crime and tell you how to become an effective crime reporter. We give advice on gathering and writing stories, and how to avoid some of the dangers of crime reporting.

Crime reporting teaches some of the essential techniques of journalism. You learn how to dig for a story, how to follow leads, how to interview people to extract information and how to write crisp, clear, interesting stories under pressure of a deadline.

In small newspapers, radio and television stations, general reporters cover crime stories, while in bigger organisations there may be a specialist crime reporter or team of reporters who cover nothing else but crime.

These specialist reporters are occasionally called police reporters, although this title gives a misleading idea of their task. It suggests that all they do is report on what the police are doing when, in fact, crime reporting should cover all aspects of law-breaking - the police, the criminals and the victims.

In this and the following three chapters, we define crime as any action in which people break the law.

**Why report crime?**

Crime reporting has long been a central part of news coverage in free press societies, because crime stories are usually newsworthy.

There are several reasons why you should report crime and why people want to read about or listen to stories of crime:

- Readers or listeners often want an explanation of why crimes happen. They ask: “Could it happen to me?” They may want to know so that they can prevent a similar thing happening to themselves.
- Your readers and listeners need to know how laws are broken, and how people who break laws are caught and punished. This helps them understand what laws are and what are the penalties for breaking them.
- Most people obey the law, so crime stories are about unusual events - one of the criteria for news.
- Some people are interested in the way criminals get something without much effort. For example, although a gang of crooks may spend weeks or months planning a robbery to net them $100,000, it might take ordinary workers many years of effort to earn that much legally. Some crimes may fascinate people who obey the laws but who wonder what it might be like to break them.
- Criminals take risks and face punishment if they are caught. This may make them fascinating to read about.

You have a role to play, in providing information to counteract rumour. People will hear about crimes through casual conversations or rumour, or they may hear a siren as a police car dashes along the road; they will be only half-informed. It is your job as a journalist to tell them the truth about the rumoured crime or explain why the police car went past. If you can establish a reputation for reliability in this field, people will buy your paper or tune into your station as a way of making sure they know what is happening.

**Types of crime**
There are many types of crimes, criminals and victims. There are serious crimes and small offences. There are professional criminals and ordinary people who occasionally break the law. There are crimes which have obvious victims and there are the so-called victim-less crimes (although, as we shall see in a moment, all crimes have a victim somewhere).

It is not always the major crimes which make the most interesting news. Of course, your readers or listeners will be interested to know about an armed hold-up which netted a million dollars. But they may also be interested in the story of a sneak thief who broke into a poor widow's home and killed her much-loved cat.

As with all news, crime stories should be new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people.

**New** - Crime reporting has to be as up-to-date as possible. This is partly because some crimes depend for their news value on being current. For example, a story about a violent killer on the loose will lose much of its impact (and its value in alerting your audience to danger) once he is captured. Also, because in some societies crimes are a regular feature of life, today's break-and-enter quickly replaces yesterday's break-and-enter in the public's attention. Crime stories get stale quickly.

**Unusual** - Murders or armed robbery are not everyday events in most communities, and so have news value. However, less serious crime can also have unusual elements. Someone who sneaks on to a bus without paying or throws rubbish on the street may be breaking the law, but it is not very newsworthy. However, if a person stows away on an international airliner, that free flight becomes newsworthy. If the rubbish someone dumps fills three garbage trucks, that too is newsworthy.

**Interesting or significant** - As we have said, most law-abiding citizens are interested in people who break the law in big or unusual ways. Crimes which by themselves are ordinary can become significant when placed in context. For example, the car theft can be one of hundreds in a city, but it may become significant if it is the hundredth car to be stolen this year.

**About people** - Crimes involve people, as criminals and victims. The so-called victim-less crime does not really exist. The motorist parked in a No Parking zone at the very least may inconvenience other people and at worst may cause an accident. People who make false declarations to claim government benefits are taking money which could have gone to other people.

Always try to tell a crime story in human terms. Do not concentrate all the time on the police or the criminals. Look at what has happened to the victim. Your readers or listeners are more likely to be victims of crime than they are to be either police officers or criminals.

Remember too that the person the police refer to as "the victim" or "the deceased" is (or was) a real, living, breathing person. Try to visualise what their life was like before and after the crime. How did the crime affect them, their family or community?

**News value**

Most stories about crimes will have some news value. Exactly how much depends on several factors, which you will have to consider.

**Seriousness**

We usually assume that more serious crimes are more newsworthy. A murder is more important than an armed assault, which is more serious than a break-and-enter, which is more serious than a parking offence. In terms of money, the bigger the amount stolen, the more important the crime. Remember, however, that money has a different value to different people. The theft of $100 will be more newsworthy when it is money taken from a poor widow that when it is stolen from a rich
Unusual nature of the crime

The more unusual crimes are generally more newsworthy. A break-and-enter at a school may be more newsworthy than a break-in at a home, but a burglary at a crocodile farm may be more newsworthy still.

Size of the community

Crimes are usually viewed as more important by smaller communities. If you are a journalist on a big city newspaper, an ordinary car theft may not be newsworthy at all. If you are a journalist in a small community, a car theft may be the biggest news of the week. Everybody may know the owner - they may all know the car. It is a sad fact that quite horrible crimes do not make the news in a big city because they are so common and because the chances are small of readers or listeners knowing the victims or caring about them.

Identity of the victim or criminal

Crimes become more newsworthy if they involve people who are themselves newsworthy. An ordinary person attacked on the street may not be big news, but if that person is a local chief, that will be very newsworthy. A fraud case becomes more important when it involves a leading politician. A robbery becomes bigger news when police reveal that the robber was an escaped prisoner with convictions for murder and rape. It is generally true that a crime becomes more newsworthy if there is a strong chance of it happening again - usually because the criminal is known and likely to strike again.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

- Write crime stories about people - the criminals, the police and the victims
- Consider the news value of the events on which you report
Chapter 36: Reporting crime

In this - the second of four chapters on reporting crime - we suggest some basic principles of reporting crime and tell you how to become an effective crime reporter. In the following two chapters we will give advice on writing stories, and how to avoid some of the dangers of crime reporting.

One of the major problems of reporting crime is that the event itself is usually over before the journalist gets there. When reporting on a parliamentary sitting or the launch of a space rocket, the journalist has plenty of time to prepare, observe what happens and write the story in a logical sequence, from beginning to end.

By the time the reporter learns of a robbery, the robbers will probably have fled, the victims will be in hospital, answering police questions or in a mortuary, while the police themselves will already have started their investigation.

In trying to bring some order out of this chaos, you have to revert to the basics of journalism. Find out what happened to whom, then try to build up the story - always with one eye on the deadline.

**Personal qualities**

You need a lively mind so you can think of ways around any problems you may come across in reporting. You need to be sympathetic to draw answers out of people who may be upset about the crime. You should also be suspicious of what you are told. The police and witnesses may not intend to mislead you, but victims and witnesses are often shocked and unclear about what happened, while the police are more interested in catching criminals than in answering journalists' questions. The criminals themselves will usually lie.

**Sources of information**

To limit the risk of inaccuracy, try to get information from as many sources as possible. If it is a small story about the theft of a car, you might get enough information from the police report. The police report can be a written report submitted by the investigating officer to his superiors or a press release summarising a case.

With more important or complicated stories, use a variety of sources. You may want to start with the police report to establish that a crime really happened, then go on to question the officer dealing with the specific case.

Try to interview any victims for a first-hand account of what happened or what was stolen. If the victim is not available, try relatives or friends (we will consider some of the ethical problems of this later in this chapter). Interview any witnesses, but be aware that they will not usually be trained to observe things as accurately as police or journalists.

Visit the scene of the crime so that you can add important details to your story or get pictures for publication or broadcast. Visiting the scene will also help you to visualise the event when it is described to you. It is much easier to understand a description of how the robber "disappeared round a corner" when you can stand at the scene of the attack and see the corner itself.

With big or unusual crimes, you will need to provide some background to help your readers or listeners to understand what happened or what the consequences of a crime might be. You can approach independent sources even though they have no knowledge of the crime itself. For example, a psychologist at the university may be able to explain a spate of arson attacks, a naturalist may be able to give you background on why certain animals are being smuggled out of the country. Remember, though, that there are legal limits on comment once a person has been
arrested for a crime and while the trial is taking place (see Chapter 64: The rules of court reporting).

Once you have gathered all the information, you should sort through it carefully, double checking any doubtful or conflicting information where necessary.

Identify those facts which are reliable and those which are not. If it is agreed that the crime took place in Avoca Street, you can state this without attribution. However, if one witness says it was breakfast time and another says it was just before lunch, say "in the morning". If one person says the car was red while the other says green, you have to say that the car was either red or green. If the victim says the attack was "horrifying" while the police officer describes it as "minor", quote both of them.

Although police reports are usually quite accurate, they are seldom entirely reliable, so you may have to cross-check some of what they say. It is a useful practice.

**Reporting techniques**

In practical terms, there are many things you can do to make your job as a crime reporter easier and more interesting. The most important of these is to establish good and reliable contacts.

**Making and keeping contacts**

Although the police may be busy all day investigating crimes, many crimes never become news because no-one thinks to tell journalists. Unless the police want to appeal to the public for help in finding someone or something, they may not tell the media about crimes. In some cases, publication of a report may actually frighten off a suspect and make the job of the police harder.

It is your task to establish good contacts - people who will tell you about events as soon as they happen.

Although your most reliable contacts may be on-duty police officers such as the police commander or duty officer, do not limit yourself to these. Get to know other sources within the police force. This may be officially discouraged by the police commissioner (who wants you to work only through official channels), but good confidential sources can often give you an off-the-record tip of something which you can then check through official channels. For example, you may be officially told to contact the duty sergeant for all details of who the police are prosecuting in court each day. However, if you have a good contact in the prosecutor's office or in the court administration, they may be able to give you information on cases which will be especially interesting.

Confidential sources, even in the police force, often take pleasure in a discreet relationship with a reporter they can trust. But remember, if you reveal the identity of a confidential source, you will land that person in trouble.

Contacts outside the police force can be just as valuable. The best are people whose work or social life bring them into regular contact with crimes or criminals. Ambulance drivers, for example, are called to crimes where people are hurt. Individual ambulance officers are useful sources, but the radio controller of the service is in the best position to know everything that is going on. Nurses see victims of violence brought into their hospital, but nurses on intensive care units see the worst cases. Many barmen or hotel keepers either know criminals and victims or hear the gossip about what is going on.

Never waste an opportunity to encourage contacts. Regular visits or telephone calls remind them that you are still interested. A few minutes spent talking to a pathologist at the scene of a murder could establish him as a future source of information about deaths and post mortems.

You must work hard on keeping contacts. Make sure that they have telephone numbers where they can find you. If you leave the office, let your colleagues know how they can get in touch with you.
in an emergency if any of your good contacts calls with an urgent story. If the contact is happy to be seen giving you information (or if the relationship with you is officially approved by their organisation), you could send them occasional greetings cards on birthdays or festive occasions. If the contact wants their relationship with you to be kept secret, respect their wishes and do not let anyone know who your informant is.

**Police contacts**

You should get to know your local police well. Make sure that you know their names (and how to spell them correctly) and their ranks. Find out what their jobs and duties are within the force so that you can go directly to the right person when you need information. Take an interest in what they tell you, even if there is no news story in the information at that time. Store it away in a notebook for future reference. Do not appear bored or critical if they give you information which is not newsworthy - you will only discourage them for the future. Remember, you are the journalist, trained to judge what is newsworthy and what is not.

Do not expect even the best of police contacts to go searching for you with story ideas. Make regular visits or telephone calls at agreed times. The good crime reporter always spends the first part of any day ringing round or visiting contacts, just to ask if anything is happening. It is good practice, on a day when there is not much happening, to use your time talking to your contacts, checking for news or simply having a chat if they are not busy.

Become known around the police station or police post, so that your presence is eventually taken for granted and officers will talk freely in front of you. However, you must remember that you are their guest. Leave the room if you are asked and do not go into places where you have been specifically banned (such as the cells).

You must also remember that, however much time you spend with the police, you are not a police officer. Your job is quite different from theirs. Your first loyalty is to your readers or listeners. Sometimes this will put you in conflict with the police. If you are too close and bound to them by favours, you cannot do your job as a journalist properly.

**Police press cards**

In some countries, the police issue press cards to certain journalists. These are often small plastic-covered cards with the journalist's photograph to identify them as a journalist in the eyes of the police. Police press cards may give journalists special access to places, such as the scene of a crime. Some reporters enjoy the status that such a card gives them, without realising the danger. If journalists accept police press cards as the official recognition, the police are in a position of power to withhold cards from journalists who write things they do not like. This is very dangerous in democratic societies and should be avoided whenever possible. The alternative - a press card issued by a professional journalism body - is usually preferable, although any system of licensing journalists can restrict your freedom to do your job.

**The police press conference**

Your newspaper, radio or television station should have regular contacts with the police on a formal level. This is usually done through a regular daily or weekly press conference with a senior officer, at which journalists are told about crimes or developments which have happened since the last conference. Depending on the personality of the officers or their relationship with the journalists, you may be told everything which has happened or only the very minimum. If you want to know more at the press conference, just ask. If the police do not want to tell you, they will say so (although you should determine whether they are keeping quiet because of their investigations or because they are feeling lazy).

You should try to get as much information as possible at the press conference. The police usually hold them so that they can deal with the media at one time and then get on with their other work. They will not be happy if you come back later in the day and ask a question you could have put
quite easily at the conference. If you work for a newspaper or television station, ask for pictures which will help to illustrate the story. This could be a photograph of a stolen statue or a Photofit picture of a suspect. Photofit or Identikit pictures are portraits put together from facial features such as eyes, nose, mouth, hair, glasses etc which witnesses think are like those of the suspect. The police show the witnesses a selection of pictures of each feature then combine the chosen ones together into a best fit.

Observation and monitoring

All journalists should develop their powers of observation. On the crime round, you must always be aware of what is happening and what is not, what is said and what is not said. For example, if all of your contacts in a police station are suddenly unavailable when you call, you should suspect that something big is happening. It could simply be that they are all in the same meeting, but when you are told that no-one has time to talk to you at the moment, get suspicious. Start sniffing around for the reasons; ring your other contacts (such as the ambulance service). If you think that something big is happening, get down to the police station straight away to find out.

In some countries, crime reporters are legally permitted to monitor the police radio using special scanners which search the different wave bands for the emergency services frequencies. You may not always be able to understand what is said (in some cases you can only pick up one side of two-way radio conversations), but you will be alerted if any major events happen.

Be warned, however, that monitoring police radio frequencies is banned by law in some countries (this is to stop criminals knowing what the police are doing). If such monitoring is banned, you must officially respect that ban. If you listen in illegally then turn up at the scene of a crime, you could be in trouble unless you have a good answer when the police ask who told you of the incident. Check what the law of your country says about monitoring two-way radio messages.

Documents and reports

You should take an interest in any documents about the police or crime, whether or not you are on a special crime round. The annual crime statistics always make news, whether there is more crime or less.

Look behind the facts and figures for the human drama. If there is an increase in break-and-enters you should find out why. Are people becoming careless? Is there a new gang working in the area? What advice do the police have for preventing such crimes? Always try to put a human face on the figures; go out and interview a victim. Find out whether their lives have changed because of the break-and-enter? How do they regard the police?

Always be suspicious about the figures themselves. If the police are campaigning for more staff, they may choose to highlight those statistics which suggest crime is on the increase. If the Police Minister is standing for re-election, he may try to minimise the problem of crime.

Do not be frightened by jargon used by the police in writing reports. If it is not clear, ask. We talk later about jargon.

Keep a filing system and diary

Crime reporters are usually busy and deal with a large number of different stories. Although there may be a few long-running major criminal investigations or court cases, most of the stories come and go quickly. Because of this, it is very easy to lose track of what has happened. Crime reporters need a good system of filing information for future use. This is especially important for stories which run for a long time, with occasional bursts of activity separated by long periods when nothing seems to happen. For example, a murder has its first peak when the body is discovered and police start their investigation. It peaks again when the post mortem examination reveals officially how the victim died. It peaks again whenever police reveal a major new clue, and again when they arrest someone. At this point the pace of the story is governed by the legal process - when the
accused first appears in court, when he is remanded, committed for trial, tried and sentenced or released. At each stage along this process, from murder to imprisonment or release, you must keep your readers or listeners up-to-date on what is happening.

You need to do two things: you should monitor developments in the case and make diary notes of when further developments are likely to happen. With small cases, such as a break-and-enter, you may let the police determine how often you update your coverage. Following your first report, you may not cover the story again until the police arrest and charge someone. However, with bigger stories you need to set the pace by contacting your sources regularly and asking what is the latest development.

This in itself may make a story, even if it is the rather weak news angle of "Police say they are still struggling to find witnesses to the killing of a 23-year-old Koror schoolteacher last month."

On the other hand, your checks may unearth information which the police have forgotten (or declined) to tell you - such as they have charged a man with the murder.

In any crime story which is still active, make a note in your diary to check developments by a certain date, at the latest. If something happens before that date, all well and good.

The actual date will vary from story to story. If police are hunting a crazed murderer, you may want to check for developments every day. If they are investigating a tax fraud in a big company, you may want to call the officers concerned each week. If a police investigation is taking a long time and getting nowhere, you may want to note in the newsroom diary to check in a month's time.

In many circumstances, the date for the next development is known in advance. Detectives investigating a murder may decide to stage a dramatic reconstruction of the killing at the scene at the same time of day the following week. Make a note to check with them the day before the re-enactment, so that you can make plans to cover it.

In another example, the police may charge someone with murder and tell you that he is due to appear in court at 10 o'clock the following morning. Make a note in the newsroom diary either to cover the story yourself or to get someone else to cover it, possibly the reporter on the court round.

Always keep a file on any major running story. Your organisation should, in any case, have a system of filing all stories so they can be referred to at any time. If you are on the crime round, start your own filing system to keep copies of any story about continuing cases. If you do not know how to keep a filing system, seek advice from a good, experienced secretary.

**What information do you need?**

All the advice we have just given will help you to get information, but you must decide what information you really want. Although it is not possible to make a fixed rule for writing crime stories, there are certain details which you should try to get for every story about a specific crime. These include details about the following:

**The crime**

What is the exact nature of the crime the police are investigating? Until they arrest and charge someone, the police will often be vague about the exact nature of the charges they will bring. A man may have died, but police may say only that it was an assault. They may say that they are looking for someone "in connection with a killing" or say that they are "treating the death as murder". We will talk more about this shortly, in the section on language.

You will also need to know exactly where and when the crime was committed, even the time of day or night. You should try to find out how it was committed, but take advice on how much you should
say in your story. If the thieves have used a new and clever way of breaking into a building, you may give other criminals an idea by describing it exactly. On the other hand, if you tell your readers or listeners how crimes are committed, they may be better prepared to protect themselves.

The method the criminals used is often the most newsworthy aspect of the crime, even when it was not successful. For example, there are occasional stories of thieves who steal a heavy safe then try a succession of different methods to open it. They unsuccessfully try pick-axes, crowbars, oxyacetylene torches, dynamite and dropping it from a great height before eventually giving up in disgust and dumping the safe, still with its contents intact. The journalist who says that there is no news because the safe was recovered would miss a good story.

As with all news, you will write a more interesting story if you can visualise what happened while it is being described to you. Build up a mental picture of the crime, asking for missing details when you see gaps in your picture.

You should, where possible, ask the value of anything stolen, both individual items and a total sum. Always ask whether a weapon was used, particularly in violent crimes. What kind of a weapon? How was it used? And do not forget to ask how the criminals travelled to and from the crime. The police may be happy to give you a full description of any get-away vehicle in their bid to trace it.

Victims and suspects

Get as many details as possible about any victims. This should include their names, ages and addresses (although not always for publication), possibly their occupation and certainly details of any injuries they suffered. Get details of any witnesses, so that you can talk to them.

The police may have a suspect or list of suspects. Although you may not be able to use the actual names, you might be able to describe them, for example as "a man in his late forties, well-built with a star tattoo on his forehead" or "a convicted murderer who escaped from prison while awaiting trial" (If you are not clear how much you can legally say about a suspect, see Chapters 64 and 65 on court reporting.)

Unusual circumstances

There may be some special circumstances which make the crime more newsworthy. For example, your intro may be that this is the fifth time that a certain office has been broken into in a month or that the landlord is a cabinet minister.

Appeals for help

The police will often ask for help from your readers or listeners, particularly in finding wanted men, stolen property or get-away cars. You should try to cooperate whenever possible, but make sure that you also get the information you want for a news story itself.

Because it may concern minor details, you will often put the police appeal at the end of the story, with clear instructions to the sub-editors or newsreader not to cut it out. However, the appeal may occasionally give you the intro. For example, if police believe that the latest crime was committed by a particularly dangerous man, their appeal may be your intro, as in the following:

**Police in Funafuti have warned women living alone to lock their doors after dark, following the murder of a 23-year-old schoolteacher.**

Quotes and actuality

If you are writing for a newspaper, get plenty of lively quotes to add interest to the story. If
working for radio or television, record people talking about the crime. Beware of quoting police officers who sound very official, their quotes will sound unrealistic and boring. Instead of quoting a policeman who says "The assailant then struck the victim several blows about the head", find a witness who can tell you things like "Then this big man started beating the little fellow, who screamed and screamed for mercy".

In all the information you gather, you must always aim for accuracy. Not only do you risk legal action by being inaccurate, but your reputation with your readers or listeners, as well as with the authorities, will suffer.

Double-check that you have understood what you were told and have made an accurate note. Cross-check with another source if you have any doubts about information you have been given. You can often use reference books, maps or directories for double-checks. If the police say the company's head office is in Mango Street, the telephone book should confirm it. If you are told the get-away car was found in Banda Place, ten kilometres from the bank, you can check the distance on a map.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Write crime stories about people - the criminals, the police and the victims

Develop good contacts and protect them if you have to

Use your diary to keep track of likely developments in continuing cases; organise a filing system to keep your information readily available

Get good quotes or actuality
Chapter 37: Writing about crime

In the first two chapters of this four-chapter section, we looked at the practical aspects of reporting crime. Here we suggest how to write about crime effectively and also avoid some of the pitfalls of poor writing. In the final chapter we will discuss the ethics of crime reporting.

Once you have gathered enough information, start writing the story in the usual inverted pyramid style, with the most important details in the first paragraph, backed-up by more information and ending in the least important facts or comments.

Know your limits

If someone has been charged with an offence or is about to be charged, you are limited in what you can say so that you do not prejudice the chance of a fair trial. That does not mean that you must say nothing about the crime, but it does mean that you should only report those details which will not be contested in court, keeping out personal opinions.

If no-one has been arrested and charged, you can say much more, always bearing in mind that you could be sued for defamation by anyone involved if you do not stick to the truth.

In many crime stories, once you have told the most important details in your first few paragraphs, you want to tell the story in chronological order (the order in which things happened). You should already have gathered plenty of information, so now lead your reader or listener step-by-step through the event, explaining things in detail where necessary. Your story may look something like the following:

Thieves used a bulldozer to break into a city bank and steal almost a million dollars from the vault. The manager and one cashier were injured in the raid on the National Bank in Hibiscus Street, but they have now been released from hospital.
Police say they are still looking for the bulldozer.
The bulldozer was stolen from a nearby building site at lunchtime yesterday and driven straight at the bank.
Staff and customers inside were horrified when the machine crashed through the front wall and into the manager's office.
Two men in black masks threatened them with knives while two others attached a heavy chain to the vault door and tore it open with the bulldozer.
"It was amazing," said customer Fred Harang. "They opened the safe like a tin of fish."

etc.

The main facts are established in the first three paragraphs, then the story is told in the order in which things happened. Right at the end you can give more details about the missing bulldozer, in case any readers spot it:

Police say the yellow bulldozer, with the name Crushcorp on the side, was last seen being driven down Oregano Street.

The police may also ask you to give a telephone number through which people can give them information. You should get this approved by your editor. Radio stations are less likely to use such an appeal partly because their stories have to be kept shorter than a newspaper's and partly because a number read once on air is not likely to be remembered by listeners anyway. Television stations may be able to show the number on the screen during the story. However you do it, keep any appeals short and factual:

Anyone who has any information about the bulldozer or the robbers can contact the police on
Features and background stories

Crime reporting can be dull if all you do is record what has happened and when it happened - dull for you and for your readers or listeners. You can add interest for everyone with background reports and features. These can be done when you have some spare time between news stories or while awaiting further developments in continuing cases.

The simplest background stories for crime reporters are general features about crime. By these we mean features (or current affairs programs) on such things as the rise in burglaries; why psychologists think more rapes happen in hot weather; how people can protect their homes from thieves during the holidays; a new course in self-defence for women.

The work of the police often provides material for features. You could, for example, write a feature on a police dog training school; you might want to interview the new police commissioner about his attitude to crime; you could spend a day in the life of the drug squad or the harbour police. All of these will help your readers or listeners to understand crime and the police in context in society.

A word of warning here: you may also want to write a feature by spending a day with a criminal gang. Remember two things: (a) you could be in danger in their hands and (b) you could be breaking the law by accompanying them on a job. We discuss the ethics of this shortly.

You can also write background feature about specific cases. Once you have reported about the murder of a lonely widow, you may want to produce a longer, in-depth report about her, interviewing relatives, neighbours, social workers and other elderly people, to discover how she lived and why she died. This helps people to understand their society and maybe avoid similar tragedies.

If someone has been charged with a crime, you will be too limited in what you can say about the crime, the accused or the victim to produce a feature or documentary. This should not, however, stop you preparing material for a special feature or programme, to be run once the trial is over. If the accused is found guilty, your feature can explain all the background to the case and the lives of the victims and the criminal. If a not guilty verdict is reached, you may still be able to write a feature on the angle that the police must keep on looking for the person who actually committed the crime. Because people can be cleared by courts even though they actually committed the crime, you should take advice from your editor and reliable experts before using this angle in a feature.

Illustrations

Always try to think of ways of illustrating your crime stories. A good picture is worth a thousand words and a simple diagram can save readers struggling through lines of text of description. For example, if you are reporting on an armed raid on a bank, ask your artist to draw a picture of the inside of the bank, showing how the thieves entered, held up the staff, shot a guard then made their escape. If the police have retrieved the gun, get a picture of it for the page. Use a Photofit picture if the police are sure that it is a good likeness of the wanted person. (See Chapter 46: News pictures.)

Language in writing crime stories

We cannot stress enough the need for care and accuracy when reporting anything to do with crime and the courts. Accuracy must extend all the way through your work, including the words you use when writing your stories, whether for news, features or current affairs.

You must select each word in your story carefully then, when you think you have finished, you
must go back to the beginning and read it through, checking again.

The police, criminals and the courts use specialist terms, some of them technical in nature, some of them short forms and some of them slang. You should only ever use them for two reasons: (a) for precision if no alternative is available and (b) for added colour.

**Legal terms**

The exact wording of charges causes most problems for starting journalists. You must always use the correct terms. For example, there is a clear legal distinction between *murder* and *manslaughter*. *Murder* is a killing planned in advance; *manslaughter* is a killing done on the spur of the moment, without any planning, or by accident. To complicate matters, some legal systems divide killings into three - *wilful murder*, which is planned in advance to kill someone; *murder*, when someone plans to physically harm the victim and the victim actually dies; and *manslaughter*, which is an unintentional killing which arises from any unlawful activity.

You must not choose your own terms. Whatever the police or courts call the offence, that is what any accused person will be charged with and tried for. If a person is charged with *manslaughter*, it would be wrong to call him an *alleged murderer* or the killing a *murder*, which is a far more serious charge.

It is worth noting here too that in correct English you must say that a person is *charged with murder*. If you say that a person is charged for murder, that strongly implies that he has done it, something which you must not prejudge. (There is also a comical interpretation because charged for means that a person is asked to pay for something, for example "He was charged for using the tennis court.")

The following are some other common legal terms which cause problems:

- **Theft** is simple stealing, distinct from *robbery*, which is theft with violence or a threat of violence.

- **Theft** itself implies the intention to permanently deprive the owner of something. Someone who steals a car then abandons it is usually charged with *taking a vehicle without the owner's consent*.

- **Stealing** from buildings is called *theft* when the thief has legal access, such as stealing from an open shop. When they have to break in it is called either *break-and-enter or break, entry and stealing*, although if it happens at night it is called *burglary*.

- **Fraud** (sometimes called *criminal deception*) is obtaining money, goods or services by making false claims about them or yourself. There is a lesser charge of *obtaining advantage by deception* if there is no actual exchange of goods or money, such as lying to a bank that you cannot repay a loan.

- **Rape** is another problem area. It usually refers to sexual intercourse obtained with force, violence or a threat of violence against a person's will. In some countries, any sexual intercourse with a girl under the legal age of consent (whether or not she was willing) is termed *statutory rape*, while in others it is called *carnal knowledge or unlawful sexual intercourse*. In some countries, rape is referred to as *sexual assault*. Check the exact term in your country.

- **Drink driving** or **drunk driving** are not actual charges. A driver may have had more than the legal limit of alcohol, but may not be drunk. The offence is *driving while under the influence of alcohol* or (in modern times when police can scientifically test alcohol levels in the blood) *driving with more than the permitted concentration of alcohol*.

**Jargon**

The police, the courts and criminals also use *jargon* words as a short form. Jargon is specialised
language concerned with a particular subject, culture or profession. It is not usually found in the everyday speech of your ordinary readers or listeners. (See Chapter 11: Language & style - words.) Your readers or listeners may not understand jargon or any words which are not in clear and everyday language.

A good example of jargon is the word deceased, which simply means a dead person. Police reports will speak of "the deceased man's wife" when you could write it more simply as "the dead man's wife" or alternatively as "the man's widow". Police jargon can often create some strange scenes, as in this example of a report:

The deceased struck his assailant a blow to the head before receiving a fatal stab wound in the chest.

The impossibility of a dead man (the deceased) hitting anyone was missed by the reporter, who should have rewritten the sentence:

The man hit his attacker on the head before being fatally stabbed in the chest.

Assailant is another jargon word liked by police but almost always better replaced by words such as attacker, robber, gunman etc. Police reports speak about an officer "proceeding to the scene" when they mean that he walked, rode or drove there.

Most modern police forces have developed a system of code words and numbers for crimes, criminals or officers. This was done to make radio messages clearer and shorter for their officers and to confuse anyone else listening in to the messages. There is no need for you to use them, they will only confuse. A "10/40", for example, may be the code for a robbery in progress. You call it "a robbery". The police may refer to a "GBH", but you should use the full term "assault causing grievous bodily harm" in the first reference, then simply "the assault".

Write simply

Many journalists believe that they add drama and life to a story by adding adjectives and adverbs. They refer to "a brutal slaying", as if another slaying can be gentle. They say that ambulances "rushed" to the scene, as if some ambulance drivers dawdle in an emergency.

Adjectives and adverbs usually get in the way of understanding, unless they add to the accuracy of defining something, such as red car. If you choose the right noun, you will not need many adjectives. For example, all screams are high-pitched, all explosions are loud, all battles are fierce, so you do not need the adjective.

In any sentence, the verb can be the best way of adding drama, if used carefully and the same verb is not used too often. A man who falls head-over-heels from a building can be said to tumble. An attacker who cuts out someone's eye with a knife can be said to have gouged it out.

Attribution

The sudden and brief nature of many crimes means that you cannot always rely on descriptions of what happened, from victims, witnesses or even the police. Only report as a fact what you know to be true. All the rest must be attributed. For example, if the police tell you that a man was attacked in Mananga Street last night, you can state that as a fact, without attribution. However, if they say that they think he knew his attackers, but are not sure, you should attribute that. There is no need to put "police said" throughout your story, but you should include the words whenever there is any doubt at all, as in the following:

A 60-year-old man was attacked outside his home in the city last night.

Retired carpenter Ahmed Shazi was opening the door to his home in Mananga Street when has was
hit over the head from behind.

Police believe the attacker used a large stick to beat Mr Shazi several times before running off.

Mr Shazi was taken to the Royal Hospital, where doctors put six stitches into a head wound. He was detained overnight but allowed home this morning.

The police say they can find no motive for the attack.

Notice from the above that we call the event "an attack". There was little doubt that it happened, and police themselves used the word. They are still looking for the attacker (as mentioned already, never use the word assailant - it is not common in everyday English). If they charge someone with assault over it, you should insert the word "alleged" whenever you are describing any aspect of the attack which may be disputed in court. This is because the defendant will probably argue that he did not do it, it is simply an allegation. Your report after an arrest would now read as follows:

An off-duty soldier has been charged with assault after an attack on a 60-year-old man.

Police say that the soldier will appear before city magistrates later today.

The man is alleged to have attacked retired carpenter Ahmed Shazi in Mananga Street on Wednesday.

Mr Shazi was treated for head wounds after the attack.

Notice that we use alleged once, because the soldier will probably deny that he did the attack. We state as facts that the soldier has been charged, and that Mr Shazi was treated for head wounds. We attribute to the police that the soldier will appear in court because, although it is likely, it is not certain.

TO SUMMARISE:

Write crime stories about people - the criminals, the police and the victims

Keep your writing simple and straightforward; avoid jargon

Make your reports more interesting with appropriate quotes or actuality; attribute all comments and attribute facts where necessary
Crime reporters face a number of ethical problems when doing their job. Perhaps the biggest problem is remembering where they belong in relation to the police, criminals and the public.

**Undivided loyalty**

As a journalist, your first and over-riding loyalty must be to tell your readers or listeners the truth. Sometimes the police may want you to hide the truth or alter it, to help them catch a criminal. For example, they may ask you not to publish or broadcast a story about a murder because they think the secrecy will help them catch a particular suspect. You must never take such a decision lightly. Always ask your news editor before making any agreement.

If you decide to suppress some details, make it clear to the police that your agreement only applies to specific details and only to this one occasion. You should always retain control over what you publish or broadcast. Never make up details to replace those you have agreed to take out (the police may ask you to give false information to trap a criminal). You must never lie to your readers or listeners. They must be able to trust you.

This loyalty to telling all of your audience the truth becomes most difficult for specialist reporters, who may spend a large part of their working life and free time with one set of people. Science correspondents who deal mainly with scientists may lose the ability to talk in simple terms their readers or listeners can understand. Economics reporters may find that their minds automatically focus on the financial advantages of a development project, ignoring the social costs. As a crime reporter, there is a danger that you may find yourself thinking more and more like a policeman, and less like a fair and balanced journalist.

Always remember that your job is not to catch criminals or prosecute them. The police and courts exist for that. You have a duty to help the police wherever possible, but that is not your only duty. You main duty, as we have said, is to the truth.

For the police to catch and prosecute a criminal, they have to believe that he or she is guilty. You do not have to make such a judgment. Under common law, a person is innocent until proved guilty. (For more information, see Chapter 63: Introduction to the law). If the police name a wanted man, you can quote the police chief as saying that he could be armed and dangerous, but never say that he is wanted for killing someone. The usual English phrase is "...wanted in connection with the killing of...".

Although most criminals will lie, they may not lie all the time. Some who say they are innocent may be telling the truth on this occasion. If a known member of the criminal world comes to you with a story, do not dismiss them out of hand, but be especially suspicious of what they say. Double-check and cross-check everything.

**Copycat crimes**

There has been a debate for a long time over whether or not people commit crimes because they have seen similar events portrayed in the media. Although crime has existed as long as there have been laws (and long before there was even writing), there are some crimes which are obviously modelled on what the criminal has seen, heard or read. We call these copycat crimes.

Although the media might not encourage people to commit crimes, they often show how it can be
done. A boy who watches a film in which a man places a poisonous snake in his enemy's bed may, if he hates his sister, go and put a snake in her bed. That would be a copycat crime.

In Chapter 61: Taste and bad taste, we explain why, in a family newspaper or programme, you should not give people exact instructions on how to commit suicide. This could be copied by a child or a person in an unstable mental state.

As a journalist, you will occasionally have to make a difficult decision about how much you tell your readers or listeners. You must tell them enough to keep them informed and help them understand why something happened, but you must not encourage copycat crimes.

**Fear and alarm**

Reporting crime needs special sensitivity because it is very easy to spread fear and alarm by what you write or broadcast. You must always balance the need of your audience to be informed with your duty not to alarm them unnecessarily. You may need to warn them that there is an escaped mass murderer on the loose, but you need to be as specific as possible. If police say the killer has been seen in the Northern Province, include this detail. You will warn those people in the Northern Province to be especially careful, without alarming people elsewhere unnecessarily.

You also need to show restraint when reporting civil disturbances. A fight between four men is not a riot. If two of them are black and two white it is not a race riot. Avoid inflaming a situation which is already tense. If you report that there has been a riot between two communities, more members of those communities may join in and make matters worse. There is also the danger of encouraging sightseers, who will also make matters worse, especially for the police.

Some journalists will use dramatic language to enliven the story and add interest, but the risks are too high that they will simply encourage more of the same behaviour. There is a lot of difference between the descriptive sentence: "A bus was burnt at North Beach and a car set on fire in South Park" and the provocative sentence: "Cars and buses were set on fire across the city."

As a general principle, you will not be accused of inciting fear and alarm if you stick to the facts and report them accurately.

While on the subject of reporting riots, you must always look after your own safety. Although you may need to be close to the action to report accurately, you will not be able to tell your story if you are shot or arrested. If there is any danger that you will be attacked, arrested, shot or trampled - move.

**Releasing names**

You should always check with the police before releasing the names of victims of crimes, especially when people have been killed. It is usually the job of the police to make sure that the victim’s nearest relatives are told first, so that they can soften the shock.

If you cooperate with the police, they will usually cooperate with you over this. If you know the names of victims but find that relatives have not been informed yet, you can agree to withhold publishing the names on the understanding that the police tell you as soon as the relatives have been informed.

**False conclusions**

You must avoid drawing false conclusions. If you only report what you know to be true and attribute all the rest, you will be safe. If you start drawing your own conclusions and laying blame, you will get into trouble.

Imagine that you arrive at the scene of a death. A man's body has been found on the pavement at
the foot of a 10-storey office building. The police can tell you that he died as a result of a fall from the building. Was he pushed? Did he jump? Did he lean out to close a window and tumble to his death? The police also tell you that they are questioning a man who worked with the victim on the top floor.

Just tell the facts, do not draw conclusions. Compare the following stories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RIGHT:</th>
<th>WRONG:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A 23-year-old man fell to his death from an office block in the Central Business District today. Police believe that telephonist Andrew Waiwa fell from the top floor of the 10-storey Telecom Building in Garone Street at midday. They say they are treating his death as suspicious and are questioning one of Mr Waiwa's colleagues about it.</td>
<td>A Telecom employee pushed a colleague out of a top-floor window in a city office block today. Telephonist Andrew Waiwa fell ten floors after being pushed out of the Telecom Building on Garone Street in the Central Business District. Police are questioning his killer etc</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Write crime stories about people - the criminals, the police and the victims

Develop good contacts and protect them if you have to

Use your diary to keep track of likely developments in continuing cases; organise a filing system to keep your information readily available

Keep your writing simple and straightforward; avoid jargon

Make your reports more interesting with appropriate quotes or actuality; attribute all comments and attribute facts where necessary

Always work within the law
Chapter 39: Introduction to investigative reporting

In this, the first of the three chapters on investigative journalism, we discuss why there is a need for investigative reporting and we state some basic principles. In the following chapters we give practical advice on how to set about the task and on how to write your stories or present your reports. We conclude with advice on some ethical and legal problems you may meet along the way.

What is investigative journalism?

Investigative journalism is finding, reporting and presenting news which other people try to hide. It is very similar to standard news reporting, except that the people at the centre of the story will usually not help you and may even try to stop you doing your job.

The job of journalists is to let people know what is going on in the community, the society and the world around them. Journalists do this by finding facts and telling them to their readers or listeners.

In much of their work, the facts are easy to find in such places as the courts and parliaments, disasters, public meetings, churches and sporting events. People are usually happy to provide journalists with news. Indeed, in many countries, thousands of people work full time in public relations, giving statements, comments, press releases and other forms of information to journalists.

Throughout the world, though, there are still a lot of things happening which people want to keep secret. In most cases these are private things which have no impact on other people - such as relations within a family or a bad report from school. These personal things can remain secret.

In many other cases, governments, companies, organisations and individuals try to hide decisions or events which affect other people. When a journalist tries to report on matters which somebody wants to keep secret, this is investigative journalism.

The great British newspaper publisher Lord Northcliffe once said: "News is what somebody, somewhere wants to suppress; all the rest is advertising."

There are several reasons why societies need investigative journalism. They include:

- People have a right to know about the society in which they live. They have a right to know about decisions which may affect them, even if people in power want to keep them secret.
- People in power - whether in government, the world of commerce, or any other group in society - can abuse that power. They can be corrupt, steal money, break laws and do all sorts of things which harm other people. They might just be incompetent and unable to do their job properly. They will usually try to keep this knowledge secret. Journalists try to expose such abuse.
- Journalists also have a duty to watch how well people in power perform their jobs, especially those who have been elected to public office. Journalists should constantly ask whether such people are keeping their election promises. Politicians and others who are not keeping their promises may try to hide the fact; journalists should try to expose it.

Of course, journalists are not the only people in society who should expose incompetence, corruption, lies and broken promises. We also have parliaments, councils, courts, commissions, the police and other authorities. The police often take people to court for breaking laws. But sometimes they do not have the time, staff or skills to catch and correct every case of abuse. Also, they cannot do anything against people who behave badly without actually breaking any laws.
So journalists have a role as well. The difference is that when journalists expose wrongdoing, they cannot punish people. Journalists can only bring wrongdoing into the light of public attention and hope that society will do the rest, to punish wrongdoers or to change a system which is at fault.

**Who should we investigate?**

Journalists should be able to expose abuse, corruption and criminal activities in all fields of public life, but the main areas include the following:

**Governments**

These range from local councils to national parliaments and foreign governments. Sometimes politicians and public servants are actually corrupt and should be exposed and removed from office. But often they hide a decision because they know the public may not like it. They might keep a deal they have made with a foreign timber company secret because it will harm the environment or destroy people's homes. Often politicians and public servants spend so long in office that they forget that the public has the right to know what is happening. If the public elects people to office and gives them taxes and other forms of wealth to administer, the public has the right to know what they are doing. The electors should also know so that they can decide how to vote at the next election.

**Companies**

Some companies break the law and should be exposed. But companies usually like to keep activities secret for other reasons. Perhaps they have made a mistake or lost money. Perhaps they do not want competitors to steal their secrets or they do not want people to oppose a development they are planning. However, even private companies have some responsibility towards the public. Companies are part of each society. They usually make some use of natural resources, take money from customers and shareholders, provide jobs for people and use services provided by all taxpayers. Where their activities affect the rest of the community, the community has a right to know what they are doing.

**Criminals**

Although governments and companies can be corrupt, criminals make their living at it. They act like leeches on the community, so your readers and listeners have the right to know about them. Fighting crime is, of course, mainly the job of the police and legal system. But sometimes they do not have enough resources to do their jobs properly. Sometimes the law itself limits their powers. Also, the police and judiciary can sometimes be corrupt themselves. So journalists - like every law-abiding citizen - have the duty to expose wrongdoing.

There are, of course, all sorts of other individuals and organisations who like to hide things which affect the public. A charity may try to hide the fact that it is not doing a good job with money it has been given. A football club might be secretly negotiating to move its ground against the wishes of its fans. A man might be selling coloured water as a cure for every illness. All these things need to be exposed so that the public can make up its mind whether to support them or not.

**Some basic principles**

Let us discuss some basic rules about investigative reporting before we move on to the practical techniques.

**News value**

Most newspapers, radio and television stations get a lot of requests from people to "investigate" some alleged wrongdoing. In many cases these are silly matters, lies or hoaxes. But you should
spend some time on each tip-off, to decide whether or not it will make a story.

You should judge all topics for investigative reporting on the criteria for what makes news. Is it new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people? Sometimes, the story might only affect one person and be so trivial that it is not worth following up. Remember you have limited time and resources, so you cannot follow every story idea. Use your news judgment.

Keep your eyes and ears open

Always be on the lookout for possible stories. Sometimes people will come to you with tip-offs, but often you must discover the stories yourself. Story ideas can come from what you read or overhear or even a sudden thought while you are brushing your teeth. Good investigative reporters do not let any possible story clues escape. They write them down because they might come in useful later.

Listen to casual conversations and rumour, on the bus, in the street or in a club. Careless words give the first clues to something wrong, but never write a story based only on talk you have overheard or on rumour.

Get the facts

Because investigative reporting means digging up hidden facts, your job will not be as easy as reporting court or a public meeting. People will try to hide things from you. You must gather as many relevant facts as you can, from as many people as possible. Your facts must be accurate, so always check them.

And do not expect dramatic results. Real life journalism is seldom like the stories you see in films. Most investigations need many hours of work gathering lots and lots of small details. You and your editor must realise this. If you are not given enough time, you may not be able to do any successful investigative reporting.

Fit the facts together

As you gather the facts, fit them together to make sure that they make sense. Investigative reporting is often like doing a jigsaw. At the beginning you have a jumble of pieces. Only slowly will they emerge as a picture. Unlike a jigsaw puzzle, you will not have all the pieces at the beginning. You have to recognise which pieces are missing then go and find them.

Check the facts

Remember you are trying to find information which some people want to keep secret. They will not help you in your investigation, so you cannot check your facts with them. They will probably oppose you and look for mistakes in everything you write or broadcast. If you make a mistake, they will probably take you to court. You must always check your facts. Take a tip from the most famous example of investigative reporting, the so-called Watergate Affair. The Washington Post reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein investigated a crime which eventually led to the downfall of US President Richard Nixon. They knew their enemies would be waiting for them to make a mistake, so they made it a rule that they would never use any fact unless it was confirmed by two sources. This is a good rule to try to follow.

However, remember that many people you might interview about corruption could be corrupt themselves. Criminals lie, so be suspicious of what you are told - and check their words with someone else, preferably someone you trust.

Evidence

In addition to gathering facts, you should also gather evidence to support those facts. This is
especially important in case you are taken to court for defamation as a result of your investigation. Courts will only accept facts which can be proved. If someone tells you something on the record, you can show the court your notes, but it would also be useful to get a signed statutory declaration from them. This is a kind of legal statement given under oath. Original documents will usually be accepted as evidence, but photocopies may not, unless they are supported by evidence from the owner of the original, who may not choose to help you.

Confidential sources

When investigating corruption or abuse, you will meet people who will only give you information if you promise never to reveal their identity. This is very common in criminal matters, where people are scared of pay-back.

You can agree to these conditions but remember, sometime in the future a judge examining the same matter in court may order you to reveal the name of such a confidential source of information. You will be breaking the law if you refuse to name your source, and could go to jail for contempt.

If you promise to protect a confidential source, you must do so until the source himself or herself releases you from that promise. So if you are not prepared to go to jail to protect a source, do not promise in the first place. (For a full discussion of this issue, see Chapter 60: Sources and confidentiality.)

Threats

People may threaten you to try to stop your work. This could be a threat of physical harm or a threat by a company to stop advertising with your newspaper or station. It could even by a vague threat to "do something" to you. Most threats are never carried out. The people making them realise that harming you will only make their situation worse.

But all threats should be reported immediately to your editor or your organisation's lawyer. This will share the burden of worry with someone objective. It will also act as extra protection if the person making the threat knows that it is public knowledge. If you have a witness to the threat, you might be able to include it in your eventual story, after getting legal advice.

Investigative journalism always leads to some unpleasant conflict. If you cannot cope with conflict, stay out of investigative journalism (see Chapter 58: Pressures on journalists).

Work within the law

Journalists have no special rights in law, even when investigating corruption. Unlike the police, journalists cannot listen in to other people's telephone calls or open their letters. Journalists cannot enter premises against a person's wish.

You must work within the law, but more than that, you should not use any unethical methods of getting information. For example, you should not pretend to be someone to whom people feel obliged to give information, such as a police officer or a government official.

However, there are situations where you do not have to tell people that you are a journalist when gathering information. We will discuss those in the next chapter.

If you have any doubts about legal matters, consult your editor or your organisation's lawyer.

TO SUMMARISE:

Investigative journalism is needed to uncover important stories which people want to
Investigative journalists need all the skills of general reporting, but especially:

- an alert mind to recognise story ideas and important facts which people are trying to hide
- an ordered mind to make notes, file information and fit lots of facts together
- patience to keep digging for information
- good contacts throughout society
- courage to withstand threats from people you are investigating

As well as accumulating information, you must also gather supporting evidence in case your story is challenged

You must protect confidential sources of information

Always consult a lawyer if you have any worries about the legality of what you are doing or writing

Double-check everything you do, from the information you gather to the way you write your final story

Work within the law
Chapter 40: Investigative reporting in practice

In this, the second of the three chapters on investigative journalism, we give practical advice on how to undertake the task and make sure your work is reliable and accurate. In the third chapter on investigative reporting we discuss how to write your stories or compile your reports and we conclude with advice on some ethical and legal problems you may meet along the way.

The task of the investigative reporter may seem full of difficulties, but if you follow some simple hints it can be quite easy.

Contacts

We cannot stress often enough how important a journalist's contacts are. These are the people who can give you story ideas, information and tell you when you are on the wrong track. Make as many contacts as you can - and look after them as you would a friend.

Good investigative reporters have contacts in the places most likely to provide stories. Your contacts do not have to be people at the top of departments or companies. In fact, people down the ladder are often more practical use. Identify people in key positions within organisations. Good contacts are people like court clerks, council clerks, company clerks - in fact, clerks almost anywhere. These are the people who see all sorts of information you might find useful.

Trade union leaders are good contacts in the commercial world, as are accountants or financial advisers. Because groups such as lawyers, police officers, accountants, doctors, nurses, delivery drivers and politicians enjoy chatting about people in their profession, you only have to establish one or two good contacts within any group to get a lot of information about what is happening within the profession.

Always listen, even if what your contact says is no immediate use. If a contact rings when you are out, always ring them back, otherwise you may lose them. Protect your contacts and never reveal them if they ask you not to. Even contacts such as council clerks who are allowed to give you information openly may not want to seem to be favouring you, so be discreet.

Make good relations with other people in your news organisation. They will have their own contacts who might be useful. It is always good to get to know the people who sell advertising space in your newspaper, radio or television station. They meet all sorts of people in their work and always like to talk. They usually love passing information to their journalists.

Listen

Good journalists know how to listen. Listen to people even if they do not seem to have any useful information. They may still say something you can use later.

If a contact calls you with information which you do not think you can use, do not tell them so immediately. Say you will "look into the matter" and the next time you talk to them, mention that "I couldn't use your information, but thanks anyway". This approach keeps them feeling important.

Interviewing

You will need to interview people in your search for facts. Never interview the person at the centre of the investigation first. Always start at the edge and work your way towards the middle. You must not warn the person under investigation too soon. Also, you need to gather as many facts as
possible before you put your questions to the person at the centre.

For example, you may be investigating a rumour that Mr X, the manager of the city rubbish dump, has accepted bribes to allow companies to dump dangerous waste illegally. Start by interviewing drivers of garbage trucks who use the dump, then the managers of their companies and finally, if you have enough information by then, question Mr X himself. Start with those people who are innocent or just on the edge of the corruption (because they will speak most freely), before digging deeper into the centre of the matter.

**Make notes**

Make lots and lots of notes. Write down everything, however unimportant it may seem at the time.

If you cannot write your notes immediately, write them as soon as possible. For example, if you are having a private conversation with a contact in a club, he may not want other people to see you making notes like a reporter. Make your notes as soon as you get somewhere private, like your car or the toilet!

Keep all your notes in order. It is good practice in a big and lengthy investigation to set up a filing system for notes, reports and other documents. This will keep them in order and separate from any other stories you might be working on at the same time.

Keep all your notes, tapes and documents in a safe place, just in case there is a fire or the office is burgled by the people you are investigating or raided by the police. In an important investigation, make copies of all material and take them home or leave them with a trusted friend, a lawyer or in a bank. You cannot resist the police if they come with a warrant to take material from your office, but you do not need offer them information on where you keep any other copies of your notes.

**Protecting documents**

Your contacts or anonymous people may give you confidential documents exposing some corruption, such as a letter from Mr X to the rubbish companies asking for bribes (though he might not use that word). Or it could be a confidential report that a new public building is about to fall down, something the government wants to keep secret.

We say that such documents have been "leaked" - like water through a hole in a pipe. You must be especially careful in protecting such leaked documents, because the legal owners of them (such as Mr X or the government) could get a court order forcing you to give them back. If they have a code on them somewhere which can identify that particular copy, they might be able to trace your source who leaked that copy. One tip is to photocopy the document then either destroy the original or hand it back to your source to put back in the proper place. Then you cannot be accused of possessing stolen goods. Now use scissors to cut out any parts of your photocopy which might give clues to who sent it to you. If the police do seize your documents, they may not be able to trace who sent it.

**Teamwork**

Where possible, try to work with another reporter on a big investigation. They can go with you on difficult interviews, to make their own notes, to protect against threats and to support you if the interviewee later denies something he said.

Working with a partner allows you to divide up some of the time-consuming work of chasing leads and checking public records.

A partner will also be able to discuss the story with you in detail. Together you might be able to solve a puzzle which you alone cannot solve.
A partner will also stop you feeling isolated. Because investigative reporting can be a long and lonely job, you need someone near you to give support and tell you when you are going right or wrong.

Sources of information

Although a lot of your work may be digging for secrets, you can get a lot of useful information openly from official sources and documents if you know where to look.

Official sources

There are official reports, minutes of meetings, company reports, transcripts of courts or commissions, records of land ownership, police records, even yearbooks, telephone books and electoral lists. By piecing together information from these sources, helped by talking to contacts, you can build up your jigsaw.

For example, if a disco burns down in suspicious circumstances, you can find who might benefit from insurance money by checking who owns it. Look in the company records and land titles records. You might be surprised to find that the person who runs the disco does not really own it. Court records might tell you whether any of the real owners have any criminal records of arson or fraud. Bankruptcy court records might tell you whether the owner is in financial trouble. You build up the picture piece by piece.

Unfortunately, because the situation varies from country to country, it is impossible to give detailed advice here of where you should look for official information. It is something you will have to learn by asking friends, colleagues and contacts - then doing it.

In countries like the United States where there are laws which allow members of the public to examine all sorts of public records, the task of the investigative reporter is made easier - even if it still takes a long time. Freedom of Information (FOI) laws set down rules about which records are open for the public (including journalists) to see. They also include rules on how people can ask to see official information and what to do if information is refused.

If you do not have any FOI laws in your country, perhaps you and your fellow journalists can lobby your politicians to introduce them. (You can get details on FOI laws by contacting journalism associations or councils for civil liberties in countries such as the United States, Britain or Australia.)

If you do not have FOI laws in your country, your Constitution may give you some rights to examine government records. Check this with a good lawyer.

Even if there is no law giving you the right to examine official documents, some public bodies may have rules which allow the public (including journalists) to see certain records. Some court and parliamentary records are usually available for inspection. Your country may also have bodies such as a companies commission, corporate affairs commission, public stock exchange or securities commission which keep records on commercial companies. You should ask if their records are open to public inspection. Most democracies have laws which state that all public companies must produce certain kinds of regular reports (such as annual reports, lists of directors and financial statements). These records may be available for inspection.

The general rule should be: Whether you have a legal right or not to examine records, you should ask to see them. Sometimes you may be lucky and an official will let you see records you are not legally entitled to. Sometimes they may refuse permission, in which case you should find out whether you can appeal to anyone higher up to change the decision.

If you are blocked in your search, why not ask a politician to help out? He or she may have access to records which you have not been able to see. Politicians may agree to help either because they
want to help to expose wrongdoing or because it will help them against their opponents.

**Overseas information**

You may need information about foreign governments, companies or organisations. Perhaps the company you are investigating is based overseas. You could try to get information or help from a number of organisations such as international news services, universities, international computer databases, foreign embassies or lobby groups such as Greenpeace or Amnesty International.

If your story has connections with another country, contact a news organisation in that country and agree to work on the investigation together, sharing information and ideas. If the story is big enough, they might even send their journalists to work with you.

**Gathering evidence**

It is never ethical to trick people to gain evidence for a story, but you can sometimes set your own trap without lying.

For example, if you are investigating a story about Garage X which is charging customers for repairs it never makes, you can test that garage yourself. Perhaps get a faulty car and first take it to a government inspection station or a reputable garage, who will tell you exactly what faults it has. Then take the car to Garage X, posing as an ordinary customer, not telling them that you are a journalist. When they say they have completed the repairs, take the car back to the original garage that you trust, and get a report from them on whether or not the repairs have been done. You or your colleagues will need to do this several times before you can be sure that Garage X really is cheating people, not just making mistakes in its work. Then you should confront the Garage X owner with your evidence and ask him to explain.

A word of warning here: do not encourage anyone to break the law. In some countries, such as the United States, this is called "entrapment" and is illegal. For example, if you hear that Mister Y is taking bribes to issue building permits, you must not go up to Mr Y posing as a builder and offer him money - that may be illegal. However, you can go up to Mr Y and ask for a permit and explain that you need it urgently. If he then asks for a bribe, you have your story.

**Publication**

If your newspaper, radio or television station is in competition with other news organisations, you will usually try to keep your investigation secret until it is published or broadcast. This is because you may spend many days or even weeks of work on a story, and do not want to give your competitors all your work for free.

It is occasionally also important to keep it secret from people at the centre of your investigation who will be exposed for incompetence, corruption or a crime. Although, as we discussed earlier, you should eventually interview the people who have been accused, you should not give them too long before you publish the story. If you do, they might threaten you, escape or take out a court injunction stopping publication. (See "Silencing writs" in Chapter 70: Defamation.)

The ideal investigation follows these steps:

1. Build up facts until there is no doubt;
2. Interview any people who seem to be doing wrong;
3. Write the story;
4. Make a final check with your lawyer to make sure your story is legally safe;
5. Publish.

**Incomplete stories**
You may occasionally find that, however hard and long you try, you cannot get all the pieces in the jigsaw. Perhaps some documents are missing, hidden or they cannot be released; perhaps someone refuses to comment. You will have to decide whether or not to publish the incomplete story. Consult with your superiors and lawyer before making the decision.

You will occasionally find that publishing an incomplete story helps to unearth some missing details. A reader or listener may come forward with the information you need. The person who would not comment may realise that silence is no longer useful.

**Follow-ups**

The story should not end with publication or broadcast. If you have exposed something wrong, you must check to see what is done by people with authority to put it right. Are the police going to press charges against the rubbish dump manager for taking bribes? Will the Minister of Health do anything about the poisonous waste left in the dump? Then you can write a series of follow-up stories, referring back to your original article or documentary.

If you have exposed a defect which will take longer to correct, make a note in your newsroom diary to check perhaps a week, a month or a year later. For example, if you have written a story showing that schools in certain provinces have been starved of teaching staff because of Education Department inefficiency, first find out what the Minister of Education intends to do about it. And perhaps six months later check again if the Minister has supplied the necessary teachers.

If other news organisations in your area or country also do investigative reporting, you will occasionally find that they have their own exclusive story exposing some wrongdoing.

It may be so important that your organisation has to use that story too. In such a case, look for a good angle to follow up. The most usual one is to ask the people under investigation for their reaction, or ask people responsible for putting the situation right - such as the police or a minister - what are they going to do about the situation which has been exposed.

From the moment it is published or broadcast, the competition’s story is public property, so follow it up if it seems worthwhile. But remember, your competitor may not have checked their facts properly. Do not trust them. You cannot be sure that their story is true unless you check the facts again yourself. Some quick visits or telephone calls may be all that is needed.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Investigative journalists need all the skills of general reporting, but especially:

- an alert mind to recognise story ideas and important facts which people are trying to hide
- an ordered mind to make notes, file information and fit lots of facts together
- patience to keep digging for information
- good contacts throughout society
- courage to withstand threats from people you are investigating

Become familiar with all the different places you can get information, such as company registers and court records

As well as accumulating information, you must also gather supporting evidence in case your story is challenged

Double-check everything you do, from the information you gather to the way you write your final story
Chapter 41: Investigative reporting, writing techniques

In this, the final of the three chapters on investigative journalism, we discuss how to write your stories or compile your reports and we conclude with advice on some ethical and legal problems you may meet along the way.

Investigative reporters must take special care when writing a story. This is because investigative stories usually make someone appear either bad or stupid, accusations which can lead to legal action against you for defamation. You will probably be safe if your story is true and in the public interest. But it can lose the protection of the law if there are serious errors. Someone - probably the people your story exposes as corrupt, dishonest or simply incompetent - will be looking closely for mistakes to attack you on. So you must take extra care. (For more on the risks of defamation, see Chapter 69: Defamation.)

Writing

Writing stories or scripts based on investigative journalism requires all the skills you need for general journalism. However, given the risks you will face in investigative journalism, a few of the core rules are worth stressing again here:

Stick to facts

You will be much safer if you stick to facts which you can prove are true. That is why you check your facts and get confirmation for each one.

As you write, stop at each new important fact and say to yourself: "Is this true?" Then say: "Have I confirmed it with another source?"

Do not speculate (i.e. write things which might be true, but which you cannot prove). If you do not have all the facts you would like, you may have to be satisfied with a lesser story, as long as it makes sense and contains no errors.

Avoid personal comment

Do not put in your personal opinions. You may be writing a story about someone who has cheated old people out of their life savings. You may hate this man, but you must not say it. You might believe he is evil, but you should not say that either. If you show in your story that you hate this man, that could be seen as malice, which will destroy your defence against defamation.

Just show your readers and listeners the facts. If the man is bad, the facts will lead your audience to that conclusion without you telling them what to think.

Keep your language simple

Keep your sentences short and your language simple and concise. Some investigations will reveal some very complicated facts, perhaps because the person under suspicion has tried very cleverly to hide their wrongdoing. You must simplify this for your readers or listeners, so they get a clear picture of what has happened.

Avoid vague words

Wherever possible, avoid using vague words, such as "a large amount" or "some time later". Words like this show that you do not have accurate details - otherwise you would use them. Sometimes
this is unavoidable, but vague words will usually take the strength out of a story.

If you know the man cheated the old people out of $110,854, write that figure somewhere in the story (but not, obviously, in the first few paragraphs, where you should say "more than $100,000").

**Check your work**

You should check your work at each stage and when you have finished, double check everything again.

Ask yourself again: "Are these facts correct and confirmed?" If you have enough time, put the story to one side for a few hours, then return to it with a fresh view, seeing it as a reader or listener might.

Ask a colleague to read the story and try to find errors. Do not be upset if they expose errors or big gaps in information. It is better to be told now by a colleague than later in a defamation case.

Wherever possible, show the story to your organisation's lawyer, who will bring a fresh mind to the story and spot any legal problems which might arise.

If anyone recommends changes, do not let them write the changes themselves. They will not know the case as well as you do. Get them to explain what is wrong, rewrite that part yourself, then ask if it is right. Never settle for anything you are not completely happy with.

One final check worth making is to ask yourself: "Is there any way I have identified my confidential sources, even though I promised to keep them secret?" Try to read the story as if you are one of the people who has been accused of incompetence or corruption. See if they would be able to identify any of your confidential sources from what you have written. If there is any risk at all, change the story to protect your sources.

**Illustrations**

Can you use any illustrations to make your story more interesting? Perhaps you can use pictures of the victims looking sad, or someone at the scene of an alleged crime.

In complicated stories, a diagram might help to show how the pieces fit together. For example, in a story involving related companies, you should include a simple box diagram showing with lines and arrows how the companies are related. If your organisation has a graphic artist, ask them for help.

In a story about how a government department has been wasting taxpayers' money, you might use a graph to show how the money has disappeared over the years.

If you have a really important document to support your story, include the relevant sections of that document as an illustration. On television, you can type quotations from the document across the screen as the story is being read out.

On radio and television, use the actual tapes of interviews if you have them. These will add variety and also act as confirmation.

However, if your interviewee wants to remain anonymous, perhaps film them in silhouette or change the sound of their voice electronically.

**Headlines**

However carefully you write your story to make it safe, a sub-editor may not understand exactly
why you use certain words or describe something in a certain way. The sub-editor may write a headline which is wrong or possible defamatory.

Having spent a lot of time working on the story, do not abandon it at this final stage. Discuss possible headlines with the sub-editor, until both of you are satisfied you have done the best job possible.

**Some words of warning**

As we have said several times in these chapters, there are many dangers to investigative reporting. The greatest danger is that you will do or write something which will allow the person under suspicion to take you to court for defamation or on some other charge. So remember the following:

**Sub judice reporting**

It may happen that a story you are investigating is also being dealt with by a court. In most countries, a matter before a court is said to be sub judice and there are limits on what can be reported about it, beyond what is said in the court.

Be very careful when covering any sub judice matters. Consult your editor or lawyer for advice. If you make the wrong decision, you could be charged with contempt of court. (See Chapter 64: The rules of court reporting.)

**Mistakes**

If someone complains about a mistake after the story is published or broadcast, never issue an immediate apology or correction without talking first to your editor and lawyer. They will decide what action to take.

**Payments for stories**

Sometimes people will ask to be paid for their information. Try to avoid this, but sometimes it is necessary, even if it is a few dollars for a tip-off.

However, never pay for something which might have involved criminal activity. For example, if someone asks for $100 to provide a document, then they steal that document, you could be charged as an accomplice to theft. Any payment could be seen as encouraging a crime.

**Concealing crimes**

Your informant may tell you that they have committed a crime, perhaps that they broke into an office to steal a photograph as proof of corruption. You should never knowingly hide a criminal from the law. If you think that your informant is involved in criminal activities, tell them at the beginning that you do not wish to know anything about it. Talk only about the facts you need to know for your story.

**A final warning**

You may live in a country where the media are controlled and the government will not allow any real investigative reporting. You and your editor must decide whether or not you should take the risk of carrying out investigative reporting which the government will not like, and may punish you for. But journalists throughout the world have often had to make such decisions. Some have paid the price with imprisonment or death. You must decide in each case whether the issue is worth the
Investigative journalism is needed to uncover important stories which people want to hide.

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- patience to keep digging for information
- good contacts throughout society
- courage to withstand threats from people you are investigating

Become familiar with all the different places you can get information, such as company registers and court records.

As well as accumulating information, you must also gather supporting evidence in case your story is challenged.

You must protect confidential sources of information.

Always consult a lawyer if you have any worries about the legality of what you are doing or writing.

Double-check everything you do, from the information you gather to the way you write your final story.

Work within the law.
There are certain major events which are newsworthy because they bring sudden tragedy to the lives of numerous people. In many cases, these tragedies involve widespread death and destruction. They usually happen unexpectedly or with very little warning. They include such major misfortunes as serious road accidents, mass murders, chemical explosions or natural disasters such as earthquakes, storms and floods. Sometimes circumstances may resemble a war, though the difficulties and dangers of war reporting are such that it should never be undertaken by new or inexperienced journalists. War reporting may seem like an adventure to inexperienced journalists but they seldom provide a professional service to their readers, listeners or viewers.

These events may continue long enough to report on while they are still happening (such as a flood), or they may be finished by the time you become aware of them (such as a mass murder). In either case, the effects usually continue long after the event itself is over, for example in rescues, repairs or manhunts.

These kinds of events are a special challenge for journalists. You have to work quickly, often under very difficult circumstances, to bring accurate information to readers or listeners who are eager for details. When these events are big, more people want to know. Gossip and rumours about the event will spread, so you should gather and publish the facts as soon as possible to avoid misunderstanding and possible panic. If there really is good reason for people to take action - such as an epidemic - they need to know how serious the situation is and what they must do to protect themselves and their families.

Death and disaster stories are centred on actual events and - like the best news stories - involve people. They are human interest stories, but you still have to ask whether they are news.

**Is it news?**

Remind yourself at this point what news is. You must ask yourself about any event: "Is it new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people?"

Remember too that **closeness** and **personal impact** are important in deciding what is news. Of course, an earthquake in your country is going to be more newsworthy than if it had happened half-way across the world, but both could be news to your readers or listeners.

The way people die also makes some deaths more newsworthy than others. A child killed in a car crash is usually more newsworthy than a child who dies of a childhood disease (unless the disease itself is unusual and newsworthy).

The identity of victims also influences newsworthiness. Everyone dies, but if the Prime Minister dies, that is news. It may be harder to decide which deaths are newsworthy in big communities where death is common than in small communities where it is rare. In small communities, you might need to report every death. You have to decide how newsworthy death is in your society and how serious an event must be before it is worth reporting. (See Chapter 1: What is news?)

Although we give death and disaster separate chapters, the skills needed are similar to those in
most other areas of journalism. There is the same need for accuracy and detail, the same need to have good contacts who will tell you of deaths and disasters as soon as they happen.

On top of this, you will also need to work very fast. This is made easy if you are prepared.

**Advance planning**

Because most deaths and disasters happen without warning, you should always be prepared, otherwise you will find yourself in chaos and may miss reporting opportunities. For example, unless you keep the batteries in your tape recorder charged, you might miss an important interview. If you do not keep enough petrol in your vehicle, you might not be able to get to the scene of a disaster. You should prepare by thinking ahead and setting up a system which you can use whenever the first reports of a disaster reach your newsroom.

Also, disasters usually cause their own confusion: facts are not clear; people are confused; communications such as telephones may be overloaded or not working; transport may be disrupted. If you have already prepared for such problems and know how to overcome them, your job will be much easier and far more effective.

If you and your organisation have not prepared plans for dealing with emergencies such as death and disaster, start now. The following are some areas you can work on.

**Contacts**

You need good contacts, people who can alert you as soon as the event begins and give you information while it is happening and in the aftermath.

The best contacts will be people in the emergency services and in communications. They do not need to be the heads of organisations, who are sometimes too busy at the start of any emergency to think about calling you. But they must be key people. Police, ambulance and fire service radio operators are good contacts, because they can alert you as soon as they have sent their crews to the scene. Someone in the control tower of the airport or in the harbour master’s office could be useful, as could the staff in the accident and emergency units of the hospitals in your area.

Think about which services will respond to any major emergency and find key contacts in each organisation. Although one person might be enough in any organisation, it is safer to establish contacts with, for example, the whole team of radio operators, in case they work shift duties.

To make good contacts, you need to know the people by name. You need to spend some time talking to them when they are not busy. Arrange to visit their control room and chat with them over a cup of tea. Exchange telephone numbers and make sure that the number of the direct line into your newsroom is placed somewhere prominent in their control room before you end your visit. If you have more than one telephone line into your newsroom, give them as many numbers as possible. If they try to phone you in the middle of an emergency and find your telephone engaged, they may not have the chance to phone again. Give your home telephone number to good contacts, so that they can alert you at any time.

You do not need to ring your contacts every day or even every week. After all, you need them when there are emergencies. Telephone or visit them occasionally to remind them you are still around. Ask how they are and maybe chat about family or mutual interests such as sport.

Do things for them, such as inviting them to office parties or sending them a card or little gifts at Christmas or a special festival. If they are interested in sport, telephone them with the results of some major sporting event before it becomes news, to make them feel special.

**Liaison with emergency services**
As well as good contacts to tip you off about emergencies, your news organisation should get together with the emergency services at an official level to work out ways to help each other in an emergency. Rescue services may not like people getting in their way during an emergency, but they should also recognise the media’s value in keeping people informed, passing on warnings or appealing for help from the public, such as appeals for witnesses or for blood donors.

Meet senior officers such as the police commissioner or his emergency planning officer and discuss ways of cooperating. Some important issues might be:

- Special access to the scene of the emergency. Perhaps reporters can be given identification badges and car stickers so that the emergency service staff will let them through.
- Most major airports have agreements with reporters about access in emergencies. Some of them nominate a special gate on the airport boundary where only reporters can enter. They may make some telephones specially available to reporters.
- Is there one officer whose job will be to keep reporters informed about what is happening at the scene of the emergency? This could be their press officer, perhaps even an assistant to the senior officer at the scene. It is always good to have a name you can ask for at the scene.
- How can you best communicate with the emergency services during a crisis? Are there special telephone numbers you can use? Are there any radio frequencies you can listen to? In the case of a major disaster, will they give you details of a special telephone number which friends and relatives of possible victims can ring to find out details about their loved ones?
- Do the emergency services need your cooperation? Can some procedures be established to help you both to do your jobs more efficiently? In some cities, for example, there is an agreement between the media and the emergency services that there will be no broadcast of news about a major aircraft emergency for the first half-hour. This gives the emergency services (and reporters) time to get to the scene of the emergency before the roads become blocked with sightseers.

**Prepare yourself**

You must be prepared to go into action straight away in an emergency. For example, you should always have a small bag packed with the things you will need if you have to overnight away from home. If you think there is a chance of being sent overseas to report on disasters or other sudden major events, make sure your passport is always up-to-date.

For your news organisation, preparation might include:

**Emergency procedure book**

This is a book which is kept on the newsdesk and contains:

- Instructions on what to do and who to contact in an emergency;
- Lists of useful telephone numbers;
- Details of any special arrangements that have already been made with the emergency services;
- Guidance on how to prepare stories. In radio and television stations, this could also include instructions on how to write news flashes and when to interrupt programs with news updates (see Chapters 48 and 49 on radio and television).

**Staff**

You should always have someone on duty or on-call in case of emergencies. There can be a duty roster, with reporters taking it in turns to be on duty. They do not have to be in the newsroom all the time, but they must be somewhere where they can be contacted. This is why it is important
that the emergency services control rooms should have the home telephone numbers of certain key people in your organisation. If you cannot give them the phone numbers of duty reporters, the emergency services should at least have the home telephone numbers of the editor, the news editor or the chief of staff. If the duty reporter is going to be out of the house, they must leave instructions on how to be contacted in an emergency. In some organisations, the duty reporter has to ring the emergency services every few hours to check whether anything is happening.

The duty reporter should have clear instructions (written in the procedure book) on who to contact within your organisation. In major disasters, even the general manager will need to be informed, but in smaller emergencies - such as bad road accidents - perhaps only the news editor needs to be told. Set up a chain of command so that, for example, the duty reporter tells the news editor. The news editor decides whether to tell the editor. The editor decides whether to call the general manager to authorise a special edition and call in the necessary printing staff or – in the case of radio and television – change scheduled programming.

There should also be a system for getting staff to work in a major disaster. If an aeroplane crashes in the middle of the city, you will want all available staff to get to work. Newspapers may want to start a special edition, so you will need everyone from secretaries through to printers and delivery drivers. All of this should be planned in advance and written down, with copies to everyone concerned. Do not expect the duty journalist to start telephoning every printer; the duty reporter should ring the person responsible for news staff, who should then alert the people in charge of other areas.

Radio and television stations may need technicians to come in to produce extra programs or to set up an outside broadcast.

Equipment

Your equipment must always be ready for use. A good journalist should always have a notebook and pens (or sharp pencils) handy. If you use a tape recorder or camera, keep the batteries fully charged. Photographers and TV camera crews must always keep batteries for their cameras and lights charged too, and have a supply of clean lens cloths and several sets of film or memory cards. If your organisation uses mobile telephones, two-way radios or laptop computers, check these batteries too. You should know how far the range of the mobile phone, radio or wireless modem extends in the place where you will be working. Always double check that your equipment is working properly before you leave your home or office – and take spare batteries and tapes.

Whenever you cover emergencies, you should carry watertight plastic bags in case you have to take your notebook, camera or tape recorder into wet conditions, such as in a storm or at the scene of a fire. If you think conditions at the scene of the emergency could be wet, cold or dirty, take a waterproof coat with you.

Make sure there is always enough fuel in your car. As you rush out of the door to your assignment, pick up a soft drink and some high energy food such as chocolate or muesli bars. You might not get anything else to eat for several hours. Always carry some money and have enough coins for telephone calls, even though you might be able to make reverse charge telephone calls back to your newsroom.

Try to think of other things you may need to deal with any situation you find. You may need to carry a small shoulder bag for your equipment and supplies, or get a jacket which has several big pockets.

TO SUMMARISE:

You and your organisation must be well prepared; you must establish emergency
procedures before they are needed

Good contacts with the emergency services are vital

Regularly check all equipment, to make sure that it is working properly

Regularly check that you are ready to respond at short notice
Chapter 43: Reporting death & disaster

In this and the next chapter, we give you advice on how to cover sudden events which bring death and destruction to people. In the previous chapter we explained how to prepare both yourself and your organisation to cope with any emergency. In this chapter we talk about how to get to the scene, what to do there, how to write reports and get them back to your newsroom, and how to organise news staff efficiently. Finally, we discuss the sensitivity needed when reporting death and disaster.

In a major disaster, you will need reporters both at the scene and in the newsroom. Reporters at the scene can get many facts immediately, describe the scene, and interview the rescuers and eyewitnesses. But do not send all your reporting staff to the scene. Keep some in the newsroom to follow other leads and put the stories together. If necessary, call off-duty staff in to work. A good journalist will always be happy to be involved.

Getting to the scene

You may have problems getting to the scene of the emergency. If it is local, you might be able to travel by car or taxi, but you may find that roads are closed by police because of the emergency. This is where preparation can help. You will probably find that an official pass or mentioning the name of a senior officer at the scene will help you get past any roadblocks. If the roads are blocked with traffic, you may have to walk or hitch a lift from a passing emergency vehicle (again, it helps if you are known by the emergency service staff).
For longer distance assignments, good contacts at the airline booking office will help with travel arrangements and might even get you a seat on a plane which is fully booked. Your news organisation should have at least one member of staff who is responsible for emergency travel arrangements. That person might be the editor's assistant or the newsroom secretary.

If you cannot travel by scheduled airlines, perhaps you can use your contacts to hitch a lift in a coastguard boat, a police car or an army helicopter. Even if the situation seems hopeless, always ask. If the senior officers do not give permission, perhaps a friendly pilot might quietly take you on board.

Always think about how far forward you should go, especially when travelling into a disaster area. Although you need to get as near as possible to the centre of the action, you will always need to get your story out again. If you are working for a weekly magazine, you may have two or three days to return with a story. But if you are working for radio, television or daily newspapers you will need to get your story out within hours. In such cases, never travel too far away from your means of communication, such as telephones or radios. Sending two or more reporters to the scene might solve this problem.

Although many reporters are good at getting to the scene quickly, many do not think about getting back. Remember you may have to get back to the newsroom to write your story or you will need to send back film or tapes. Sometimes two or more reporters can share these jobs, but you might find a courier is better, someone paid to deliver things in a hurry. Many television stations have their own couriers, usually equipped with motorcycles to get through heavy traffic.

If you are travelling a long way to the scene, perhaps arrange with someone - maybe even the friendly pilot - to carry your finished tapes or films when he returns to base, then your newsroom can collect them from him. These must be people you can trust. If they are already good contacts, they will be more reliable.

**At the scene**

On arriving at the scene, the first thing you must do is quickly assess what is happening so that you can inform your newsroom and send back a first story. This will be most important for reporters from radio, television or daily newspapers which are approaching their deadlines.

Take a quick look around and try to find people in authority at the centre: perhaps the chief fire officer or the leader of the rescue team. Introduce yourself quickly and correctly and promise you will not take up their time. Ask simple questions to find out what has happened and what is happening now. Ask about the dead and injured, what rescue attempts are being made and, if relevant, what was the possible cause. Do not enter into a debate with busy people, or you may be removed from the scene. Radio and television reporters should record such interviews.

Spend five minutes quickly writing a short story in your notebook. Contact your newsroom and let them know the main facts, so they can assess what they need to do, such as sending more reporters, changing programs or adding extra pages to the newspaper. Send them your short story for a special news flash or a stop press. Agree on a time when you will telephone them again, perhaps in half-an-hour.

Now you can get more details and start to build up your major story. Talk to as many people as possible without getting in the way of rescuers.

Look busy and show that you are doing your job professionally. Wear some official identification tag, even if it is only your newsroom security pass, and stay clear of any crowds of sightseers. If you are mistaken for a spectator, you may be removed if police clear sightseers from the scene. Once you have been seen talking to senior officers, other rescue staff will probably leave you alone to do your job.

**Your main tasks**
The scene may be chaotic, but you have some essential tasks to do. These will include the following:

**Notes and recordings**

Make lots of notes about what you see and what people say. Radio and television journalists should do a lot of recording but never use all your supply of tapes at once. Save some in reserve in case something unexpected happens, such as a second explosion, another tremor or the discovery of someone trapped alive in the wreckage.

**Eyewitnesses**

Look for eyewitnesses, people who were there at the time of the event and who can describe what happened. Get their personal details such as names, ages and what they were doing at the scene. They may be in a state of shock, so be gentle when you ask questions. Try to get them to explain what happened in their own words.

**Keep contact**

Keep contact with the people in charge or who seem to know what is going on. You can leave them while you do other interviews, but always know where they are in case something happens and you need more information from them. Again, a second reporter will be useful to share the burden.

**Inform your newsroom**

Keep your newsroom informed of latest developments and contact them on a regular basis. There is nothing more frustrating for a news editor than to lose contact with journalists in the field and not know what is happening. For example, once you know where the injured are being taken, tell your newsroom so they can send another reporter to the hospital.

The scenes of disasters and other emergencies can be chaotic, with events changing minute-by-minute. Many reporters are afraid that they will miss something while they are contacting their newsroom. If the activity seems to slow down, take the chance to contact your newsroom. If you have to leave the scene, arrange with journalists from other news organisations to "keep an eye on things". They too will probably need to contact their newsrooms, so you can return the favour for them. Try where possible to share information, but you may also be in competition with some of the reporters there, for example reporters from a competing newspaper.

**Find colour**

Look for things which might add colour to your report. By colour, we mean observations which may not be essential to the story, but which help your readers or listeners imagine what is happening. For example, look for pictures which will illustrate the scene. One of the most famous pictures of an aeroplane crash showed only a child’s doll lying in the mud beside a shattered aeroplane seat. Radio reporters should listen for sounds, such as the sound of an electric saw being used to cut through wreckage or the shouts of rescuers.

**Tasks in the newsroom**

Although your organisation should always try to send a reporter to the scene of a disaster or other major crisis, there is plenty of work for journalists left in the newsroom. There are more details to gather, stories to write and pages or bulletins to put together.

**Assign tasks**
The news editor or chief of staff should organise journalists to do different tasks. Someone - or a team of writers - must be responsible for the final story or stories, either writing them or checking how separate stories fit together in the overall coverage. If the news editor and chief of staff are busy with other jobs, one person must take responsibility for overall coverage.

Someone must keep the rest of your news organisation informed. The printing manager will need to know about new deadlines or extra pages; the program presenter will need to know if there will be extended news bulletins. The more people know, the better they can help.

Gather more details

Although the reporter at the scene can do a lot, they cannot usually do everything needed for a story. At least one reporter must be given the job of getting additional information, background details and comments. They can keep in touch with the emergency control rooms for details. They can find out from experts or from your cuttings or tape library details about previous disasters. They can contact people such as ministers or aid agencies for comments and details on what help can be given to the victims.

Reporters may need to be sent to airports or hospitals to report on how casualties are being received and treated.

If it is a major disaster, ask the emergency services for a special telephone number which people can ring to find out about friends and relatives who might be victims. Once you print or broadcast this telephone number, it might stop members of the public telephoning you for details.

**Writing the story**

There may be only one story (such as in a car crash), but major disasters usually need several separate stories to explain all the aspects. There will usually be one lead story summarising the overall picture, then several other stories concentrating on different angles, such as the rescue operation, eyewitness accounts, background history and messages of condolence.

**Style**

Keep your writing clear and simple. Keep your sentences short so that they are easy to understand quickly and so that they can easily be moved around within the story if you re-write it to update it. Always do one final check to update the death toll just before you publish or broadcast.

**By-lines**

It is usual for newspapers to print the names of reporters involved in a major story, usually in by-lines, or in a box beside the story if the team was large. Most reporters work extra hard during a crisis and deserve some special recognition. Sub-editors should make sure that they name all the reporters who worked on the stories. Such recognition also helps to strengthen the links between reporters and their contacts if the stories are accurate and well-written.

**Language**

Keep your language simple, using words your readers or listeners can understand easily. Stories about death and disaster are usually exciting to read. Do not kill the story with slow and heavy words. Aircraft do not "impact with the inclined slope of a hill during a period of limited day-time visibility", they "crash into a hillside in fog".

Do not use complicated technical words or jargon which is only used by emergency service staff. For example, ambulance officers talk about a person being "DOA" meaning "dead on arrival" (at
hospital). In plain English, write that a person has "died before reaching hospital" or, if you know they were still alive when they were dragged from the wreckage, you can say they "died on the way to hospital". (See Chapters 10 and 11 on language and style.)

Of course, you should not avoid all technical terms. For example, when reporting on an earthquake, you have to mention how strong it was. Earthquake strength is measured on the Richter scale (pronounced: RIK-ta) and given as a number and point, such as "7.5" (read as "seven-point-five" on radio and television). The scale is calculated in such a way that every increase in one whole number on the Richter scale shows a ten-fold increase in the strength of the earthquake. Any earthquake above 5 on the Richter scale is severe but damage depends on a lot of factors such as the structure of the earth at certain points and the types of housing affected.

Avoid vague words, especially adjectives and adverbs (the words which describe the nouns and verbs). It is always better to give details than to give vague impressions. For example, instead of writing "Many people died when a massive volcano on Rubadub Island exploded doing enormous damage", give the facts and write: "More than 60 people died when a volcano on Rubadub Island erupted, splitting the island in two. The death toll is likely to rise as rescuers search for missing islanders".

Give the facts

Try to answer all the obvious questions your readers or listeners will ask. Remember WWWWWH - Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? You may not be able to answer the Why? question straight away, because details may not be clear or blame has not been proved.

Write blocks of similar material together so that they can easily be moved around the story. For example, keep the detailed description of the scene together. Keep the report of what is happening at the hospital together. However, you will need to use some material in different places, such as in the intro, so that the whole story makes sense.

You need to give the following kinds of details:

- **Casualties** - numbers of dead and injured, types of injury, where casualties were taken, any well-known names, people who escaped.

- **Damage** - the extent, and estimate of the cost, what kind of damage, any well-known buildings.

- **Description** - of the event itself, eyewitness stories, the scene afterwards.

- **Rescue and relief** - the people involved, the action being taken, the facilities, any problems (such as weather), evacuations, any acts of heroism.

- **Cause** - what the experts say, eyewitness accounts, who sounded the alarm and was there any warning?

- **Follow-up action** - will there be post mortems or inquiries, legal action, rebuilding?

Do not exaggerate

Let the facts speak for themselves. If you exaggerate you will make your story soft and vague. You could also cause unnecessary alarm and panic in your readers or listeners. If fires have destroyed forest in a small corner of Warang Province, it would be wrong to write: "Warang Province is ablaze."

Try to keep your emotions under control. Although you may become emotionally involved in the event, you must write your stories without putting in your own feelings. For example, you might find the scene of an earthquake extremely distressing. You might see the bodies of men, women
and children lying in the broken remains of their homes. Do not write about how bad it makes you feel. Describe the scene carefully in simple language. If you write well, you will take your readers or listeners to the scene, allowing them to feel the tragedy with their own emotions.

Follow-ups

Crisis, accidents and disasters do not end just because you have finished reporting them. The effects of major tragedies are felt for a long time. You should write follow-up stories to keep your audience informed about such things as: people who later died of their injuries; accurate details of the cost of damage; any new relief action; the results of any inquiries or inquests; how the event changed the lives of survivors.

Bigger disasters will need longer follow-ups. For example, if a mudslide destroyed an entire mountain village, it could take months before survivors are able to rebuild their homes and replace their food gardens; it could be years before all the scars are gone. Make a note in your newsdesk diary to follow-up their story, perhaps in three months time, perhaps on the anniversary of the disaster. Find out what has happened to the survivors. Especially find out what has happened to all the promises of help which might have been made at the time.

Anniversaries

For major disasters, you might want to produce special features or documentaries on major anniversaries, such as the tenth or the twentieth. It will help your work if your newsroom has saved material such as photographs, tapes or films. Although no radio and television station can afford to keep the tapes from every story, they should keep tapes and film from major disasters, so they can be used again in the future.

Sensitivity

When reporting on death and disaster, you will meet people who are hurt, both physically and emotionally. These people could be survivors or the friends and relatives of the killed and injured. You must be sensitive to their pain.

At the scene

Do not interfere with rescue operations and do not try to interview people who are obviously hurt, unless they clearly show they want to be interviewed.

Be careful with names

You may know the names of people killed or badly injured, but you should not print or broadcast them until you know that their closest relatives have been told. It is very cruel to learn of the death of a loved one from a newspaper or bulletin. It is usual to wait until the police tell you that the next-of-kin have been told.

In some societies, it is wrong to speak or write the names of people who have died. In Australian Aboriginal communities, it is wrong to show images of the dead during the time of mourning for them. Be sensitive to such issues.

Pictures and sound

Although you should give the facts as accurately as possible, you can cause grief by doing it. Be careful in choosing pictures to illustrate your story. The body you show with all its arms and legs ripped off was somebody's relative or friend. You have to balance the need to show such pictures against the duty not to cause unnecessary grief. There is no easy answer. If you have to show such scenes in a television program, warn the viewers beforehand that "the following report may contain
Images distressing to some viewers.

Sounds too can have both good and bad effects. The sound of a child screaming as she is cut from the wreckage of a car may make powerful radio, but it will also be intruding into the grief of many people. (See Chapter 61: Taste and bad taste.)

Blame

Be careful about laying blame on anyone for an accident or disaster. If it was caused by someone’s action or inaction, let the courts decide. If you accuse someone wrongly, they can sue you for defamation.

Even the words you use can be seen as laying blame. For example, if you write that "the car crashed into the bus", you are blaming the car driver. Unless it is totally clear who was to blame, say something like "the car and bus collided". Of course, it would be silly (and wrong) to say that they "collided" if the bus was standing still with its engine switched off. Similarly, cars do not "collide" with trees, they "hit" them.

Debrief and learn

Because you cannot fully learn a new task in journalism without doing it, the best way of learning how to report on a crisis, accident or disaster is by attending one. Read this chapter again after you have finished such a reporting assignment and think where you could have improved your work.

Better still, whenever you complete a major reporting assignment, sit down with colleagues and senior journalists to discuss what you all did right and wrong. These debriefing sessions can be a time when the editor can say thanks for a good job. They can also make you better prepared for the next time.

TO SUMMARISE:

You and your organisation must be well prepared; you must establish emergency procedures before they are needed

Good contacts with the emergency services are vital

Regularly check all equipment, to make sure that it is working properly

Always try to plan ahead; think of problems which might arise and ways of solving them

Keep the newsdesk informed of what is happening at all times

Keep your stories simple and do not put in your own emotions

Be sensitive to people's suffering

Think of follow-ups
Chapter 44: The breaking story

In this and the following chapter we consider how to deal with a news story which is still happening as you report it. In this chapter we look at how to plan in advance, so that you will be ready when something like this happens; and what to do when it does happen, to give readers and listeners the best news service. In the following chapter we take you through a breaking story minute-by-minute to see how it is done.

A breaking story is a news story which is still happening as you report it.

This is not the same as follow-ups, which we considered in Chapter 24; there we looked at how to handle a story where something had happened and been reported, but where there were later effects of that event. Here we shall consider the story where something is continuing to happen and develop, often in a dramatic way, as you report it.

This may be something expected, like an election, which will unfold slowly as the votes are counted and the results announced. However, it will more commonly be an unexpected event, and often a disaster - either a man-made disaster, like an air crash or a riot; or a natural disaster, like a volcanic eruption or a cyclone.

The key to covering a breaking story is good management and good planning. You may feel overwhelmed by the speed with which events are happening, and feel unable to handle it all. It is important to stay calm, think clearly and do as much as you can.

Ideally, one person should take control of organising the coverage of a breaking story, organising their troops like a military leader. If possible, this person should not get too involved in reporting or writing or sub-editing. If everybody is in the engine room of the ship, and nobody is up on the bridge, the ship may well drift on to the rocks.

So the person in control - let us say the editor - will need to plan the available resources (including time) efficiently. The editor will need to think of problems which are likely to arise, and prepare solutions. He will need to inspire the people around him, and demand from them 100 per cent effort. And he will need to be considerate to those people, not keeping them hanging around the office if there is nothing to do, and remembering to thank them for their hard work and dedication.

Planning

As soon as you hear about a major news story developing, you will need to begin to plan. Newspapers and television, in particular, need to consider their production deadlines. It may be possible to persuade printers to accept later deadlines than usual, but remember that those deadlines may have been set in order for the papers to catch a boat or aircraft to other parts of the country; if you are late, in order to get the full story, the result could be that much of the country outside the capital gets no story at all, since the newspaper does not reach them.

It may be possible to bring out a special late edition, aimed at the capital city, bringing the story up-to-date. It may be possible to bring out a special issue - perhaps a Tuesday issue of a weekly newspaper which normally only publishes each Friday. To do this, though, you will need the agreement not only of the printers but also of the owner and/or advertisement department; otherwise the special issue could be very expensive.

Staff

You will need to consider how many staff you have, and whether you can get more. In particular, you may have to call in any staff who are on holiday, or have the day off, or who have already gone home at the end of their day’s work. Nobody wants to be called in to the office when they are
off duty, but journalists have to understand that this may be necessary in exceptional circumstances.

You will need to think about how to use the staff you have. You will want to send some out, to report and to get pictures and sound. You will want to keep some in the newsroom. You will need to decide exactly what stories you want and then give clear instructions to everybody as to what they are supposed to do.

Stories

It is good to divide a big and complex story into component parts, and have a separate story on each subsidiary part to back up the main story. As time goes by, and the story continues to develop, you may need to change these instructions: do so clearly, and let everybody know about any change which will affect them.

Communications

It will be vital that everybody keeps in touch. Telephones can be difficult in rural areas, which is why many newsrooms have portable two-way radios for their staff. Whether you do it through telephones, mobile phones or two-way radios, you must insist that all your staff who are out on assignments keep in regular contact with the newsroom, to let you know what is happening and to receive new instructions.

You will probably need to have someone on hand to act as a copy-taker. This is much faster than reporters having to return to the office to type their copy. A copy-taker needs a telephone headset which does not need to be held with a hand - usually a set of headphones with a microphone attached. They can then have a story dictated to them down the telephone, and type it, perhaps into the newsroom computer.

Alternatively, you may send reporters out with laptop computers and modems, to enable them to type their own stories and then send them direct from their own computer to the newsroom computer by telephone line, using a modem. This is a good option if you have the money available, and if you have a good telephone system.

Writing the story

Reporters who are sent out to cover a breaking story have a difficult job. They are usually confronted with a confusing situation, which they are expected to assess and explain in detail as quickly as possible. Everyone who has information seems to be busy, and none of them wants to be bothered with a journalist asking questions. And the clock seems to turn twice as quickly as usual.

Don't panic

It is vitally important that reporters do not panic in these circumstances. Whatever you manage to do will be better than doing nothing, so just get on and do what you can.

Remember at all times what instructions you have been given, especially about deadlines and about the length of the copy. Many reporters think they can stretch a deadline by a few minutes, in order to make the story just a little better, without being aware of the problems this can cause to the production schedule of the newspaper, radio or television station. The golden rule is that you should get a story in on time, however much you still do not know - it is better to tell half a story in time for it to get into the paper or on the bulletin, than to tell the complete story too late for anyone to read or hear it.

Write to length
Similarly, you will create problems if you are asked for 300 words and send in 500, or you are asked for a 40-second report and send a 60-second one. This will waste precious time while you phone in the unwanted words, and will waste more precious time while they are edited out again.

You will need to keep in touch with your newsroom regularly, which may mean finding a telephone. Try houses or shops nearby which look as though they may have telephones. If there is no telephone at all, you will have to allow yourself time to drive to one, and still phone in your copy by the deadline.

The fastest way to deliver your copy is to phone it in to a copy-taker, as we discussed above. To save even more time, though, you will need to learn the technique of "writing" the story as you speak it, from your notes. This means that, instead of writing the whole story in your notebook, you write just the intro and perhaps the second and third paragraphs; and then you write notes for the structure of the rest of the story - "Topulpul quotes ... school evacuation ... headmaster quotes ... rescue operation ... scenes of sorrow and despair".

Using this outline, together with your detailed notes, you then create the story out loud, as you speak to the copy-taker, and they will type it for you. This is difficult to begin with, but like anything it becomes easier with practice. See Chapter 14: Copy presentation for more detailed information about phoning copy.

If there is an important new development after you have phoned in your copy, phone it in as an add to your story. It may be too late to use it, but that is a decision for the editor to take; your job is to supply the information.

Radio reporters will not usually be expected to file long voice reports from the scene. Thirty or 40 seconds is usually enough. So write a tight story of about six sentences and be prepared to send it to your newsroom or recording studio (who should have been warned in advance to have a tape ready on the recorder to record you). If your editor or program producer wants a longer description, suggest to them that you record it in the form of a question and answer session. They will ask the things they want to know and you provide simple, unscripted answers. This way there is no need to write a formal script.

**Editing the story**

The way in which newspapers, radio and television handle breaking stories is slightly different. Newspapers and television require more time for technical processes - printing or editing videotape - than radio does.

We shall talk first about newspapers. This will include much that is the same for all three media. Then we shall look at radio and television, to discuss the things which are different for those media.

**Newspapers**

The chief sub-editor is a crucial person in a newspaper’s handling of a breaking story. He or she will need to work under great pressure, balancing the needs of the reporters to have as much time as possible to report and the printers to have enough time to print the paper. Above all, though, they will have to look after the demand of the readers to have the story told clearly and thoroughly.

The chief sub-editor will first need to make sure that there is sufficient space in the paper to tell the story. Very often, if the big story breaks near to the paper’s production deadline, this will mean clearing other stories out of the way. This is not easy. The least significant stories will usually be on inside pages, but these pages will usually be printed early, so it will often be necessary to rearrange the front and back pages. You cannot just abandon your lead story, to make room for a new lead: if you thought it was a good enough story to be your page one lead, it must be too good to throw away. Usually, they will need to throw out one or two of the smaller stories, and then cut some or all of the remaining ones, rewriting headlines as necessary. The chief sub-editor must first
redesign the page or pages, and then cut and rewrite headlines to fit with the new plan. This can be done first, while the reporters are gathering the news on the big late story.

Like everybody involved, the chief sub-editor must keep a clear head and not panic. They must keep the copy flowing, possibly even before they know precisely how they will use it. It is wise under these circumstances to use standard column measure, since this is most flexible if the page has to be redesigned.

It will also be necessary to break a big story up into component parts. This will make it easier on the reader. It is easier to read a main story of 500 words plus three stories on related aspects, each of 200 words, than it is to read one big story of 1,100 words. How the story is to be divided up needs to be agreed with the editor, or whoever is instructing the reporters, so that they know what is wanted and can provide copy of the required length at the required time.

The last job which the chief sub-editor will do is to write the main page one intro and headline. This allows the story to be as up-to-date as possible. Even if some late news is received as the front and back pages are almost ready to go to the printers, it may be possible to rewrite just the intro and headline to include the late news, leaving the rest of the story untouched.

If there is late news which is even later, it may be necessary to carry a Stop Press paragraph. If you have a stencil machine, you can run the printed pages through that, to stencil the late news into a column or half-column left blank for that purpose. If you do not have a stencil machine, it may be necessary to make a new plate, including the late news paragraph, and to stop the presses to change the plate as soon as it is ready.

The chief sub-editor will need to keep closely in touch with the printers, to ensure that the rest of the production process is proceeding smoothly.

Above all, the chief sub-editor should be prepared to start all over again, tearing apart the work they have just done and remaking the pages, for a second or subsequent edition. They must be tireless in their desire to give the readers as clear a picture as possible of the big story which is taking place.

Radio

Radio journalists enjoy several advantages in reporting breaking stories. It is usually possible to break into scheduled programs with news flashes on the latest developments. News can be up-to-the-minute with live reports from the scene of the story. You can use sound to bring the scene alive to the listener. Unlike newspapers or television, the technology is simple and involves only a small number of people to transport your story from the scene all the way to the radio in the listener’s home.

The main disadvantages are that you can only work in sound, you cannot show pictures of the event. In big breaking stories such as disasters, pictures are important. Also, you cannot include as much detail as newspapers. Radio reporters must restrict their reports to essential details and the most important comments.

The task for the reporter on the scene is similar for all the media. The differences arise mainly in the methods of getting the stories to the audience. In radio, there are three main ways of getting reports of breaking stories to air.

The first is to use recorded and live reports in scheduled news bulletins. Because most news bulletins have very limited time, the reports must be short and delivery must be reliable. It is no good encouraging listeners to expect a live report from the scene of a disaster if all they hear is silence when you try to cross over to the reporter.

It is also possible in radio to break into programs which are currently going to air. This may involve the program presenter either playing a report recorded by the newsroom or going live to a reporter
on the scene, by either telephone or two-way radio. This can be done as many times as necessary. However, you must be sensitive to any clash in tone between the reports coming in and the content of the rest of the program.

For example, it is possible to interrupt a record request program with live reports on a flood disaster, but the presenter would have to take two precautions. One is to avoid playing cheerful music straight after a report of death. The other is to separate the requests from the news report by appropriate music. No-one will be happy if a cheery request is read out either directly before or straight after a report from the scene of a tragedy.

The third way of getting stories to air is by gathering material for scheduled current affairs programs. In this, radio works in very similar ways to newspapers and television. Someone must be assigned the task of gathering together all the reports on the breaking story, then producing them in a logical order for the program. This is usually the task of the program producer (who might also be the current affairs presenter). The newsroom sub-editor in charge of the story will need to cooperate closely with the producer/presenter. If you know that you will be covering a major story in your news or current affairs program, tell the presenters already on air so that they can warn people to listen later.

Television

Television has many of the advantages of both newspapers and radio. Television can give viewers news of a breaking story as it happens, either by feeding a live report straight into a news bulletin or by interrupting scheduled programs with news flashes. Using modern satellite technology, television is even able to bring pictures live from the scene. It cannot, of course, give the same amount of detail as a newspaper, but moving pictures can be used effectively to tell stories in a simple way.

It is unusual for television producers to break into programs for news updates in the same way as radio can. For major breaking stories, the newsroom might produce a short news flash to be read by a newsreader at an appropriate break in the scheduled program. Again, great care must be exercised in determining what goes before and after the news flash. For example, you should not interrupt a comedy program with news of a tragedy, except in an emergency, perhaps to warn viewers to evacuate homes down-wind of a chemical factory explosion. It is normally better to wait until the program ends.

More often, television journalists will build up reports on a breaking story in a similar way to radio current affairs, trying to put a variety of reports and interviews in a logical sequence. Far more people are involved, so everyone must be kept informed of what is happening, minute by minute. (See Chapters 48 and 49 on radio and television.)

In the following section, we show you how to handle a breaking story. Although it focuses on newspaper reporting, much of the advice is also applicable to both radio and television.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

*Keep a cool head: don't panic*

*Plan how best to use the resources you have*

*Make sure everyone has clear instructions*

*Make sure everyone keeps in touch with the boss*

*Keep to deadlines, even if it means writing an incomplete story*
Chapter 45: A practical example of the breaking story

In the previous chapter we looked at how to plan in advance to cover breaking stories so that you will be ready when something happens. We also discussed what to do when it when a big story breaks. In this chapter we take you through a breaking story minute-by-minute to see how it is done.

Having looked at what breaking stories are and how to cover them in the previous chapter, let us now follow through an example of a weekly newspaper handling a breaking story.

We could just as easily look at a daily newspaper or radio or television coverage. The time lines may be different and some of the subject matter, reporting methods and writing techniques would change according to your particular medium and organisation. But the flow of news and the principles which guide your decision-making should be applicable across most media.

For those working in the print and online media, we have illustrated how the pages will change as the coverage progresses. Broadcast journalists can think in terms of re-jigging bulletins as the information changes.

The newspaper we have chosen publishes every Friday. It has an editor, one sub-editor, three reporters (one of whom is on holiday, though still in town), a typist and its own processing facilities and printery.

It is 4.43 p.m. on Thursday, and the week's work is almost done for the journalists. The deadline for the front and back pages is 6 p.m., and the last story has been written. The chief sub-editor is just editing it and writing its headline. The reporters are chatting, waiting for the editor to say they can go home.

Then the phone rings, and the editor answers it. It is a reader, at the coastal village of Rawila, to say that there has been a terrible road accident. A bus has gone off the road and plunged down a ten-metre drop into the sea. They think there are lots of people killed. The editor thanks the reader for calling, and puts the phone down. Events now proceed like this:

4.44 Newsroom - Editor phones police: they confirm that there has been a serious road accident at Rawila.

4.46 Newsroom - Editor tells chief sub-editor (CSE) to get more staff in.

4.47 Newsroom - Editor goes to see the printers. They say they cannot put back the 6 p.m. deadline and still get the paper out in time to catch the boat for the outer islands. However, they agree to limit the print run on that first edition; then reprint the front and back pages only for a late second edition, with a deadline of pages from the newsroom of 10 p.m. All the other staff phone home to tell their families they will be late.

4.49 Newsroom - CSE phones the reporter who is on holiday (Cathy) at home; she tells her that there is a major story and asks her to come to the office immediately. A taxi will come to collect her, he says. CSE then phones for a taxi.

4.50 Newsroom - The assistant makes coffee for everyone.

4.51 Newsroom - CSE phones a former reporter (Dudley), who is now a Government information officer. Dudley is about to leave his office. CSE explains that there is a major story and asks Dudley to come and lend a hand. Dudley drives straight round to the newspaper office, first asking his secretary to phone his wife and tell her he will be home late.
4.52 Newsroom - Editor returns from the printery. He calls an immediate editorial conference. The two reporters (Aaron & Bill) are sent to Rawila, with the office car, a digital camera and spare memory cards. They are told to send 400 words by 5.40, by phone. Although it is doubtful whether there is mobile phone reception in the village, it is clear that there is a telephone, since a reader has just telephoned from there. Then they are told to call in again not later than 6.15 with an update. Finally, one of them is to return to the office as soon as possible with pictures.

5.00 Newsroom - The two reporters set off for Rawila, five kilometres away. They run into a traffic jam, caused by the crash.

Editor and CSE discuss the redesign of page one, which had been planned to look like Figure 1.

*Figure 1: the original plan for page one*
They decide to clear the top half of the page for the 400-word story on the crash, still using two lines of large headline across the top of the page. The story catchlined "Govt" is to be carried full-length if possible, and without changing the type to standard column measure; the picture is to be used much smaller; and the story catchlined “sugar” cut into the remaining space. The advertisement must remain. CSE redesigns the page as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: page one, as redesigned for first edition

5.02 Newsroom - Dudley arrives. Editor tells him to get comments from the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Transport, the bus company, community leaders in Kalo, which is the district the bus was heading for, and anyone else he can think of.

CSE gets on with redesigning page one - cutting stories already subbed and sent, rewriting headlines etc.

5.05 Newsroom - Dudley phones the Prime Minister's office. He is told the Prime Minister is busy. He explains the situation and says he will call again at 5.30. He asks whether the Prime Minister will still be in his office, and is told that he will.

Editor checks the paper's library files for details of the country's last big road crash. He finds that there were five people killed in a two-car collision in 1974. That is the worst road accident on record.
5.07 Rawila road - The reporters’ car is stuck in stationary traffic. Aaron gets out of the car, with the camera, about one kilometre from the crash. He walks and runs the rest of the way. They agree that Bill will follow with the car.

5.09 Cathy’s house - The taxi arrives. Cathy gets in and they set out for the office.

5.10 Rawila - Aaron arrives at the scene of the crash. He knows that words are needed before pictures, but he also knows that there is only another 60-90 minutes of good daylight; so he quickly takes pictures of the injured people sitting and lying around; of a partly covered dead body, lying by the water; and the back end of the bus, visible above the surface of the water. Then he talks to people who are around - one or two injured people, who are conscious and apparently not in too much pain; bystanders, who may have witnessed the accident. He is told by one of the injured people that there were "about 20" people on the bus, including some children. Aaron counts the injured people, and finds that there are seven. There is also the one dead body. That means that there are probably about 12 more people still in the bus, who must certainly be dead. An eye-witness also reports that a car was involved, and went into the sea with the bus. Nobody can say how many people were in the car.

5.12 Newsroom - Dudley phones the Ministry of Transport. Everybody has gone home. Using the newsdesk contacts book, he phones the Minister at home and explains the situation. The Minister immediately makes a statement for publication, saying that he is deeply saddened by the news and will call for full details of the accident first thing the next morning.

5.15 Rawila road - An ambulance arrives at the back of the traffic jam, and police force all cars to the edge of the road to let it through. Bill follows closely behind as it goes past him, and follows it to the crash scene. As soon as he arrives, he finds Aaron, who asks him to find a telephone. He goes off to do so, and finds one in a nearby house. The owner agrees to let them use it whenever they want to. Bill phones the newsroom to make contact, then returns to tell Aaron.

5.20 Newsroom - Cathy arrives. Editor tells the taxi to wait. Editor briefs Cathy to go to the hospital and get full names and other personal details, and condition reports, of all injured people. She is to phone in at 5.45 with a situation report, and phone in a 300-word story at 8.30.

5.25 Newsroom - Cathy sets out in the taxi to go to the hospital.

5.25 Rawila - Aaron sits on a rock and writes the first few paragraphs of his early story, plus outline notes for the rest of the story.

5.30 Newsroom - Dudley phones the Prime Minister's office again. He is told that the Prime Minister is busy. Dudley explains the situation again, and asks whether the Prime Minister will be available at all to issue a statement. The person at the other end of the phone says he does not know. Dudley asks whether he will please ask the Prime Minister. The person at the other end of the phone says he cannot do that, because the Prime Minister is busy. Dudley explains that the Prime Minister will be very disappointed to read in the next morning's paper that he was "not available for comment" at such a moment of national tragedy. Dudley says he will call again at 6.00.

CSE finishes her redesign of page one; there is now just space for 400 words plus a big headline.

5.31 Newsroom - Editor and CSE confer again, to ensure that all is under control.

5.33 Hospital - Cathy arrives. She learns that the first two injured people arrived about ten minutes earlier. She finds the duty sister in Casualty and explains who she is and what she wants. The sister tells Cathy not to get in the way, and she can have the information she needs as it becomes available.

5.35 Rawila - Aaron goes to phone his copy to the office. He reads it out, while the assistant at the other end types it straight into the computer. He reads the first few paragraphs, which he has already written, then creates the rest of the story out loud from the notes. Meanwhile, Bill
continues to interview people at the scene of the crash. He finds a young man who rescued several of those people who escaped, by diving repeatedly into the wrecked bus and pulling them out.

5.40 Newsroom - Dudley phones the bus company. They decline to discuss the matter. Dudley tries and tries to get them to talk, but they won't. Dudley asks the name of the person he is speaking to, but he will not say; and then he hangs up.

5.45 Hospital - Cathy phones the office; she tells the editor that she will be given information by the duty sister in Casualty.

5.46 Newsroom - Editor writes three or four paragraphs of background material, about the 1974 crash, ready to be incorporated into the story which Aaron will write.

5.48 Newsroom - Dudley looks up who is MP for Kalo. He discovers that it is Mr Isaac Gesund, who is Minister of Health. He phones Mr Gesund's office, but there is no reply.

5.49 Newsroom - Editor reads Aaron's copy; hands it to CSE.

5.50 Hospital - Ambulance arrives with two more injured people, both on stretchers. One is a child. The ambulance goes again.

5.53 Newsroom - CSE sub-edits Aaron's copy; incorporates the editor's background copy; checks it for length and cuts a bit to make sure it will fit; writes a headline; and sends the whole page to the printers.

5.55 Hospital - The sister brings Cathy the names and other personal details of the first two injured people. She says that no condition reports are yet available. Cathy asks how many ambulances there are, and is told that there is only one, which is driving backwards and forwards bringing all the injured.

5.59 Newsroom - Page one of the first edition is approved, and goes to have a printing plate made.

6.00 Newsroom - Dudley phones the Prime Minister's office again. The Prime Minister is available for comment. He tells Dudley he is greatly saddened by the news, and will be asking the Minister of Transport for a full report at the first opportunity.

6.01 Rawila - Aaron returns to the crash scene. He takes photos of the rescue hero whom Bill has found, plus more pictures of the scene, including ambulance paramedics at work. He then removes the memory card from the camera, gives the camera (with a fresh card) to Bill, and sets off to drive back to the newsroom.

6.03 Newsroom - The assistant makes coffee for everyone.
6.05 Newsroom - CSE starts to plan page one and back page of the second edition. The back page of the first edition was as shown here in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: the back page of the first edition**

She redesigns page one and the back page as shown in Figures 4 and 5.

**Figure 4: page one as first designed for the late edition**
Page one will carry the main story which Aaron is writing, with a big picture, and Cathy's hospital report. There will also be a white-on-black reversal to cross-refer to the story on the back page. The back page will carry another picture, plus Dudley's story. It will also carry short versions of all the other stories which were originally on page one and the back page, except the picture story "Woman", which has been dropped. The story "Govt" will have to be changed to a standard single-column measure, but "Factory" is to be left as it is. CSE redesigns early stories, cutting them and rewriting headlines, to fit in with the new plan.

6.10 Newsroom - Aaron arrives, delivers the memory card of photos and reports that they have found a rescue hero. The editor hears the details and then sends him back to the scene of the crash, with orders to return to the office by 8.00 to write a 600-word story on the crash, but not to include the rescue hero. Bill is to write a 300-word story on that and phone it in by 7.00. Aaron sets off to drive back to Rawila.

6.12 Newsroom - Dudley phones Mr Gesund's home. He is told that he has not yet returned home and is probably working late. Dudley says he is not at his office. They say he may be at his club and that he does not carry a mobile phone.

6.13 Newsroom - Editor and CSE confer again, listing all the stories they expect - now including the 300-word rescue hero story. CSE redesigns page one and the back page to include this story and a small picture, pushing "Hosp" to the back page and relegating "Sugar", "Rape" and "Deport".
"Club" is thrown away. The pages now look as shown in Figures 6 and 7.

**Figure 6:** page one redesigned with 'rescue hero' story.

**Figure 7:** the back page re-designed after putting 'rescue hero' story on page one.
6.15 Rawila - Bill phones the office. Editor tells him to write a 300-word story on the rescue hero and phone it in by 7.00. He tells him Aaron is on his way back to rejoin him. Bill completes his interviews and writes the story.

6.18 Newsroom - Dudley phones Mr Gesund's club. He is not there. They do not know where else he socialises.

6.20 Hospital - Ambulance arrives again, with three more injured people. One is carried on a stretcher, the other two walk, with help. Cathy asks the ambulance officers whether there are any more injured people to come, and they tell her that there are no more.

6.23 Newsroom - Editor and CSE look at Aaron's photos and choose which they will use. They choose a vertical picture of the bus in the water, a mugshot (head and shoulders) of the rescue hero and a horizontal picture of ambulance officers helping the injured. CSE redesigns page one again, around the strong vertical picture they have chosen, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: page one redesigned again around the strong vertical picture which has been chosen

6.25 Newsroom - Dudley writes up what he has so far - the Prime Minister's comments, the Minister of Transport's comments, and an accurate report of the bus company's reaction. He ends it with the letters "mfl" (more follows later) and sends his copy to the editor (6.40).

6.30 Rawila - Aaron arrives back at the scene of the crash. He talks to more eyewitnesses, and finally finds one woman who saw it all: the bus driving fast, overtaking a car, suddenly meeting another car coming the other way, braking hard, skidding on the muddy road, and going through
the barrier and over the edge into the sea, taking with it the car it had been overtaking.

6.35 Hospital - The duty sister brings Cathy the names and other personal details of the two injured people brought in the second ambulance journey. She says there are still no condition reports yet; but they will issue condition reports on all seven crash victims at about 9.00. Cathy explains her copy deadlines and asks please can she have these details by 8.00 at the latest. The sister says that she will see what she can do, but can make no promises.

6.45 Newsroom - Editor gives Dudley's reaction story to CSE, who sub-edits it and writes a headline.

6.55 Rawila - Bill phones the office and dictates his 300-word story on the rescue hero to the typist, who types it straight into the computer.

7.00 Newsroom - Dudley again phones the Minister of Health's home; he is not there. Dudley again phones the Minister's club; he is not there. Dudley writes a holding paragraph in case he is unable to get the Minister at all: "The MP for Kalo, where the bus was going, is Mr Isaac Gesund, Minister of Health. He could not be contacted for comment last evening."

It is now getting dark.

7.05 Newsroom - Editor reads Bill's rescue hero story. He makes some alterations, then passes it to CSE.

7.10 Newsroom - CSE sub-edits Bill's rescue hero story and writes headline.

7.10 Hospital - The duty sister brings the names and personal details of the final three injured people to Cathy. She says she will have all seven condition reports available by 7.45. Cathy thanks her.

7.14 Hospital - Cathy sits down to write her story. She leaves a space for the condition of each person to be inserted later; and she puts each person on a separate sheet of paper, so that she can rearrange them in the right order later, with the most seriously injured first and the least seriously injured last.

7.15 Rawila - Bill returns to the crash scene. Police and divers arrive, with floodlights, to recover the bodies from the wrecked vehicles. The two reporters agree that Bill will stay and watch this, and phone the newsroom if it produces anything newsworthy.

7.20 Newsroom - Dudley phones the Bishop, tells him about the crash and asks whether he has a message of comfort for the bereaved. The Bishop gives him a few comforting words. Dudley writes a couple of paragraphs quoting the Bishop, and hands it to the editor to add to the story.

7.25 Newsroom - Editor reads Dudley's add copy, then passes it to CSE.

7.35 Newsroom - CSE goes to the printery to monitor progress there.

7.40 Rawila - Aaron finishes his interviews and leaves to drive to the newsroom.

7.50 Newsroom - Aaron arrives. Editor discusses the story with him; tells him about the background paragraphs which he has written; and agrees the structure of the story. Aaron starts to write his story, using some material included in the original story, but bringing it all up-to-date and including much detail which was not available at 5.30 - especially the detailed eyewitness account of the crash.

7.52 Newsroom - The assistant makes coffee for everyone.
7.55 Hospital - The duty sister brings the condition reports to Cathy. Two, including one child, have head injuries and are in a critical condition; the others are not in a critical condition.

8.00 Hospital - Cathy sorts out her story, inserting the condition reports and putting the people in the right sequence. She then phones the newsroom and dictates the story to the assistant.

8.00 Newsroom - Dudley tries again to phone the Minister of Health at home and at his club: he is still at neither place. Dudley hands the holding paragraph which he has written to the editor, to add to his story. The editor thanks Dudley for all his help and says he can go home now.

8.05 Rawila - The first diver goes down to survey the scene. He comes up to report that there are nine bodies in the bus - four men, three women, one child and one baby; and one man in the car.

8.05 Newsroom - CSE returns to his desk. She shows Aaron the three pictures being used and asks for information about each one. Aaron provides details, and CSE writes the captions.

8.15 Newsroom - CSE sub-edits Dudley's final paragraph and incorporates it into the page.

8.15 Rawila - Bill phones the office to tell them how many bodies have been found. Editor hears the news, then passes Bill on to Aaron, to discuss it in detail. Aaron incorporates this information into his story by rewriting the early paragraphs and inserting three paragraphs of detail about the dive lower down in the story.

8.17 Newsroom - Editor reads Cathy's copy; he passes it to CSE.

8.19 Newsroom - Back page is approved, and goes to have a printing plate made.

8.20 Newsroom - Editor phones for a taxi to go to the hospital, collect Cathy and bring her back to the office.

CSE sub-edits Cathy's copy and writes headline.

8.25 Newsroom - Editor discusses with Aaron how to structure the story now, including the information about the number of bodies. Aaron phones the police to ask if they will release the names of the dead people. The police say they will not be able to do so until tomorrow.

8.45 Newsroom - Taxi arrives with Cathy. Editor sends the assistant home in it.

9.00 Newsroom - CSE starts to sub-edit Aaron's copy, but leaving the first few paragraphs to one side.

9.15 Newsroom - Cathy phones the hospital to see whether there are any further developments, and asks to speak to the duty sister in Casualty. The sister tells her that one of the injured people has died - the adult who was critically ill - but that all the others are in a stable condition. Cathy tells the editor, then phones the police to see if they will inform the next-of-kin tonight. The police say they cannot promise to do so, and ask that the name should not be published yet. Editor tells Aaron to amend his story to incorporate this new development, making it now a total of 12 people who have died - but not to use the name of the person who has died in hospital.

9.30 Newsroom - Aaron finishes his story and hands it to the editor, who reads it, then passes it to CSE.

9.35 Newsroom - CSE sub-edits the rest of Aaron's story and writes the headline.

9.50 Newsroom - Page one is completed and goes to have a printing plate made.

10.00 Newsroom - Aaron is sent out to take Cathy home, then go to the crash scene and collect
Bill.

10.05 Rawila - The divers report that the dead man in the car is the Minister of Health, Mr Isaac Gesund.

10.06 Rawila - Bill checks with the police that Mr Gesund's family will be informed tonight, then runs to the telephone and phones the editor to tell him about the dead man in the car being Mr Gesund.

10.08 Newsroom - Editor tells CSE about the late development. While editor writes a Stop Press paragraph, CSE runs to the printery to tell them to hold page one. The printing plate is almost made, but the process is stopped.

10.10 Newsroom - A Stop Press paragraph, in big capital letters, saying: LATE NEWS: CAR DRIVER KILLED IN RAWILA CRASH BELIEVED TO BE MINISTER OF HEALTH, HON ISAAC GESUND is hastily inserted into the Stop Press space on page one, which goes again for platemaking.

10.15 Newsroom - CSE remains in the printery to see the second edition away. Editor remains in the office in case there are any more calls about further developments.

10.25 Rawila - Aaron arrives at the crash scene, collects Bill, and takes him back to town.

10.50 Newsroom - The presses start to roll with page one and the back page. Editor and CSE each grab a copy of paper and sit down to discuss it.

11.10 Office - Editor makes a note reminding himself to thank all the staff next day, and leaves it on his desk. He and CSE go home.

TO SUMMARISE:

Keep a cool head: don't panic

Plan how best to use the resources you have

Make sure everyone has clear instructions

Make sure everyone keeps in touch with the boss

Keep to deadlines, even if it means writing an incomplete story
Chapter 46: News pictures

In this chapter, we concentrate on newspapers, magazines and online publications, looking at how they can use pictures to tell the news. In the following chapter we discuss various kinds of graphics and how to caption pictures.

Please Note: Most of the photographs used in The News Manual Online are taken from the original three-volume book. They were screened for the printing technology in use at the time and are, therefore, grainy by comparison with modern digital photographs. I have included them partly because they were taken and selected by Peter Henshall himself. We hope eventually to build an additional Resource to share examples of good and bad news pictures sent in by journalists.

Most print media use a combination of words and pictures to tell the news, but some only use words. If you have ever seen a newspaper with no pictures, you will know that it does not look attractive; it does not make you want to read it. It looks as though it will be hard work, and readers are therefore put off. It is also limited in its ability to tell the news accurately.

When we talk about "pictures", we are usually talking about photographs, but there are other kinds of pictures, too. Good drawings, paintings and other graphic work also work well as news pictures. We shall consider those in the next chapter.

Why do we need news pictures?

There are three main reasons why newspapers need news pictures.

To brighten the page

A page without a picture is just a slab of grey text. It looks boring and many people will not bother to read what is written on it.

That is a pity if some of those stories are well researched and well written, but it is true. The readers who pay money for a newspaper expect their job to be made easy for them. They expect the news to have been sorted out into big stories and little stories, to have been written clearly, and to be presented in a way which is easy to read.

Newspapers without pictures do not make the news easy to read. They make life hard for the readers. The newspaper's journalists are not doing their job properly.

To tell the news

As we saw in Chapter 1: What is news?, news is something which is new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people. It is obvious that new, unusual, interesting and significant things about people can be communicated by pictures as well as by words.

Not all stories will be ideal for pictures. Some will be told more easily in words than in pictures, while other stories may be told with one picture more easily and more clearly than in many words.

There is an old saying in English that "one picture is worth a thousand words". That can be true, but only if it is the kind of story which is suitable to be told by a picture, and only if it is a good
picture. We shall look in a moment at what makes a good news picture.

Pictures can sometimes tell the news just by themselves, with a caption to say who the people are and where the event is taking place. At other times, the picture may go with a story, to work as a team with the words. In either case, a news picture must always leave the reader knowing more than he did before. It must carry information.

To show what it looks like

Only a very gifted writer can use words in a way which lets the reader visualise exactly what a scene is like. Not every reporter can write as well as that.

A picture can let the reader see what a person, or a place, or a building, or an event looks like.

In societies which do not have television, newspaper photographs are probably the only way that most people can know what these things look like. They may be the only way that people outside the capital city will know what their own leaders look like. Even in societies with television, some areas of the country and some levels of society may have no access to it, and many of the programs may be imported from overseas. The newspapers still have an important job to let readers know what their own news looks like.

What makes a strong news picture?

A strong news picture has to be about the news. That is, it has to be about something which is new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people. To that extent, it is no different from a news story. However, news pictures also need three other qualities:

Life

To the photographer, a picture assignment may seem dull. It may just seem like yet another cheque presentation, or yet another graduation day, or yet another retirement.

To the people involved in the story, though, each of these is a big event - the culmination of months of fund-raising, the fruit of years of study or the end of a lifetime's service. It is the news photographer's job to feel the same excitement which the people involved in the story feel, and to convey that through the picture to the readers.

If the people being photographed look alive and involved in the subject of the photograph, then the photograph will have life.

Relevant context

A photograph of a man behind a desk tells us nothing, and no newspaper should ever publish such a picture.

Some people sit behind desks because they are business people, running companies which produce soft drinks - photograph them in the factory, surrounded by bottles of soft drink.

Some people sit behind desks because they are head teachers, running schools - photograph them in the school grounds, surrounded by students.

People sit behind desks for many reasons, and it
is the reason which matters, not the desk. Also, it has to be a very unusual desk for the picture to have any interest for the reader. A desk with a phone and some papers on it is very boring.

News pictures should always try to capture this context, the job which the person does, or the reason why they are in the news. If a schoolteacher is in the news because they have won a painting competition, then the relevant context would be the painting. A photograph of them teaching would not provide the correct context.

However, a photograph of the teacher painting, surrounded by the students, might be the complete news picture.

In the case on the right, the man is an editor, so show him doing something special to his job.

Meaning

Every news picture must earn its space on the page. That means that it must tell the story clearly, without needing people to read the story first in order to understand what the picture is all about. In other words, every news picture must have meaning.

A picture of a man pointing at a broken window means nothing. If this is a man whose house has been broken into, by the thieves breaking a window and climbing in, then the story is about the way he feels, as well as the damage done. The picture should show his anger, or distress, in his expression and gestures; behind him and to one side can be the broken window; all around him may be the mess which the thieves left behind. In this way the picture can have meaning to the reader.

Types of news picture

It is not possible to give a complete list of types of news picture, any more than it is possible to give a complete list of types of people. People come in all sorts of shapes, sizes and characters; so do news pictures.

The list which follows is just a guide to the most common types.

Some news pictures will fit into more than one category - a portrait of a person may well be humorous, for example. And there will always be good photographers who can produce good pictures which book authors cannot fit into any category at all. That is what makes journalism so interesting.

The happening

There are all sorts of news story, but the big one is the thing which just happened. Perhaps there was an unusual act of nature - an earthquake, a cyclone, an eclipse of the sun. Perhaps there was a man-made drama - a murder, a robbery, a demonstration, a parade. Whatever happened, it was new; and if it was unusual and interesting, then it was news. A photograph of it is just what a newspaper editor wants.

A photograph of a happening helps the readers in many ways. It provides proof that the event really happened, since the readers can see it with their own eyes. It also takes the readers there, and lets them see the setting in which the event happened. In this way, it helps the words to tell
the story, by making clear what they mean.

The epitome

An epitome is something which shows, on a small scale, exactly what something larger is like. For example, a photograph of one student with her head buried in a book might epitomise all the studies being done by all students, and could be a strong news picture as the time of national examinations comes near.

Epitomes are important to news pictures. It is impossible for the human mind to imagine 10,000 people starving to death, or 500 refugees being turned back at a border, or 30,000 miners on strike. These numbers are too vast, and our minds cannot cope.

What people can understand is one thin mother, with no milk in her breasts, watching her baby starve to death.

They can understand the despair of one refugee as the door of hope is shut in his face.

They can understand the hopes and fears of one striking miner, as he balances the desire to stand up for what he considers to be his rights against the need to provide for his family.

In each case, by reducing the vast scale of the story to the human scale, the story gains in emotional power. The epitome is the picture which shows in one person what the story actually means to 500, 10,000 or 30,000. It turns statistics into people.

There are also pictures which epitomise situations, in that each part of the picture stands for something bigger. For example, when the Soviet Union sent its army to occupy Czechoslovakia in August 1968, and end the liberal reforms of the Dubcek government, people went out on to the streets of Prague to protest. One memorable photograph showed a young man, still wearing his
pyjamas, standing in front of the gun of a Russian tank baring his chest defiantly. The picture summed up the whole situation - the weak humanity of Czechoslovakia being defeated by the metal inhumanity of Russia, but still refusing to accept it. It was a brilliant and memorable epitome.

People

News is about people. It is about things which people do, and things which happen to people. To tell the news, we need to let the readers know who those people are and what they are like.

A picture can do this, if it shows the person's character and the person's context. If the news story is about a man's house being burned down, then we do not want a picture of him smiling: he needs to look sad. He needs to be photographed either in the burned remains of his house, or on the beach where he has to sleep now, or in whatever other context tells the story.

Revelations

Most of our readers see only a few places and meet only a few people in their everyday lives. They do not see a lot of what goes on around them, because it happens in places which they never visit.

There are many other things which most of our readers do not see because they do not want to see them, even though they may be happening in places which they visit regularly - beggars on the street, people looking in rubbish bins to find food, pickpockets and car thieves.

It is part of the job of all the news media to reveal to their readers or listeners what their society is like, and newspapers in particular can publish pictures which force people to see clearly the society they live in.

These pictures may show that crime is committed, that some people live in poor conditions in squatter settlements or shanty towns, that there is social injustice, that there is fighting going on between rival clans in remote parts of the country.

All this may sound very negative, but it is only possible for things which are wrong to be put right when people know about them. When you sweep out a room, the first job is to get all the dirt out from under the furniture into the middle of the room. Only then can it be cleaned right out of the door. In the same way, journalists often need to bring the dirt of society into the open, so that it can be cleaned up.

Not all revelations need to be negative, though. It is just as valuable to make your readers look for the first time at the life of a person or a family which overcomes difficulties - perhaps dealing with physical handicap, or finding ways to make money when there are no jobs available, or getting on with life while tribal fighting is going on all around.
Humour

A newspaper without a sense of humour is missing out on an important part of life. People enjoy a joke, and they will like a newspaper more if it can see the funny side of life as well as the serious side.

Pictures can often be funny by bringing together things which are not usually seen together, or by using contrasts of extreme sizes.

Pretty pictures

People do like to look at pictures of pretty scenes or attractive people, and newspapers need to recognise that. But a picture of a pretty scene or a pretty girl which has no news value should not be used in a newspaper as if it was a news picture.

That does not mean that we cannot use these pictures. Pictures of attractive young people, in particular, can find their way into the paper in connection with any artistic or cultural activity, such as dancing, or using the youngsters as models wearing clothes which have been designed or manufactured locally.

More than one picture

If you get back to the office, and find that the one picture you have taken does not really tell the story, it is too late to do anything about it. You cannot gather everybody together again for another attempt.
So when you are sent to cover a story, and when it has picture possibilities, you should always take more than one picture.

In the first place, cameras can be held two ways, to take both horizontal and vertical pictures. You should always take at least one picture of each shape.

You should also come up with more than one picture idea, in case one of them does not really work. That means thinking in advance about the story, and imagining what the finished picture could look like.

So, for each picture idea, you will have a horizontal and a vertical shot.

Now, for each of those, you will need to try a number of different camera settings, to make sure that you get at least one picture with the right light quality. Try several different shutter speeds and several different f stops. (If your camera is fully automatic, this does not apply to you.) In particular, even if the light is not very good - inside a building, for example - always try at least one shot without flash, using available light. If it is too dark, you have lost very little time; if it works, you will almost certainly have a better picture than one which uses flash. Flash makes everything look very flat and dull, and should only be used when there is no alternative.

This is why you need to take more than one picture even when the newspaper will only use one picture. There are also some types of job which require more than one picture to be published in the paper, and these make special demands on the photographer.

**Sequences**

A sequence of pictures can show a story unfolding, and therefore tell that story better than a single image can do. Very often, the editor will want to use the last picture like the punchline of a joke, using it bigger than the rest, so that the early pictures give the background to the main news, which is shown in the final climax picture. Be prepared when news is happening in front of you to keep taking one picture after another, in rapid succession, so that you may have a good sequence.

In any case, whether you have used only one frame or 30, the photos must be developed or downloaded as soon as you return to the newsroom. If you are using film, it should not sit in your camera for several days, waiting for you to finish the roll, while the news becomes old; you may as well use all the film on the current assignment.

**Big events**

A big event, like an independence anniversary celebration, or the visit of a foreign head of state, may well need many photographs to tell the whole story. Such an event will probably be too diverse to be captured in one picture.

At these times you will need to look for pictures of all the types listed above. You will want a picture of the moment the flag flies out of the hands of the soldier, perhaps; a picture of the proud and emotional face of a person in national dress looking up at the flag as it is raised, to epitomise the nationalism of the day; lots of pictures of people, of both high and low rank; a picture of a drunk collapsed under a tree; funny incidents; happy children.

All aspects of human life are there on these big occasions, and it is the job of the news photographer to capture them all.

And don’t forget that many big days are not happy – for example Hiroshima Day in Japan - or may be sorrowful for some people in the society. In Australia, for example, Australia Day signifies for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders the day their country was colonised by the British. A spread of photos of Australia Day celebrations would be incomplete without some showing the perspective of indigenous people.
Taking the picture

Professional photographers tend to use sophisticated cameras, which allow them to control just the sort of picture they want. If you feel comfortable with a camera of this type, that is fine.

Most people, however, become confused by all those lenses and different settings. If you are like this, you will probably get better results with a simple fixed-lens fully automatic camera than with a fancy one.

The reason for this is simple: you should be concentrating on the picture which you are taking, not on the camera. If you find that you have to puzzle over the camera settings, then you would probably do better with an automatic camera. These can now be bought for as little as US$100, though for newspapers and magazines you will probably need to spend more for a good quality lens necessary to take pictures which can be reproduced in large and clear format.

Whatever kind of camera you use, learn to look at the picture through the camera. Do not look at the scene first, decide it will be a good picture, and then click the camera shutter. Look at the scene through the camera, and see what it looks like.

Look all around the picture, too, not just at the subject. Look into the corners, and at the background. Photographers who do not do this often take photographs of people who seem to have things growing out of their heads - it may be a tree which is behind them.

Always remember that you can move - not only from side to side, and backwards and forwards, but up and down, too. Your knees bend. Try kneeling down, or even lying down; try standing on a chair. See what a difference this makes to your picture.

Remember, too, that the people in your picture can move. However, they can only move if you ask them to do so. You will need to take control of the situation and be the boss.

This is not always easy, especially if you are a young journalist and you are photographing important people. You will need to remember that you are a professional person, doing an important job.

If you can take a better photograph of the President outside the building than inside the building, explain to him what you want and ask for his cooperation. If he says no, you have lost nothing; but if he agrees, you will get a better picture. This will please the President as much as it will please you. (See Chapter 16: Interviewing for details of how to deal self-confidently with important people.)

Compare the picture above with the one on the right here. You will see similar posed pictures of presentations - cheques, leaving presents, reports being handed to Parliament etc - in
newspapers and magazines all over the world.

Posed pictures like the one above, which are simply people handing something to someone else, are quick to set up and easy to take - but they do not grab the reader's attention.

By comparison, the photograph on the right took longer to set up and take, but it is a more memorable shot. Your subjects will recognise this and may even ask for a copy to put in a frame on their wall!

When you photograph a group of people, you will need to organise them. Left to themselves, they will stand in a long line, with big spaces between them. Your photograph will then look awful.

Try to arrange different groupings. Bring more important people closer to the camera, so that they will appear bigger than the other people. Try putting tall people behind short people, or get some people to sit and others to stand behind them. Try putting everybody in a crowd, looking up, and stand on a table to photograph them from above.

However you arrange the group, persuade them to stand closer together than they really want to. It is a strange thing, but people look unfriendly in a photograph unless they are very close together, and you will have lots of dead space through the picture if they stand apart. Explain why, and get them to stand so close together that they touch, unless this is entirely socially unacceptable. If it is, bring some people nearer the camera to cover the gaps in the line behind them.

Above all, have ideas for good pictures before you start a job. You can then take control of the situation. If important people try to tell you what to do - "I think we will have one of me behind my desk" - take the picture they want first, and then say: "Can we now try another idea? My editor always likes me to have a selection of shots." Even if you never use the boring picture of the person behind the desk, it was worth the cost of a little film or digital processing time to win the person's confidence in you.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

All newspapers should use pictures:

- to make pages more attractive
- to tell the news more clearly
- to let readers know what people, places and things look like

Good news pictures need three qualities:

- to look alive and exciting
- to have a relevant context
- to be meaningful

Bring big stories down to the scale of the individual whenever possible

Point the camera at things which people choose not to see

Keep your sense of humour

Take a variety of pictures of each story:

- more than one picture idea
• a choice of horizontal and vertical for each idea
• several shutter speed and aperture settings for each shot
• try not to use flash; always try at least one shot with available light
Chapter 47: Captions & graphics in news pictures

In the previous chapter, we looked at how the print and online media can use pictures to tell the news. In this chapter we discuss various kinds of graphics and how to caption pictures.

If you have not already read the previous chapter on news pictures, it might be useful to visit it before proceeding with this chapter. Many of the things we speak about here build on advice given in Chapter 46 on the reasons for, choice of and use of news pictures.

Captions

Very few pictures used in newspapers, magazines or web pages can stand alone without at least some short description of what they are or why they are there. We call these descriptions captions. Typically they are short pieces of text placed below or beside the picture, although in magazines where there are several pictures on a page they may all be gathered together in one block of text, which we will discuss shortly.

Why have captions?

We have already seen that news pictures need to be able to tell the news. Even when they tell it well, though, there are things which no picture can do for itself.

Pictures generally cannot answer all the questions Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How? Nor can they always make it clear exactly what is happening, especially if it is a photograph of a demonstration or riot, where the scene is confused.

The job of the caption is to help readers to understand what they can see in front of them.

The content of a caption

To understand how a caption should be written, you must first think about how people read newspaper pages. They first look at the big headlines and the pictures, until they find something which looks interesting; then, if it is a picture which has caught their eye, they read the caption; finally, if they are still interested, they will read the story which goes with it.

Readers therefore read captions before they read stories. This means that a caption must include enough information from the story to make sense all by itself.

In the following example, the reader knows from the correct caption what the story is about and who is in the picture; the incorrect caption means nothing until the reader has first read the story:

**RIGHT:**
Mr Fred Duka, president of the Chamber of Commerce, welcomes the Finance Minister, Mr Barney Kina, to the Chamber luncheon at the Travelodge yesterday.

**WRONG:**
The president greets the Minister as he arrives at the luncheon.

Note, too, that the caption was written in the present tense, even though the event happened yesterday: "Mr Duka welcomes the Minister". This is because the picture is there, in front of the
readers, as they read the caption. They can see it happening at that very moment. It seems strange at first to write "Mr Duka welcomes the Minister yesterday," but it is a convention of journalism which works well.

**Writing the caption**

Every news photographer should go on assignment carrying a notepad and pen, as well as a camera and spare films or memory cards. This is because the photographer will need to write a caption for each picture.

If there are several people in a photograph, the photographer will need to ask the name of each one, and make sure that all the names are spelled correctly. It is best to do this before anyone moves out of position, so that the photographer can list the names as the people appear, from left to right, in the picture.

When the photographer returns to the newsroom, and the photographs are developed and printed, he or she will need to write a caption. This should be written in the style which we have just discussed, and should give all the information which the readers will need.

If the photographer is a good writer, this caption may be published exactly as it was written. However, not all good photographers are good writers. If the caption has not been written very well, it should be rewritten by a sub-editor, using the information provided by the photographer.

If you are using photographs of people from your picture library (or archive), always double check they are of the right person. It is not unknown to use the wrong picture where there are two people of the same name. For example, using a photograph of Archbishop Geoffrey Kwano above a caption: "Convicted murderer Geoffrey Kwano" will not make the Archbishop or your lawyers happy!

**Where does the caption go?**

In English, people read from left to right and from top to bottom. We have already seen that they want to look at the picture first and then read the caption afterwards, so it is natural for the caption to be below the picture or to the right-hand side of it - that is, in a position to which the reader's eye will naturally travel next.

In practice, the best place to put a caption is below the picture, preferably the full width of the picture. It is always easy to find a caption in this position.

Next to the picture is the second best position, but ideally a caption in this position should have a column of space all to itself, so that the caption can easily be seen. Space is precious in a newspaper, though, especially on the news pages. A caption beside a picture will probably have other text above it or below it, and this will make it hard for the reader to find the caption. It is best, therefore, to put captions beside pictures only on feature pages, or in magazines, which can better afford to use white space.

Worst of all is to bury the caption in the middle of, or at the end of, the story. This makes it almost impossible for the reader to find the caption at all.

It is usual to print a caption in a contrasting type (either **bold** or *italics*), slightly larger than the body type. If it is to go underneath the picture, it should be set a bit narrower than the picture itself, so that it fits neatly underneath the picture without looking as though it is sticking out at either end.

Occasionally when there are several pictures on a page all associated with the same story, you can use an 'island' of text for the captions. This is most usual in feature articles where one theme connects all the pictures. In such captions it is common to either use words like 'above', 'right', 'far right' etc to identify the specific pictures. Another method is to identify the pictures in a clockwise
direction from the first picture.

So, for example, a caption for four pictures of a singer at different ages might say something like:

Much of singer Dhaba Lal's life has been spent on stage: (clockwise from top left) aged six in a talent contest; on Talent Time aged 12; winning India Idol 18; performing last year at Madison Square Gardens.

**Graphics**

So far we have talked about photographs, but there are other kinds of pictures which can also tell the news. If you have the chance, get a graphic artist on to the staff of your newspaper or magazine. They can do a lot of valuable work, preparing advertisements as well as the kind of news graphics which we shall discuss here.

There are four main kinds of graphics which you are likely to want to use.

**Maps**

One of the basic questions which journalists need to answer is **Where?** One of the best ways of answering this question is by publishing a map.

For a foreign news story, this can be a map showing the location of the country where the news is happening. For a national story, it can be a map showing whereabouts in the country the town is, where the news is happening. You can even use a street map, showing whereabouts in the town the news event happened.

The best maps for use in newspapers contain as little information as is necessary, and have all the lines drawn boldly. Do not try to photocopy a page from an atlas, which is full of contour lines and rivers, and expect it to communicate clearly with the readers. Get your graphic artist to draw a simple map, using the atlas as a guide.

Some maps can have an inset, showing the location of the main map - for example, a map of the Federated States of Micronesia showing the location of Chuuk Lagoon could be used as an **inset**, beside a larger scale map of the lagoon itself, pointing out exactly where Tol island is in relation to the main island of Moen.

Remember, too, that all the lettering on the map must be easily readable, even after the map has been reduced in size for publication. The usual rule is that no lettering on a map (or other graphic artwork) as it appears in a newspaper should be smaller than 9 point.

**Graphs and charts**

When the story depends on comparing sets of figures, it may be easier for the readers to understand if they are presented in graph or chart form.

Many small personal computers can now generate artwork of this kind, if you have the right software. Even if you have not, they can be simply prepared by any graphic artist.

Once again, it is important to remember that all lines should be drawn boldly, and that the chart or graph should not be crowded with too much unnecessary information.

**Drawings**

Sometimes a drawing can illustrate a story more effectively than a photograph can do. A news story about a dramatic rescue of a child from the side of a cliff, in bad weather, may be
difficult to illustrate with photographs for several reasons.

First, the weather was bad, so all your photographs are pale grey and fuzzy. Second, the rescue took a couple of hours, so there was no really decisive moment to photograph. Third, the best vantage point from which to see what was happening was in mid air, 40 metres above the sea.

An artist can overcome all those problems. In the drawing of the cliff, the reader can be taken out into mid air, just out from the cliff, for the best possible view. In the drawing, the mist and driving rain can be cleared away, so that everyone can see clearly what is happening. And in the drawing, all the stages of the rescue, over two hours, can be shown together, clearly numbered so that the readers can understand the order in which things happened.

Drawings can also be useful in illustrating features. If the feature can be given to a good artist several days in advance, it may be possible for the artist to create a drawing which captures the point of the feature in a way which no photograph can do.

Whether or not you will use drawings will depend on whether or not you have a good artist available. If you have, use them as much as possible.

Drawings on photographs

There are some stories which need a combination of photographs and drawings to be told clearly.

If the site has been cleared for a new hospital to be built, how can you illustrate this? A photograph of a cleared site will be very boring.

One possibility is to photograph the whole site, ideally from a high vantage point (perhaps you will be allowed to go up into a crane on the building site) and then get an artist to draw on the photograph how the hospital will look on this site when it is built. To do this, you will need the architect’s drawings or a model of the finished building.

Similarly, if a car has run out of control in the city centre, bumping into other cars and traffic signs before finally running across the footpath and into the front of a shop, you might be able to show all of this in one picture.

A photograph of the whole scene (again, preferably taken from a high vantage point) can be drawn on by an artist, to show the car’s eventful journey down the street. A line, going from side to side, with a short caption at every “bump”, might tell the story well.

TO SUMMARISE:

Make captions self-contained and in the present tense

Use them large enough for people to read easily

Use suitable graphics to tell news, as well as photographs
Chapter 48: Radio and television basics

In this chapter, we discuss writing news for radio and television. There is advice on how to simplify your writing and how to structure your stories to be most effective. In the following chapter we give step-by-step guidance on preparing news bulletins.

Although all journalism should be a flow of information between the journalist and the reader, listener or viewer, in the broadcast media it is of vital importance that the reporter - through the newsreader or announcer - actually speaks to the audience.

It may be that you are broadcasting to millions of people, but you must write your story as if you are telling it to just one person. You should write as if someone you know personally is listening. Picture a favourite uncle or aunt, cousin or brother and imagine that you are speaking to him or her.

Your style must, therefore, be conversational and as far as possible simple.

Remember also that, unlike a newspaper story, your listeners or viewers cannot go back on the bulletin to hear again something they have missed. Nor can their eyes jump around within a story or a page searching for the information they want. In broadcasting the words and sentences are heard once only, one after the other, and all the information must be presented in such a way that it is understandable straight away. This is often called a linear flow of information because it goes in a line in one direction.

You must help your listeners and viewers by presenting information concisely and logically.

You must always remember that by switching on a radio or television set, the listeners are inviting you into their homes, their workplaces and their cars.

Write and speak as if you were talking to them as individuals, face-to-face.
In practice

You should remember all you have been told about writing the basic news story. Be concise, up-to-date, stick to the main point, use the active voice, don’t start with quotes and don’t overload.

KISS

Keep it short and simple. You should not try to get too much information into any sentence. Although you use the inverted pyramid style of story writing, you may only be able to use one or two concepts (ideas) per sentence. You cannot get as much detail into a radio or television story as you can into a newspaper story.

You cannot expect your listener to understand the Who? What? Where? When? Why?and How? of a story all in the first paragraph or even the first two paragraphs. Although as a good journalist you should not leave any essential questions unanswered, you may find that it takes all the time available for a single story to communicate only a few basic facts. It is often said that you could put all the words in a ten minute radio bulletin on one page of a newspaper.

Stick to one or two key points per sentence. No sentence should be longer than 20 words, except in unusual circumstances. Just as a mother feeds a child one spoonful at a time, allowing the child to swallow each spoonful before taking the next, you should spoon feed your listener. Give them one piece of information at a time so that it can be digested before the next piece.

Where necessary, split a long and involved sentence into two or more shorter clearer sentences, as you would in conversation.

RIGHT:
Japanese boats have returned to fish in Fijian waters.
They were banned last year because of an international row over net sizes.
Now they are back in the waters off Vanua Levu.

WRONG:
Japanese fishing boats, which were banned from Fijian waters during an international row over net sizes last year, returned to fish in the waters off Vanua Levu on Monday.

It may take more words, but what good is the most skilful sentence in history if the listener cannot understand it?

It might help you to write short and simple sentences if you first try to imagine how the story might appear in a newspaper headline.

Once you have reduced it to the bones of a headline, you can put some flesh on it for radio and television. Don’t forget though that, whereas newspaper headlines can be incomplete sentences, without words like the and a, radio and television news must be in complete sentences.

Look at the following example and notice how we take the details in the information, strip it down to the bones by writing a headline, then add words to turn the headline into a complete sentence, suitable for radio or television.

INFORMATION:
A contract for the construction of a new road between Madang and Lae has been awarded to a Korean company.
**INTRO:**
A Korean company is to build a new road between Madang and Lae.

**Use up-to-date tenses**

The single greatest advantage of broadcasting is immediacy. You can inform your listener as an event is happening, or immediately afterwards, without waiting for typesetters or printing presses. Do not waste that advantage.

Keep all tenses as up-to-date as possible. Use the present tense or the tense nearest to the present and, whenever possible, use a continuous tense to tell your listener that a thing is still happening, as they listen.

Compare the tenses in the following examples. The verbs are in italics.

**RIGHT:**  
The Prime Minister says he expects an increase in imports this year.

**WRONG:**  
The Prime Minister said he expected an increase in imports this year.

**RIGHT:**  
Leaders of the main opposition parties in Fiji have been meeting.

**WRONG:**  
Leaders of the main opposition parties in Fiji met over the weekend.

There is no room for words such as "yesterday", "last week" or "last Monday" in the intro of a broadcast news story. If the date makes the story seem old or stale, hide it down in the main body of the story.

**Do not use quotes**

Do not use quotes in radio or television stories. If you want your listeners to hear the words as they were spoken, record them on tape and use them as *actuality* (the actual sound of something or someone, sometimes also called *audio*). This ability to hear people speak is one of the great benefits of broadcasting.

Also, quotes in broadcasting cannot work as they do in print, where the readers can see the quotation marks. It is just as effective to turn quotes into reported speech (see Chapter 8: *Quotes*).

Bad journalists try to get round this rule by using the words "quote" and "unquote" at the beginning and end of direct quotes. This sounds clumsy. It is much better in radio to rewrite quotes in reported speech. Compare the following sentences:

**RIGHT:**  
The chairman said it was a crying shame.

**WRONG:**  
The chairman said: "It is a crying shame."

**WRONG:**  
The chairman said, quote: It is a crying shame - unquote.
If you feel the need to stress a certain word or phrase in reported speech, to emphasise that these are the actual words used, underline them so the newsreader can add the stress with their voice. Again, it is better to use actuality where possible.

Some journalists mistakenly think that they will be safe from defamation if they add "quote ... unquote" around danger words. In law, it does not matter whether words are in quotes or reported speech; they could still be defamatory. (See *Chapter 69: Defamation*.)

The only time you would use quotes in television is when you present them as text on screen. This most commonly happens when it is important the the viewer can see the exact words used, for example in quoting a judge from a court case where audio or actuality of his voice is not available. These quotes are usually kept very short and given in large, easy-to-read type, punctuated as they would be in print media.

**Put attribution first**

Attribution in radio and television goes at the front of a sentence, as it would if you were talking to that favourite aunt. This is unlike traditional newspaper style, which commonly puts attribution such as *he said* at the end of the sentence, after the quote. In newspapers, readers can see both the quote and the attribution together. In radio and television, your listeners need to know who was speaking before they can judge what was said. Remember the linear structure of broadcast news.

Compare the following sentences. The attribution is in italics.

**RIGHT:**

*A senior government economist* says that people in Papua New Guinea are paid too much.

**WRONG:**

People are paid too much in Papua New Guinea, *a senior government economist* said last night.

By putting the attribution up front, you are also making your sentence more active, important for broadcast news.

**Avoid unfamiliar words**

If a newspaper reader does not understand a word, he or she can return to it and maybe look it up in a dictionary before proceeding to the rest of the story. Your listeners cannot do this.

By the time they have worked out the meaning of an unfamiliar word, the story will be over and they will have missed all the other details.

If you have to use an unfamiliar word or name, you must not hit your listeners with it without warning. You should never put it as the first word in your paragraph, but work your way towards it over familiar ground.

In the following examples, the unfamiliar words are in italics.

**RIGHT:**

*In Mexico, the volcano Popocatepetl* has erupted again.

*It showered lava and ash for 50*

**WRONG:**

*Popocatepetl, a volcano in Mexico,* erupted again yesterday, showering lava and ash on the ground over a radius of
People's names can cause problems too, unless they are familiar. For example, the name of your Prime Minister or President may not cause problems, but an unfamiliar name might, as in the following example:

**RIGHT:**
A school inspector in the East Sepik says teachers don't listen enough to their students.

The inspector, Mr Arianthis Koloaloa, says ...

**WRONG:**
Mr Arianthis Koloaloa, a school inspector in the East Sepik, has criticised teachers for not listening to their students.

**Repeat important words**

Because radio and television listeners do not pay attention all the time, and because people often switch on their sets half-way through a bulletin, it is important that you repeat the essential features several times in the story.

They might be half-listening to the radio or TV until something - perhaps a word relevant to them or their interest - triggers their attention. They then 'tune in' with their mind but, because of the linear nature of broadcast news, they cannot go back and retrieve any words they have missed. So repeat important words at least once in the story.

In the following example, the words Korean, Madang, Lae and road are repeated:

A Korean company is to build a new road between Madang and Lae.

They estimate it will cost more than one-hundred-million kina.

Work on the new Madang to Lae road should begin in August.

The Prime Minister, Mr Rabbie Namaliu, says the Koreans were awarded the road contract because of their years of experience.

Of course, too much repetition can be boring, so do not overdo it. A simple tip is to cover the intro and see whether or not you can still understand the story from what is left. Try it with the example above.

**Keep punctuation simple**

Keep punctuation as simple as possible. In broadcast news, punctuation marks are not only there for grammatical reasons. They also give the newsreader clues on breathing.

In general, the only punctuation marks you need are the full stop, comma, question mark and dash. Some writers like to use a series of dots to denote a pause, as in the following example:

The Prime Minister... speaking at a business lunch... said the economy is looking brighter.

Where two words go together to form a single concept, hyphenate them whether or not it is grammatically correct to do so. For example, write mini-market, winding-rope, pocket-book.
Simplify numbers

Numbers should be included to inform, not to confuse - either the newsreader or the listener. Wherever there is the possibility of confusing the newsreader, write the number in full.

**RIGHT:**

two-million, nine-hundred-and-eighty thousand, and two.

**WRONG:**

2,980,002

Better still, round off large figures, so that the example above becomes "almost three million". This simplifies matters for both the newsreader and the listeners.

The same rule applies to fractions. Write them in full, for example *one-half, three-quarters* etc.

With money, spell out the units, so that $1.50 becomes "one-dollar-fifty".

Many newsreaders even prefer the date to be spelt out, as in the following:

**RIGHT:**

The 1st of March, 2007.

**WRONG:**

March 1, 2007.

Avoid abbreviations

As a general rule, avoid abbreviations. You can, of course, use "Mr", or "Mrs" in your script, but do not abbreviate other titles.

Where the initials of an organisation are read as a word, write them as such, for example Nato, Asean, Apec.

But if they must be read individually, separate each letter with a dot, as in U.N., P.N.G. or Y.M.C.A.. Some broadcasters prefer to hyphenate the letters, to make it even clearer that they must be read out separately, for example P-N-G.

The first reference must be written in full unless the initials are widely understood on their own - as are the three examples above.

Do not use the abbreviations a.m. or p.m. There is always a better way which tells your listeners much more. Phrases like "this morning" or "tomorrow afternoon" mean much more to most listeners. See how much clearer the correct sentence is in the following example.

**RIGHT:**

The rocket was launched at three this morning.

**WRONG:**

The rocket was launched at 3 a.m. today.

Give a guide to pronunciation

Pronunciation is a very large field. Most newsrooms should have a pronunciation guide for place names and other difficult foreign words.

Good dictionaries should give you correct pronunciations, but if you are in doubt, check with a
senior journalist or someone who is likely to know the correct pronunciation. For example, if it is
the name of a species of fish, check with a fisheries officer.

When writing an unfamiliar word for the newsreader, make their task as simple as possible by
writing it phonetically. For example, the state of Arkansas should be written as ARK-en-sor; the
French word gendarme becomes JON-darm, placing the stress on the syllable in capital letters.

Do everything you can do to make the message clearer.

Writing for television

Although most of the rules for broadcast writing (such as KISS) apply to both radio and television,
there are a few additional factors to remember when writing for television.

Making television news is a more complicated process than producing radio news - which can often
be done by one person. Television always involves several people, performing specialist tasks such
as camera operating, scriptwriting, bulletin presenting, directing, studio managing, lighting and
sound mixing.

Television also involves two simultaneous methods of presenting information - sound and vision. Of
the two, vision is usually the most effective in giving details quickly. For example, you could take
several minutes to describe a crash scene which can be understood from a ten-second film
segment. The words in television usually support the pictures, not the other way round. That is
why television reporters usually write their scripts after they have edited the videotape (or film).
You usually have to write your script so that the words match the pictures which are on the screen.
This requires good language skills, especially in simplifying complex language. If a newsreader has
to read your script live - perhaps from an autocue - it will help them if you keep the words and
grammar simple and the sentences short. (An autocue – also called a teleprompter - is a device
which projects a magnified image of the script on a clear screen in front of the camera lens, in such
a way that only the presenter can see it. It is invisible to the viewers at home. It is used so
presenters do not need to keep looking down at their scripts.)

Of course, the words become more important when there are no pictures to illustrate the story,
only the sight of the newsreader's head and shoulders. But you should always try to think of ways
of presenting some of your information visually, otherwise you are wasting half of your resources
(the vision). For example, if you are telling about a new tax on beer, you will probably
simultaneously show pictures of a brewery and of beer being produced and consumed. You might
also want to show a graph showing how beer sales and taxes have increased over the past few
years. And you may want a clip of the relevant minister explaining why he is increasing the tax.

As well as being aware of how your words will support the pictures, you must also consider the
effect the pictures will have on your viewers' ability to listen to the words. For example, if you have
some very dramatic pictures of an explosion, you should not write your script in such a way that
the important facts are given while viewers have all their attention on the picture. Perhaps leave a
couple of seconds without any commentary during the explosion, then bring your viewers' attention
back to the words gradually. Remember that every time you change the picture on the screen,
your viewers' attention is distracted away from the words while they concentrate on the new
image. Bear this in mind when writing your script to fit the edited pictures.

Because television viewers have to concentrate on both sight and sound, you cannot expect them
to concentrate on lots of details while there are interesting pictures on the screen. So if you want
to give some very important details, either do it when the camera returns to a picture of the
newsreader, or do it through graphics such as maps, diagrams, graphs or tables or through
captions.

Captions

The names and titles of speakers are usually written on the screen in captions. These must be
simple and clear, so that your viewers do not have to spend much time reading them. Remember too that your viewers may not all be able to read. If you know that literacy rates are low among your audience, putting the written word on the screen will not alone explain essential details. For example, in countries with high literacy rates, television newsreaders or reporters use only captions to identify speakers. You may need to both present a caption and also read the name aloud.

**Subtitles**

Subtitles are text versions of the spoken words in the bulletin or program. They usually run along the bottom of the screen so viewers can read them while still watching the pictures and listening to the words being spoken. They are mainly used for two reasons: to assist viewers who have hearing difficulties (called closed captions) or to translate words in languages other than the language of broadcast. They generally need to be prepared beforehand and they require concentration from the viewer, so they should be done professionally if possible.

To avoid having to use subtitled translations of words spoken in another language, it is possible to over-dub what the speaker is saying by fading down the original sound and getting another voice to read a translation over it, either a fellow journalist or a professional voice actor. Simpler still is to fade down the words being spoken so they can barely be heard then the newsreader (or reporter) can summarise what is said in reported speech.

**Stand-ups**

One final word about writing for stand-ups. These are the times when a reporter speaks directly into the camera at the scene of the story. Each stand-up segment in news is normally about 10 or 20 seconds long, meaning that it can contain several sentences of spoken word. Some reporters write the words they will say in sentences on a notebook then read them out in front of the camera. However, this means that the reporter cannot look into the camera while also looking down to read from the notebook.

It is better either to memorise the sentences then put the notebook to one side or to remember only the key words you want to use then speak sentences directly into the camera. In both cases, it helps if you keep the language simple and your sentences short. You must also avoid using words which might be difficult to pronounce. If you try to say "The previous Prime Minister passed away in Papeete", you will get into difficulties because of all the "p" sounds. Rewrite the sentence as "The last Prime Minister died in Papeete."

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Follow these simple writing rules:

- **KISS** - keep it short and simple
- Do not use quotes on radio or in television scripts
- Avoid unfamiliar words
- Repeat important words
- Keep punctuation simple
- Simplify numbers
- Avoid abbreviations
- Show how to pronounce difficult words
In the previous chapter, we discussed writing news for radio and television, with advice on how to simplify your writing and how to structure your stories to be most effective. In this chapter we give step-by-step guidance on preparing news bulletins.

All your work as a broadcast journalist leads ultimately to one thing - the time when your listeners hear what you have produced. This can be the news bulletin or a current affairs program. You have to use your on-air time effectively.

Although we will concentrate in this section on producing bulletins for radio, you can use similar techniques for television. The main difference is that television bulletins also include pictures, which have to be coordinated with the script. If you can understand the principles of producing radio bulletins, you can use them for television, adapting them to the style of your particular newsroom.

The principles of bulletin preparation

Radio bulletins are usually made up from three types of material:

- written stories in the form of a script;
- voice reports from journalists, either recorded or live;
- recorded sound called actuality. This is usually the sound of someone speaking, perhaps taken from an interview or a speech. A short segment of actuality is called a grab. Grabs are used in a similar way to quotes in a newspaper story. In some countries, grabs are called cuts or inserts.

Preparing a bulletin should not be difficult if you remember the basic principles of news reporting. Remind yourself of the criteria for what is news: Is it new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people?

Each of these criteria will help you to decide what stories you should include in your bulletin and where you should place them within your five, 10 or 15 minutes. It is usual to give the most important story first and the least important story last. If you are putting together your first bulletin, stick to this technique.

However, once you feel confident that you can put together a simple bulletin, you can start to consider some extra factors which will change it from a list of stories to a proper bulletin.

The two main factors you have to consider are the overall order or balance of the bulletin and the pace of it.

Balance

Try to avoid seeing the bulletin simply as a collection of individual, self-contained stories. If you put a string of economic stories (however important) at the start of the bulletin, you risk losing your listeners' interest.

They expect a balance of items, some heavy and some light, some about major political events and some about ordinary people. Of course, the actual mix of stories, their tone and pace of delivery will depend to a degree on the format of your station; serious national broadcasters tend to use more serious stories, delivered in a more deliberate style whereas youth-oriented music station bulletins might be lighter and brighter with more stories about popular culture.

Whatever your station format, your ranking of stories in order in the bulletin will give your listeners
some indication of how important you consider each story. But there is some freedom within bulletins to re-order stories to add variety and balance to the bulletin as a whole.

Pace

You must also get the right pace of stories through your bulletin. By pace we mean the length and tone of a story as it appears to the listeners.

Some stories have a fast pace. The report of a fire, for example, will usually be written in short sentences, using short snappy words to convey simple ideas. It will have a fast pace.

By comparison, a story explaining some involved political controversy may need slightly longer sentences with words expressing more complicated ideas. The story itself may need to be slightly longer. The whole effect is one of a slower pace.

Too many long complicated stories will slow the pace of the whole bulletin and allow the attention of your listeners to wander. Too many short, sharp stories may leave listeners confused, unable to keep up with the pace of changing stories.

Your ideal bulletin will have a steady pace throughout to maintain interest, with variations in pace during certain sections; slower at times to let your listeners catch their breath or faster at other times to pick up their lagging interest.

How do you achieve balance and pace in practice? You should rank your stories in order of importance then look at the order afresh, to see that you have a good balance of items and variations in pace.

You may decide that your most important three stories are all rather serious political stories about taxation, health insurance and an internal party squabble. Ask yourself: "What will my listeners think of three minutes of this at the start of the bulletin?" If you think they will be bored, what about putting the report of a street fight up to the third place in the bulletin, to inject some pace into that section? This may force your party argument story into fourth place, but you will now be giving it new life by changing pace after the street fight story.

Structuring the bulletin

Now you understand the basic principles behind building a news bulletin, you can start thinking about how the stories and components such as headlines and actuality can fit. Bulletins are the broadcasting equivalent of a page on a newspaper, except that in radio and television you are more limited in where you place the different parts because, as we know, news bulletins are linear, therefore all the elements must be placed along the line of time so they are used most effectively.

Starting the bulletin

The start is the most important part of any radio bulletin. It determines whether or not your listeners will stay tuned. Just as the intro is the most important part of a news story, the lead item is the most important one in the bulletin. If your listeners find this boring, they will assume that there is nothing better to come and go out to dig the garden.

If you are faced with a choice between two stories of equal strength for your bulletin lead, choose the story which is more dramatic. If your obvious lead story is rather dull, you should write it in such a way as to add life. Keep the sentences short, the ideas clear and simple. Although you should try to write every story well, you should give special attention to your lead story. This is the one by which listeners will judge the bulletin.

Headlines
Once you have decided on the order of stories, you should write some headlines for the bulletin. It is usual to start a long bulletin by headlining the major stories. This may not be necessary for a short, three-minute bulletin, but for longer bulletins your listeners will want to know what kind of stories they can expect.

Your listeners will use the headlines to judge whether or not the bulletin is worth listening to, so write your headlines to promote the stories in the most powerful way possible.

It is good practice to headline the first two or three most important stories, and also one or two dramatic stories which come later in the bulletin. Many stations also like to headline the final story, on the assumption that, if they make the headline attractive enough, listeners will stay tuned to the entire bulletin until they hear that story.

You should write headlines for dramatic stories in such a way that you hint at the drama without giving away all the details. Remember that if you tell everything in the headlines, listeners have no need to hear the rest of the bulletin.

In English bulletins, headlines do not have to be grammatically complete. They can be more like newspaper headlines, stripped down to the main words. The following are examples of possible headlines:

"More trouble for the Asean alliance."

"Twelve die in a mine blast."

"Why Russia is angry with Israel."

When writing headlines about announcements or humorous stories, it is best to be mysterious, to keep the real information secret until the listeners hear the story itself. Such headlines are sometimes called teasers, because the tease the listeners' interest.

For example, if you have a story about rising petrol prices, you might write the headline "Motorists face another shock at the petrol pumps". Never write the headline "Petrol is to rise by 10 cents a litre" - that gives the whole story away, and your listener can now tune to another station's bulletin or go and dig the garden again.

Closing stories

Sometimes called tail-enders, closing stories are almost as important as lead stories. They are the last stories your listeners will hear and remember from the bulletin. You need to choose them carefully. However, because many listeners do not maintain their attention throughout the whole bulletin, you should not keep your best stories to the end.

Light or funny stories make the best tail-enders. They add relief and a change of pace to heavy bulletins. They should be written in a more informal way than other stories, possibly with a play on words which your listeners will appreciate.

It is usual in English radio bulletins to signal the light tail-ender with the words "And finally...", as in the following example:

And finally, police in Apia are looking for a thief who broke into a house last night ... and left his trousers behind.

Be careful, though. Humorous stories may not be appropriate if the rest of the bulletin is dominated by a major tragedy.
Closing headlines

With longer bulletins, you can use closing headlines to remind your listeners of stories they may (or may not) have heard 10 minutes earlier.

Again they should be the major stories of the bulletin, excluding the tail-ender, which they should have just heard anyway.

Unlike opening headlines, which should attract your listeners to listen to the bulletin, closing headlines are simply there as a service, especially to listeners who may have tuned in late.

Each closing headline should be a summary of the main point of the story, written in one sentence. Any longer and they become a repeat of the story itself. Do not simply repeat the opening headline or intro of each story as a closing headline. This is laziness which does not serve your listeners. Never repeat teasers as closing headlines: give the details.

Closing headlines are usually introduced with a phrase like: "Now to summarise the main stories, ..."

Actuality

Short grabs of actuality are a useful part of news bulletins, for a number of reasons:

They can often tell the story more effectively than a script. If your story is about a violent protest outside an embassy, a 10-second grab of demonstrators chanting and shouting will convey the atmosphere better than any words.

They can add variety to the pace of the bulletin, breaking up a long section of reading by one voice. On the practical side, they allow the newsreader to take a 30 or 40 second rest.

They are often a chance to let people within your community speak on the radio. People like to hear their own voice on radio occasionally, or the voices of people they know.

Using a grab of someone speaking can convince listeners that the person really did say a certain thing. They might not believe your report that the Government is resigning. When they hear the Prime Minister announcing it, they have to believe.

Actuality grabs should be kept short (between 20 and 40 seconds), clear and well-edited. A minute-long grab of a dull voice will slow the pace of your bulletin and may force listeners to switch off.

Grabs must be introduced, stating clearly who will be speaking. You only need to identify a person after paying the actuality (called back-announcing) if the grab is long and the voice is not familiar.

Grabs in languages other than your own should be overdubbed with a translation. This means that you fade down (reduce) the sound of the original speaker until it can only just be heard, then play the voice of the translator over it.

You can occasionally use grabs in languages other than your own without overdubbing, but only if you know that your listeners will be able to understand them. A short grab in simple language may be usable without an overdub, especially when it is used to show the emotion behind a speech, rather than the content.

It is occasionally possible to open the bulletin with dramatic piece of actuality, then explain it with a back-announcement. Such a grab must be dramatic, short and make sense to your listeners. For example, a radio journalist used a 10-second grab of guns firing and people screaming during the
assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, then back-announced: "The guns which destroyed the hopes of peace in the Middle East as President Anwar Sadat of Egypt was assassinated."

Only use such opening grabs on special occasions, otherwise they lose their effect. Also, it is not good to play the grab before the opening theme, as it will confuse your listeners.

Music

Never use music as background to a news bulletin. It is distracting and ruins any variations in pace within the bulletin.

A special theme should be used to announce the bulletin and may occasionally be used within the bulletin, perhaps to separate different segments. We call such short music inserts stabs or stings.

Your opening theme should be short and dramatic. It should either end before the presenter starts reading or should be faded out under their opening words. Many record companies now produce selections of electronic or instrumental themes especially for use as stabs.

Any stabs within the bulletin should echo the opening theme as a link throughout the bulletin. However, too many stabs will annoy the listener and reduce the amount of time available for real news.

It is possible to use a closing theme at the end of the bulletin, although this should be different from the opening theme (you do not want to fool your listeners into thinking that this is the start of the bulletin). The best compromise is to use the opening bars of a theme at the start of the bulletin and use the closing bars at the end.

Timing your bulletin

There is never enough time on radio for all the stories a journalist would like to include, so the timing of your bulletin is very important. By careful timing you will be able to include all your important stories, giving adequate details of each.

The exact time of each item depends upon:

- How long the whole bulletin is;
- How many items you need to include;
- How many grabs of actuality you want to use.

You have to balance these three considerations. If your bulletin is 15 minutes long you can use up to 20 stories, several of them with grabs, and still treat each story properly. If the bulletin is only five minutes long you might not manage more than seven or eight items and have time for only one or two short pieces of actuality.

Because some important stories can be told briefly and some less important stories need lots of explanation, you cannot set a fixed time for each story. However, if you aim to tell each story in about 30 to 45 seconds, you will be able to cover the news properly and in some detail.

If you have a number of less important stories which you want to mention, run them as briefs at the end of the bulletin. Briefs are short stories, no longer than one or two sentences each. They are not designed to tell the whole news, simply to let people know that something has happened.

The inclusion of briefs also helps to increase the pace of the bulletin if the rest of the stories are long and heavy.
If you are a newsreader too, you must always read your bulletin through fully before going to air. Use this opportunity to time each item, writing the time in the bottom right-hand corner. Eventually you will be able to look at a piece of copy and estimate within a second how long it will take to read. Initially, timing each item with a watch will help you to develop the skill. Some modern newsroom computer systems can automatically calculate the duration of a story based on the number of words and the newsreader’s reading rate.

Below, in the section Reading rate, we give some practical advice on how to calculate the length of your bulletin and its components.

Always take more copy than you need into the studio, just in case you have misjudged your timing or you have problems with a piece of audio which does not play. The extra copy may be a story which you would not normally consider important enough for the bulletin, but which will provide a useful reserve in emergencies.

Keep glancing at the studio clock as you read the bulletin so that you can make adjustments, adding or taking away stories. And always be ready to use that extra story in an emergency.

In some cases, when your bulletin comes before a current affairs segment, you will not need to run full details of some stories in the news. You can say something like: "We will have full details of this story in our current affairs program after this bulletin."

**Special bulletins**

We have been speaking so far mainly about regular news bulletins. There are, however, special bulletins which need considering.

**News flashes**

A news flash is when the newsreader breaks into a program on-air to read an important, urgent news story, such as a major disaster or the death of a national leader. The news flash should only be used on extremely important stories.

Urgent news which arrives in the studio as the bulletin is going to air should be read at the next most suitable break in the bulletin, although it usually makes sense to use it at the end of the bulletin, just before any closing headlines.

The newsreader should have the story as soon as possible, so that they can decide where in the bulletin to use it. If you intended ending the bulletin with a light story and the flash comes through of a major air crash, you must drop the light story.

It is possible to interrupt a non-news program for a news flash, although you must warn people in the studio that you are coming with the flash. The best method of introducing a flash is for the program presenter to introduce the newsreader with words like: "Now we interrupt the program to cross over to the newsdesk for some urgent news."

The newsreader should then read the story in their usual tone, speaking clearly and repeating details. If you only have one sentence, you can read it twice to get the message across clearly. You should end with words like: "Those are all the details available at the moment. We will give full details in our next bulletin, at six o’clock."

**Weekend bulletins**

You may need to treat weekend news bulletins in a slightly different way from weekday bulletins, because there are usually fewer stories available.

You will need to re-assess newsworthiness at weekends, perhaps running stories which you would
not use at other times. Your listeners will understand this. In fact, they may even welcome a change from a diet of death, disaster and politics.

You may want to make your weekend bulletins shorter and perhaps include a segment on sports news. You may want to save lighter stories during the week to run at the weekend, as long as you still cover the major events as well.

**Practical techniques**

There are many practical techniques which will make the job of preparing news bulletins easier and more professional. If you use these techniques, they will help you to overcome many of the problems which inexperienced journalists can encounter.

**Ranking stories**

One of the major problems in bulletin preparation is ranking the stories in correct order. Just follow some simple steps.

First read through all the stories available. Then go through them again, making three lists (or selecting the stories on to three piles). These categories should be:

1. Important stories which you must use;
2. Stories which you can use, but which are not so important;
3. Stories which you cannot use, for any reason.

First look at the stories in category one. Calculate roughly how much news these will give you (if each story will be approximately 40 seconds long and you have four of them, they will take about 2 minutes 40 seconds to read).

Now choose enough stories from category two to more than fill the remaining time. Together with your essential category one stories, decide the order in which you want to use them, taking into account their importance, length and pace.

You can combine stories on similar topics, either running them as one story or as two stories linked with words such as "Meanwhile" or "Still on the subject of ...". A word of caution. Do not combine too many stories, because they will become a shapeless mass and you will lose the impact of separate intros.

**Reading rate**

It is very useful to know your reading rate or the reading rate of the newsreader who will read the bulletin. Once you know how long it will take you (or the newsreader) to read one line of type, you can time your bulletin by counting lines, rather than by timing yourself each time you practice.

Reading rates are calculated in **words per second** (wps) and usually range from 2 wps for slower readers in some languages to 3.5 wps for quite rapid readers in other languages.

Ask a colleague to help you calculate your reading rate. Get them to time 60 seconds while you read a short piece of news script. Mark where you stop after 60 seconds. Add up how many words you read in 60 seconds and write this number down. Repeat this process ten more times with different scripts. To calculate the average number of words you read in 60 seconds, add up all the numbers from the ten scripts and divide the total by ten. Divide this figure by 60 to get your reading rate in words per second.

For example, you might find that over 10 scripts, you read 125, 126, 119, 123, 118, 120, 122, 126, 118 and 117 words in 60 seconds. Add these up; they total 1214 words. Divide this by 10 to get the average number of words per script (121). Now divide this average by 60 to get the
number of words per second. The answer is roughly 2 words per second - your average reading rate.

Once you know your average reading rate, you can estimate how long it will take to read each story. Of course, you will not want to count all the words in all your stories; this would take too long. It is better to count just the number of lines.

First, count how many words there are in 50 lines of your standard news scripts, then divide the total by 50. This will give you the average number of words per line. For example, if there are 600 words in 50 lines of script, the average is 12 words per line.

Now you can calculate how long it takes you to read a line of script. For example, if your reading rate is 2 words per second and your script contains an average of 12 words per line, you can read one line in 6 seconds (12 divided by 2). By counting the total number of lines in each story, you can calculate quite accurately how long they will take to read. For example, a story with 8 lines of type will take 48 seconds to read (8 times 6). Mark the time on the bottom right-hand corner of each story.

One final step is to add up the times for all your stories. This will tell you the total time it will take to read them all. When you are adding up total reading time for the bulletin, add an extra two seconds for the pause between each story.

(One tip on counting lines: If the final line in the paragraph ends less than half way across the page, ignore it. Count only those lines which end more than half way across the page. Over a number of paragraphs, this will average out accurately.)

Of course, you may need a calculator to work out all the sums, but it is worth the effort. Once you learn how to calculate the length of your bulletins, you will be able to time them accurately. After many years, you may become so experienced that you can judge the length of a bulletin just by looking at it.

The script

Most newsrooms today use computers to produce news stories and features which newsreaders can either print out or read directly from a screen in the studio.

If your newsroom uses printed scripts they must be typed neatly, with any last-minute changes clearly crossed out. If you make more than a couple of crossings-out, re-print that script.

Start a new paragraph for each sentence and type double-spaced. Type only one story per sheet, as this will make it easier to find stories if you want to drop or insert them during the bulletin. Use good quality paper which will not rustle as you move it.

Never turn a phrase from one line to the next and certainly never hyphenate words from one line to the next.

Never staple the pages of your bulletin together. You must be able to pull the sheets aside noiselessly as you read them. Stack the stories neatly on one side after you have read them; do not throw them on the floor.

Even if you read "off the screen", much of the above advice still holds though the challenge now is how to manage the scrolling of the script and the re-arrangement of stories while you read. As mentioned earlier, television newsreaders usually read from an autocue operated by another member of the production staff. Radio newsreaders seldom have such help so have to present their bulletins single-handed.

Whether you work in radio and television, if your news stories and bulletins are well-prepared in an
orderly manner, you will make your work easier and serve your audience more effectively.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Let us look back at some simple rules discussed over the past two chapters:

- **KISS** - keep it short and simple
- Do not use quotes on radio or in television scripts
- Avoid unfamiliar words
- Repeat important words
- Keep punctuation simple
- Simplify numbers
- Avoid abbreviations
- Show how to pronounce difficult words

When constructing bulletins consider:

- balance
- pace

Remember radio and television news is presented in a linear way over time.

Consider how you will use different elements and how they go together in sequence.

Time your bulletin precisely but always have extra material in reserve.
What are features?

A feature is an opportunity to take more than a superficial look at something. It is an opportunity to explore the background to an issue, or the character of the person behind a news event.

It is an opportunity to offer the reader a better understanding of the news which you are reporting elsewhere in the newspaper.

A newspaper which had no features at all would seem shallow, because there is not enough space within most news stories to dig very deeply into issues. A newspaper which had only features and no news stories would seem narrow, because it would not be able to cover all the stories it should. In fact, magazines do often limit themselves to one specialist subject in this way.

A good newspaper balances its news and features, so that there is always space to give in-depth coverage of one or two news events each day, while covering adequately all the news which the readers want.

In some ways, it is easier to say what a feature isn't than to say what it is.

It is not an opportunity for a journalist who secretly wants to be a great novelist to indulge himself or herself. If you want to write artistic prose, do it in your own time; your first duty while writing for a newspaper or magazine is to inform the readers, and after that to entertain or amuse them. Of course, you should write well if you can, and there is more scope in a feature than in a hard news story for your writing style to show through. The most important thing, however, is the content of the feature; if you allow the literary style to get in the way of the content, you will have failed.

It is not a way of disposing of subjects which are long and boring, but which you feel obliged to publish. Every feature should be assessed on its merits in exactly the same way as every news story - is it newsworthy? In fact, since it will take up many times more space than a news story, it needs to be that much more interesting to deserve the space.

It is not a very long news story. As we shall see later, the structure of a feature is quite different from a news story. You might set out to write a 400-word news story, find that you have much more material, and write 1,000 words. You have not written a feature. You have written a 1,000-word news story (and have probably wasted your time and your employer's money).

Structure of a feature

As we saw in Chapter 3: The shape of the news story, a simple news story is structured as an inverted pyramid. This means that the most important information is presented first, followed by the rest of the information in diminishing order of importance. A news story written in this way can be cut from the back without fundamentally damaging it.

A feature is not written in this way at all. A feature has a beginning, a middle and an end. If a feature is cut from the back, it will leave the story hanging in the air, and leave the reader
wondering where the rest of it has gone.

A feature is structured more like the advanced pyramid of pyramids story structure which we looked at in the Introduction to advanced techniques. [Link] Like that complex news story, the subject matter of the feature is divided up into separate pieces, each of which is told completely before moving on to the next.

There is a difference between a feature and a pyramid of pyramids news story, though. There is no reason why the pieces in a feature should each be structured as a mini-inverted pyramid; and there is no reason why the most newsworthy piece should be told first, and the least newsworthy last.

Sometimes in a feature you will wish to deal with one piece of the story first, to make sure that the reader understands all the issues involved, before moving on to a more important part of the story. This is perfectly acceptable.

The bead necklace

A feature is rather like a necklace, and each piece of the story is like a cluster of beads. Just as a necklace would not look attractive if the biggest bead was put on first, followed by the next biggest, down to the smallest, so the parts of a feature do not seem right when they are written as mini-inverted pyramids.

Use each paragraph like a bead. Thread on a paragraph or two of descriptive writing, followed by a paragraph of argument. Then thread on a few paragraphs of quotes - some from one side of the debate, some from the other side - with one bead in between them: a paragraph introducing the second speaker. This cluster of beads will have told one part of the story.

You could give exactly the same pile of beads to ten different people, and they would make ten different necklaces. So it is with features. There is no absolute right way or wrong way of writing any feature, just different ways. Nevertheless, just as one person's necklace will look more attractive than another person's, and just as people become better at making attractive necklaces as they practise, so some features are better than others, and you will get better with practice.

Develop a sense of balance, between the different kinds of paragraph - description, argument, quote, comment. And try to read your own features as if you were a reader who had never seen them before. Develop an understanding of what makes your features easier to read, and what makes them harder to read.

Write to length

It is obviously even more important with features than with news stories to write to length. If the editor asks you for a 300-word news story and you write 350 words, you will be a nuisance, but your last 50 words can simply be deleted (and if you have written the story properly, the story will still be intact).

If, however, the editor asks for an 800-word feature and you write 950 words, you will create real headaches for the sub-editor, for the reader and for yourself. Newspaper pages are not made of elastic; a space which is big enough for 800 words cannot stretch to take 950.

Cutting a well-written feature is difficult for a sub-editor; you should do it before you hand it in. This has two advantages. First, it saves production time; and second, it increases the chances of the cuts being done well, since they are being done by the writer, who understands the merits of each part of the feature.
Subjects for features

One British newspaper had for many years the slogan "All human life is there". Nothing less than all human life is the subject matter for features.

A frequent complaint about the news media is that they tell only bad news. It is easy to see why.

Most things which happen suddenly, and are therefore news, are unwelcome. For example, deaths, accidents, crimes and so on all happen suddenly, and they are all unwelcome. Very few people can think of anything which could happen to them suddenly that they would welcome, other than winning money in a lottery.

Most things which people will welcome happen only slowly and gradually, and are therefore not news in the strictest sense. For example, the terracing of a village's hillside farmland, to prevent soil erosion, will take many years, and there is never a precise moment at which the work can be said to be done. Yet this is surely good news.

Features offer an opportunity for a newspaper to redress this balance. They are a chance to step back and view life in perspective, to relate current events to a wider social and historical perspective. They are an opportunity to tell the good news as well as the bad.

"All human life" means just that, the whole of your readers' lives - physical, mental and spiritual. You must reflect their working lives, their leisure activities, their family lives, their spiritual lives.

Above all, you must choose subjects which will interest your readers. No feature can hope to interest everybody, but you must aim to appeal to as wide an audience as possible in general features. There is scope to write for minority interests as well, but we shall come to that later when we consider columns.

Remember that it is not just news and leisure which are suitable for features. The business pages and the sports pages, too, can carry both news and features on their own subjects.

In fact, all sports editors should always have five or six good sports features up their sleeve, for that awful day when all the sport is rained off and they have nothing live to report.

Let us look, then, at the different kinds of features which we commonly find. They fall into two main categories - dated features and undated features.

Dated features will date and become unusable, just like news stories. Undated features can be written in advance and kept until there is space to publish them.

Dated features

There are many categories of dated features, but the most common are the following:

News features

The first and most important type of dated feature is the news feature, which offers extra understanding of the news of the day. It can take many forms:

1. Backgrounders
   These explain the historical or social setting in which events are taking place. They help the reader to understand why current events are provoking the reactions which they do. They are especially helpful in understanding news in societies and cultures with which readers are unfamiliar.
2. Situation reports
These act like a picture of the present state of affairs in a place which has been in the news in the past, but is not now producing news stories. What is the political situation in Uganda, or the security situation in Sri Lanka, or the economic situation in Ho Chi Minh City?

3. Personality profiles
News is about people, because people make the news. If something important is happening, it helps readers to understand it if they are told more about the person behind the news.

4. Revelations
A newspaper, radio or television station’s own investigations may reveal something which the public ought to know. There are often injustices in any society - social, economic or political - which journalists can bring to light. Features about inadequate housing conditions for poor people in towns, child abuse or favouritism in political appointments can open a society’s eyes to its own problems.

One of the greatest scandals of US politics was revealed in a series of newspaper features - the Watergate scandal, which eventually led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Although the amount of space which will be needed to publish such revelations makes them features for an inside page, they will normally also be exclusive news. For this reason, you should also write a news story for publication on page one, cross-referred to the feature inside.

5. Analysis and predictions
An informed and skilled person may be able to write features predicting future events, on the basis of analysing present information. Care must be taken with these, however, as uninformed predictions make newspapers look very stupid. It is often a good idea to invite an academic or experienced person to write a feature of this kind, rather than to write it yourself.

6. Debate of issues
A controversial issue may be debated through the feature pages of a newspaper, so that your readers may be given the arguments for both sides and be able to make up their own minds. This is often best done by two people with opposing views each writing an argument to support their case. These may be published either on consecutive days or together on the same day.

Good news features

The building of a family business over a period of 20 years is not hard news, because there is no one moment at which it can be said to have happened. It is good news, though, and it is important to report it in order to give a balanced view of society, with all its achievements and failures.

Anniversary features

These are dated features, in that they must be published at a particular time, but they are like undated features in that they can be written ahead of time and stored.

They are features which recall an event from the past, and look again at the event or its implications, or a little-known aspect of it. The feature will be published on or near an anniversary of the event itself.

Not every anniversary of an event is suitable for publishing such a feature. Good anniversaries are the first, fifth, tenth, 20th, 25th, 50th, 75th, 100th and any other centenary (200th, 300th etc).

Columns

There are two types of columns, and they have one thing in common - they are written by one named person and all the views expressed in that column are his or her views. It is not necessary for a column to be impartial and objective; part of its function may well be to provoke people by
offering a strong or even biased point of view.

It must certainly have something definite to say. People often enjoy reading a point of view with which they strongly disagree as much as one with which they agree. They will certainly enjoy either of these more than a column which offers no point of view at all.

Columns offer a newspaper an excellent opportunity to introduce two things which readers enjoy, but which are not generally appropriate elsewhere - calculated bigotry, and humour.

1. News opinion column
This is especially true of the first type of column - the news opinion column. In this a columnist writes about the news and offers an opinion of the merits of what is being done and the way it is being done. No junior reporter should expect to be allowed to write a column such as this. Not only is there the danger of being sued for defamation, but also it will be very difficult for a young person of limited experience to write a column of sufficient depth.

2. Minority interest column
In this second type of column, regular space can be devoted each day, or each week, to a particular subject such as cookery, or golf, or pets, or bush-walking, or any activity about which there is something to say and interested people to buy the paper and read it.

Reviews and previews

Your readers will want to decide whether to pay their hard-earned money to go and see a new play or film, or to hear a concert, to go to an art exhibition or to eat at a new restaurant. You can help them to decide by publishing previews or reviews.

Both of these are your description and opinion of the film or play or concert or exhibition; a preview is published before it is open to the public (as a result of a special press preview) and a review is published as soon as possible after the first public performance.

We shall deal in detail with reviews and previews in Chapter 52.

Diary column

The diary column of a newspaper should not be allowed to become a dustbin for all the material which could not get into the news columns. Each item should be a genuinely interesting, amusing or illuminating piece of news or gossip about the world in which we live.

Be warned, though: people who live in glass houses should not throw stones. Newspapers are full of typographical and spelling errors, so it is unwise ever to make fun of somebody else’s typographical or spelling error, however amusing the result. Also, if you use your diary column to criticise people who throw rubbish out of car windows, you had better make sure that nobody ever sees you doing the same thing. Practise what you preach.

Obituaries

Like anniversary features, these can be written in advance but must be used at a particular time - when the subject of the obituary dies. Of course, you cannot tell in advance when you are going to need an obituary (usually referred to as an obit).

An obit is an account of the life and achievements of an eminent person who has just died. A disorganised newspaper is always taken by surprise by the death of such a person, and scrambles an obituary together after hearing of the event. It publishes the obit a couple of days later.

Nobody should be taken by surprise by death - it is the only thing in life which is certain. The organised newspaper has obituaries ready written on all the eminent people who matter to its
readers. From time to time, when a person is in the news, his or her obit can be taken out of the filing cabinet and updated. When an eminent person does die, their obit will only need to be brought up-to-date and it can be published immediately.

We shall deal more fully with obituaries in Chapter 51.

**Undated features**

These may be about any subject under the sun (or, indeed, about the sun itself), but it will always help you to decide what will interest your readers if you ask yourself what your readers do with their time.

One good indication of this is what they spend their money on: if they are keen enough to spend money on it, they will probably also want to read about it. This will have a commercial spin-off, if yours is a commercial newspaper, in that you will be able to sell advertising space connected to those activities. Don't forget, though, that some activities may be popular but not need any money spending on them, such as bush walking. And don't neglect generally popular features such as nostalgia or light humour.

**Educational features**

The world is changing quickly, and the news media can help people to keep pace with the change. Educational features can help people, especially in developing countries, to understand the changes around them, and to adapt.

You could run features on health and hygiene, giving up-to-date practical advice on how to improve the prevention of disease in the village and how to treat simple illnesses.

You could run features on better methods of farming, to give small-scale village farmers higher standards of living, and thereby to build up the country.

Newspapers can run special features for people who have just learned to read, written by a language expert in a way which these people can understand. In this way the new media can play a role in building up their nation.

**Food and drink**

Everybody must eat and drink. As soon as people can afford it, they start to enjoy food and drink as luxuries rather than just to stay alive. Popular features are recipes, which can be very useful for introducing readers to ways of cooking from other cultures. You may also wish to publish reviews of restaurants, and even a wine column.

**Travel**

As soon as people can afford it, they like to take holidays. When they cannot afford it, they like to dream about holidays. A lot of money is spent every year on travel, both holiday and business travel. You will offer your readers a service if you write intelligently and informatively about how to spend their money wisely and enjoy travel to the full.

**Fashion**

Fashions change in all sorts of things, but especially in clothes, and many people consider it important that they are up-to-date in the clothes they wear. An informed regular report on fashion, with good photographs to show readers what is in fashion, will always be popular - especially with women readers.
Entertainment

Rock music stars, movie stars, sportsmen and women, millionaires and royalty ... readers often have a great appetite for knowing all about these people’s lives.

Leisure

There are a host of leisure activities which can be written about, either as regular columns or as single features.

It is often a good idea if you, the writer, go and try parachuting, or diving, or horse riding, or mountaineering, and then write about it. It makes it more real for the reader and it makes life more interesting for you. A local club will often allow you to use its facilities for free in return for the publicity which it will get, in the hope that your feature will attract new members.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Newspapers need to provide a good balance of news and features

Features provide an opportunity to report in depth

Features provide an opportunity to report good news

A feature is structured like a bead necklace, and not like an inverted pyramid

Features can and should be about the whole of human life
Chapter 51: Obituaries

In this chapter we shall consider how journalists note the death of somebody in society, reporting both the death itself and the main points of the person’s life. We shall see how to deal with the deaths of leading members of society, and people of less high status.

What are obituaries?

As we are reminded throughout The News Manual, news is about people and it is people who make much of the news. However, we report the things which they do day by day and week by week, a little bit at a time. It is sometimes good to gather together all the things done by a person, and write a round-up of their contribution to society. But when can we write such a review of a person’s lifetime?

We can choose an occasion such as their retirement, or their 70th or 80th birthday. However, people who contribute in a big way to society often do not really retire at all, and many remain active beyond the age of 70 or 80. For this reason, the time to sum up somebody’s lifetime’s work is usually when they die. Such a piece of writing is called an obituary, or usually by its abbreviated title - an obit.

It serves the same function as a speech delivered at a person’s funeral - it marks the proper respect due to the person who has died and gives them a proper send-off.

It would be unthinkable to bury the dead body of someone who has been a member of our family, without saying some words about them.

If a newspaper, radio or television station wants to be part of a community, it must mark the deaths of notable figures in that community. It must deliver those funeral speeches, as obits.

Writing an obituary

An obituary is essentially a news story, and it must be planned as a news story. That means that the key points of the story must be identified and the intro must include the most newsworthy of the key points in the story. However, as we shall see, we are reporting two things: the news of a person’s death and the story of their life. This means that we need an intro which identifies the person by the main key point of their life and tells the reader that they have died, followed by a paragraph which acts as an intro to the story of their life. Sometimes, for very important people, these two things are split into two separate stories. We look at all this in detail below.

There are certain pieces of information which must be included in any obituary. They are:

- The person’s name, or names if they had more than one. For example, when the American film star Marilyn Monroe died, her obituary had to include both her professional name, which everybody would know, and her real name, Norma Jean Baker.
- The person’s age, if that is important in your society. This may have to be approximate in the case of old people born in rural areas where no records were kept.
- An identification of the person. This may be the job which they did, such as "a former Secretary of the Ministry of Education", or a description of their role in more general terms, such as "a highly respected figure in all the Poreporena villages".
- Where the person came from. Readers are always interested to know the part of the country which a person came from.
- The time and place of death.
- The cause of death, if this is appropriate. In some societies, certain diseases are not talked about. In such cases, you will need to find a way of expressing it - “he died after a long illness” or "he died suddenly". If you know the cause of death, however, and there is no
social taboo about saying so, it is better to be precise - "he died of lung cancer" or "he died of a heart attack".

- Funeral arrangements. People who are sufficiently well known to have an obituary used by the news media will have many people wishing to attend their funeral. Give details of where the funeral will be held, on which day and starting at what time. Indicate, too, if the family have made any special requests. They may say that anybody is welcome to the church service but that the burial is for family only; or they may ask that nobody should spend money on flowers, but donate money instead to the dead person's favourite charity.

- Details of survivors. The death of a person is felt most acutely by those nearest to him or her - the family the person lived with. Tell the readers that "she is survived by a widower, six children and 15 grandchildren", or "he is survived by a widow and three young children, who will be cared for by his brother Isaac". How this is worded will vary from one society to another, depending on the pattern of family relationships. You must decide what is suitable for your society, depending on who is most directly affected, emotionally and materially, by the person's death.

That is the information which must be included in the obituary. However, what makes an obituary interesting is the detail of the person's life and achievements.

**Two obit formulas**

Every life is unique. However, there are two formulas which can be used to write a satisfactory obituary on anybody.

Which of the two formulas you use will depend upon the importance of the person who has died.

If the person is so well known that their death is worth a news story on page one, then the news of the death and the appreciation of their life will need to be written separately. That is Formula A.

If the person is not that well known, but has made a sufficient contribution to society to deserve an obit, then the news of the death and the appreciation of their life should be written together. That is Formula B.

Let us look first at the outline of each formula, and then see an example of each one.

**Formula A**

On page one:

1. Name, identity, has died at the age of age.
2. Cause of death, time of death, place of death and where they came from.
3. Comments and reaction of other public figures.
4. Funeral arrangements.
5. Survivors.
6. Cross-reference to the obit on the inside page.

On an inside page:

1. Most newsworthy part of achievements.
2. The rest of their life and achievements, in chronological order.

**Formula B**

1. Name, identity, died time of death of cause of death at place of death.
2. Where they came from and age.
3. Most newsworthy part of achievements.
4. The rest of their life and achievements, in chronological order.
Funeral arrangements.
6. Survivors.

Example of Formula A

Let us take as our example the death of Sir Iambakey Okuk, who was a leading politician from the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. When he died, in 1986, we might have carried the following report on page one:

Okuk dies

Sir Iambakey Okuk, the political voice of the Highlands, has died at the age of 51.

Sir Iambakey died at his home in Boroko late yesterday afternoon from cancer of the liver. He came from Simbu Province.

Tributes poured in yesterday from his former political allies and rivals.

"He was a great man," said Mr Stephen Tago, deputy leader of Sir Iambakey's National Party. "We shall not see his like again."

"Even when people disagreed with him, they had to respect him," said Mr Michael Somare, Leader of the Opposition. "He was a true leader and always worked for the development of his people."

The Prime Minister said that Sir Iambakey had done a great job for the Highlands.

"He played a leading role in bringing the region out of isolation and into the modern State of PNG," said Mr Paias Wingti. Mr Wingti is the first Highlander to become Prime Minister of PNG.

The funeral service will be held at Koki Lutheran Church on Thursday at 2.30 pm. Sir Iambakey's body is then expected to be flown back to his village for burial.

Sir Iambakey leaves a widow, Lady Karina Okuk, and three sons.

From mechanic to kingmaker - Page 6.

On Page 6, the reader can now find the appreciation part of the obituary, telling the story of Sir Iambakey's life and achievements. It might read as follows:

From mechanic to kingmaker

Sir Iambakey Okuk, who died yesterday, once boasted that he was a kingmaker.

Certainly his support was crucial for every man who has become Prime Minister - Michael Somare at Independence, Sir Julius Chan in 1980 and Paias Wingti last year.

The tragedy for Sir Iambakey, though, was that he never wanted to be kingmaker. He wanted to be king.

He desperately wanted to be Prime Minister - and in particular to be the first Prime Minister from the Highlands - and he had to watch as the much younger Paias Wingti took that honour.

Nevertheless, he will be remembered as the voice of the Highlands during the run-up to Independence, the voice which caused the opinions of the Highlands to be taken seriously.

Sir Iambakey was born in 1935 in Simbu Province, just at the time when first contact was being
made between the Highlanders and the outside world.

He became a motor mechanic, but was identified as a suitable candidate for further education. He was sent to Sogeri National High School, where he was a classmate of Michael Somare.

In 1972 he was elected to the National Assembly, representing Kundiawa. He joined the Somare coalition, and brought several Highlands members with him. This convinced the Australian administration that the coalition was representative, and paved the way for self-government in 1973 and Independence in 1975.

In 1977 he became leader of the opposition. He tried several votes of no confidence in 1978 and 1979, but without success. In 1980 Sir Julius Chan left the government and Sir Iambakey tried again, this time supporting Chan. They won, and Sir Iambakey's reward was to be made Deputy Prime Minister.

He lost the election in 1982, but won a by-election in Unggai Bena in 1983. He again became leader of the opposition and again tried a vote of no confidence, which was defeated 70-0.

In 1985 he was kingmaker again, supporting Paias Wingti in a successful vote of no confidence. He was made Minister of Agriculture.

He fought to the very end over who should control the Agriculture Bank - himself or the Minister of Finance. He lost that fight, as he also lost his last fight, against cancer.

It was in the nature of the man, though, to fight at all times, for power and for his people. He will be greatly missed.

Example of Formula B:

Let us take as an example of this category of obit a person whose name is John Vagi; his identity is that he used to be the principal of Port Moresby Administrative College; the cause of death was a stroke; the place of death was his home in Korobo sea; his home village was Bereina; and his age was 57. In this case, our obituary would start as follows:

Death of a pioneer

Mr John Vagi, former principal of Port Moresby Administrative College, died yesterday from a stroke at his Boroko home.

Mr Vagi, from Bereina in Central Province, was 57.

He was the first Papua New Guinean to be appointed as principal of a training college ... etc.

After giving the rest of the story of Mr Vagi’s life - giving the newsworthy parts in detail and skipping over the less interesting and less unusual bits - our obituary should end this way:

Mr Vagi is survived by a widow, Pauline; by three sons, Peter, Paul and Damian; by one daughter, Mrs Rose Kulau; and by five grandchildren.

The funeral service will be at 9am on Thursday at St Joseph's, Boroko. The burial will take place afterwards at Bereina.

While much of the above advice can also apply to radio and television obituaries, because of time constraints obituaries will normally be shorter and will probably not contain so much detail, such as the names of the surviving family or the time and place of the funeral service. A major exception to this is for national leaders or popular public figures when it is likely that many people will want to
attend their funeral, especially if it is a state funeral.

**Points to remember**

When writing obituaries, you need to remember to show what the dead person was like, to be honest and to avoid euphemisms.

**Show the personality**

A good obituary will make the reader feel as though they have met the person being written about. It should bring their personality to life even though their body is now dead. You will need the facts and figures of the person's career and achievements - job titles, dates and so on - but much more important is to describe the person's character and personality. There are two particularly good ways to do this:

**Quotes**

This can include the person's own quotes, which you will find in stories in your newspaper library; or other people's quotes. The woman who was Mr Vagi's secretary for 20 years may say: "He was a very hard man to work for. He was such a perfectionist." His daughter may say: "Everyone thought he was tough, but at home we knew how gentle he really was." Quotes like these enable us to see a full picture of him.

**Anecdotes**

Stories about people can tell you a lot about them. For example, if people tell you that a woman was warm and motherly, then ask them to tell you of an incident when she demonstrated this quality. It is better to write "Once she invited 16 lost children into her house and fed them, while people went out to find the teacher who had lost them" than simply to say "she was very motherly".

**Be honest**

Nobody is perfect, and it would be dishonest to write an obituary which ignores the mistakes a person has made, and overstates the things they have done well. If you do this once, then your praise becomes worthless. What good is it to be praised by a newspaper, radio or television station which praises everyone?

An obituary should be a balanced account of the good and bad things which a person did. For example, the obituary of the former President of the United States, Richard Nixon, will need to include the shame and scandal of the Watergate break-in and the cover-up which followed, but it will also need to include the brilliance of his foreign policy.

There is a story of a priest delivering a funeral address. He spoke of the dead man as if he was perfect, exaggerating his good points and making no reference to his bad points. Finally, the dead man's son threw himself weeping on the coffin. "Dad!" he cried, "I had no idea you were so great!"

The priest's description was not accurate. People who knew a man should recognise him in the obituary which you write.

**Avoid euphemisms**

A euphemism is a word or phrase which is used to describe something which we are embarrassed or ashamed to talk about directly. For example, Americans talk about "going to the bathroom"
when they mean "urinating".

Because death is not usually welcome, many euphemisms have grown up in the English language to describe it. Do not use them. Use plain simple English and you cannot cause offence.

Do not say that somebody has "passed away" or "passed on"; say that they have "died".

Do not talk about "the deceased" or "the departed one"; use the person's name, unless it is culturally unacceptable to do so.

Do not talk of an "interment"; say "burial".

**Organise a morgue**

The time to write an obituary is not when somebody has died; that is the time to publish or broadcast the obituary. The time to write an obituary is while the person is still alive.

You can be quite certain that your work will not be wasted. The obituary will be used one day. It is quite certain that anybody you write an obituary about will die one day.

Most newspapers, radio and television stations have obituaries prepared and filed away, in a reference library. These are also sometimes called *clippings libraries or cuttings libraries* or *tape libraries* in radio or television. Traditionally they were also called the *morgue* - a humorous name, since a morgue is where dead bodies are kept in a hospital.

For a newspaper, this can just be one or more filing cabinets, with the stories and pictures filed alphabetically, under the person's family name.

For radio and television, it may need to be scripts in filing cabinets, and tapes on shelves or in cupboards. In this case, each tape should be clearly labelled and numbered; the number of the tape written on the script; and the tapes should be stored in sequence. When the obit is needed, the script can first be taken from the filing cabinet, and then the relevant tape can be found to go with it.

There are four things to do if you want to organise a good morgue - identify the people you want to write obituaries about, gather the material, write the copy and update the obits regularly.

All these things can be done on quiet news days. There is never a day when there is nothing for journalists to do.

**Identify subjects**

Think about who you would like to publish or broadcast an obituary about, when they die. Some will be obvious, especially political and traditional leaders. But you should want to cover more of society than that.

Leading figures in education, commerce, agriculture, sport, the arts, the police and army, the church and any other area of life - even eminent journalists - will all be missed by their society when they die. These are the people you need to identify.

**Gather material**

Go through your own news cuttings library for information about the person. Talk to their family, friends and professional colleagues.

If it is culturally acceptable, talk to the subject of the obituary. Some people may be upset to think
that their obituary is being written; but others will be happy to help, by providing you with 
information about their life. If the person really is important or very interesting you might produce 
a feature article or broadcast interview with them while they are still alive then keep the best bits 
for their obit.

Remember to gather pictures, or sound recordings, to illustrate your obit, as well as gathering facts 
and figures.

Write the obit

Write the obit honestly, but sensitively. Imagine the dead person’s family, friends and professional 
colleagues - even their enemies - reading it. Do not lie in order to make them happy; but do not 
upset them by writing carelessly.

If the person is a major figure in your society, the obit will need to be long. If the person is a 
schoolteacher or police sergeant, it may only need to be a few paragraphs.

When you have written it, file it carefully in the morgue.

Update regularly

From time to time, take out each obit and read it through. If the person has done more things 
since the obit was written, you may need to add a couple of paragraphs.

When you have finished, write the date on which you have revised the obit, on the folder in which 
it is filed or at the top of the first page.

It will now be a quick and easy job to update the obit again when it is needed.

Radio and television

Obituaries such as we have described in this chapter are mostly for newspapers. Radio and 
television cannot do this job in quite the same way. They can carry the news story of a person’s 
death, but it can only contain the most basic of biographical detail - too much detail will quickly 
become impossible to listen to.

When a major figure dies, however, radio and television can broadcast a program devoted to the 
story of the person's life, together with interviews with people who knew them and worked with 
them. It can also include recordings of the person speaking, as illustration of the way they thought 
and acted.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Write obituaries while people are alive, so they are ready to use as soon as the people 
die

File them in a properly organised morgue

Include all necessary information about the person, their death, the funeral and 
survivors

Show the personality of the dead person

Be honest about them
Chapter 52: Reviewing

In this chapter we look at how to comment on artistic and other creative events, and why it is a useful thing to do.

Many newspapers and some radio and television stations carry reviews of artistic and cultural events which take place. The review will usually be a description of the event, together with a critical assessment of how well it was done.

Why the media publish reviews

Reviews are typically written of plays and other theatre performances, concerts and recitals, new recordings (records, cassettes and CDs), movies, radio and television programs, books, art exhibitions and special museum exhibitions. In some societies other forms of entertainment and venues such as restaurants might also be reviewed.

There are three reasons why such activities are reviewed:

Guidance for readers or listeners

Our readers or listeners have limited amounts of time and money. Before they decide whether or not to use some of their time and money going to a concert, they will want some information about it. Is it the sort of thing they are likely to enjoy? What kind of music is it - traditional, Western classical, popular Indian, rock and roll? Are the musicians good? How much does it cost to get in? How long does it go on for?

People often discuss such things before they make decisions, asking the opinion of friends who have already been. The reviewer can be the friend who has been, offering an opinion to help the readers or listeners decide. This is an important reason for reviewing.

Feedback to artists

People who write books, make movies, put on plays and concerts or paint pictures devote a great deal of time and energy to it. Usually they want to do it as well as they can. Usually they will want to please the public, and often they will want public applause.

It is very helpful to any artist - a creator or a performer - to have some feedback from the public on the merits of what they have done. Artists will read reviews of their work to see what the reviewers thought of it. Artists may not like negative reviews but if the reviewer is knowledgeable, his or her comments can help the artist to improve.

Historical record

Part of the job of the media (and especially newspapers) is to provide a historical record of what happens in society. If an exhibition of carving is mounted, it is important that there should be a historical record of the fact.

Part of this can be done with just a news story, ideally with a supporting photograph. This will record the fact that the exhibition took place. However, it would tell people in the future nothing about the exhibition itself, only that it took place. Reviews are written so that people in the future can know something about the nature and quality of the exhibition, as well as the fact that it happened. This provides a complete historical record.
**The reviewer**

It should already be clear that the reviewer must be a special person. It is not possible for every reporter to be a reviewer; and it is not possible for anybody to be a reviewer in all fields.

A reviewer needs to be knowledgeable in the field under review. If it is a dance to be reviewed, the reviewer must know about dance. It is not necessary for the reviewer to be a dancer or ex-dancer, though he or she may be; but the reviewer must be an experienced spectator, with a deep understanding of what dance is about, and what should be expected of the dancers.

It may well be that a media organisation does not have such a person on the staff. What then should it do? Usually, it will find an outside person who is qualified to write dance reviews, and ask that person always to do reviews for the organisation whenever there is a performance of dance. Some people will expect a small payment for doing this job; others may do it just for their love of dance, and because they want to see knowledgeable reviews in your newspaper or program.

**Importance of impartiality**

There is a danger, however, in using outside reviewers. Especially in small communities, the most knowledgeable people in any field are usually the ones who are putting on the performance. If a concert of Western choral music is being put on, by local amateurs, then it is quite likely that everybody who knows about and loves this kind of music will be in the choir.

It is vital that you never allow anybody who is involved in putting on a production to review it. The reason for this is obvious - nobody who is involved can achieve any of the three reasons given above for publishing a review. Since they are biased, they will be bound to say that the performance is good; this does not help your readers or listeners to decide whether or not to go, nor does it provide a record of the actual standard of the performance. Furthermore, it cannot give the performers themselves critical feedback.

Look for a person who is knowledgeable but not taking part. If there are two conductors who take in turns to put on choral concerts, you may get them to agree to review each other’s concerts.

If no suitable person is available to do a review, it is better that you do not try to publish a review at all. A short news report with a photograph is not nearly as good as a good review, but it is much better than an ignorant review.

What you can do, though, is to write a feature about the concert, or interview the conductor, the lead singers and the musicians. This will be helpful, whether or not you can do a review.

**Doing the review**

As with any assignment, you will do a better job if you do some preparation first. If you are going to review a play, for instance, find out something about the play and the playwright.

As with any round, you will need to keep yourself generally educated in the arts. Try to read as many relevant books and magazines as possible. See Chapter 26: Rounds for more details of this.

Always try to review something as soon as it is open to the public. This is important, since it allows your readers or listeners as much time as possible to go to the performance themselves, if they wish to, after they have read your review. Go to the first night of a play or concert; go to the first day of an exhibition.

For a movie, or a book, or a record, you can try to get a copy before it goes on sale to the public, and publish your review as soon as it is released. Book publishers, cinemas and recording companies will often make arrangements for this, if you tell them you want to do reviews. If you
are reviewing television programs, ask the TV company for an advanced tape of the program to watch before it appears on the screen or in the TV guide. This helps people plan their viewing.

Do not review live performances on the strength of rehearsals, though, even if it allows you to publish your review sooner. This will not do any of the jobs which a review is supposed to do. It will not provide a record of what the performance was like, will not be a fair guide to readers or listeners of whether or not to attend, and cannot give helpful feedback to the performers, since they can dismiss any adverse criticism on the grounds that it was only a rehearsal.

It is important that you get a good seat, from which you can see and hear everything clearly.

If you are reviewing a live performance at a theatre, concert hall or gallery, make sure too that you get a copy of the program, if there is one. This will give you the names of all the participants.

It is a good idea to check with somebody who knows whether all the names are spelled correctly. It would be a pity to repeat a typing error in your review.

If you are reviewing a radio or television program or recorded music, it is important that you listen on good quality equipment. Whether you are at a theatre or at home, you cannot review something if you have had to struggle to see and hear it.

Make notes as the performance goes along, or as you read the book or listen to the record, or as you walk around the exhibition, of whatever comes into your head as worthy of comment. However, do not write so many notes that you distract yourself from an impression of the performance as a whole. You need to learn to relax and to enjoy the performance, at the same time as making brief notes to remind you of details.

Finally, do not forget to keep an eye on audience reactions, as well as on the performance itself. If the crowd laugh a lot, or sit on the edges of their seats, or cry, or go to sleep, or jeer, this is an important matter of historical record, and rightfully belongs in your review. The first performance of the ballet The Rite of Spring ended early because the Paris audience booed and threw things at the dancers. We know this because the reviewers all included it in their reviews.

Do not forget to keep an eye on audience reactions: this is an important matter of historical record.
Writing the review

The most important thing to remember when writing a review is that it should always be honest. If you tell lies in order to avoid hurting people's feelings - for example, saying that an actor was very good when in fact he was very bad - you will lose credibility. Your readers or listeners will realise that they cannot believe your reviews, and your reviews will become useless - not providing an honest record, not offering guidance on the performance and not giving any useful feedback to the performers.

However, there is a difference between not telling lies and always telling the whole truth. It would be dishonest to say a bad performance was good, but it is not necessary to say that it was bad. If you do not want to offend or upset a performer who performed badly, you can choose not to mention them at all in the review.

This is an especially useful approach when reviewing amateur rather than professional productions. Furthermore, it is very important not to destroy the self-confidence of children by saying in your review that they are no good.

There are two kinds of criticism - constructive criticism and destructive criticism. The first kind always offers suggestions for how things could be done better - "Fred Imo's performance would have been better if he had spoken with more volume" - while the second kind merely pulls people down - "Fred Imo clearly represented the silent majority when he stepped on stage, since we could not hear a word he said".

Bearing all this in mind, let us consider how to write a review.

Plan on paper

Before starting to write your review, jot down on a piece of paper all the things you want to comment on.

If you have just seen a play, for instance, you may decide that the acting was generally very good, the play was excellent, the costumes were very good and the lighting quite good. However, despite all these good points, you may feel that the production was spoiled because the pace of the action was uneven, moving sometimes too fast and at other times too slowly.

If so, you would list these items, good and bad, deciding in what order you want to mention them:

- Play
- Acting
- Costumes
- Lighting
- Pace

Note that, in this example, we have chosen to give all the positive things first, saving the adverse criticism until last. If the performance had been a thoroughly bad one, we would not have chosen to do it this way; but if we feel that there was more good than bad in it, it is better to do it this way.

Intro

A review needs a bright and inviting intro quite as much as any other piece of journalistic writing. If you start a review with a dry and dull intro such as the following, you will not encourage people to read or listen further:
POOR:
Moresby Theatre Group last night put on the first night of the musical The King and I at the Waigani Arts Theatre.

That is not an acceptable intro, because it is not news. Everyone who is interested in theatre knew that the musical would be performed last night. If it had not taken place, that would have been news.

It would be better to bring the intro up-to-date by saying how the audience reacted:

BETTER:
The first night of The King and I at Waigani Arts Theatre was greeted with warm applause by a capacity audience last night.

What the readers really want, though, is information about what the production was like. They want to know more than the fact that the production took place, and more than the reaction of the audience. They want to know the reviewer’s expert opinion. They will be looking for an intro like this:

BEST:
The Siamese children marched across the stage and into the hearts of the audience at Waigani Arts Theatre last night.

This is not easy, but it becomes easier with practice and experience.

Item by item

Having written the intro, you have to work your way through your list of items, covering each one in turn. Try to devote several paragraphs to each item, offering examples whenever possible to back up any points which you make:

The lighting was very good, with slick changes and some very subtle effects.

The quality of the lighting in the opening scene was especially clever, giving the effect of dappled reflections off the water around the ship.

Don’t be afraid to name names. If you are praising the quality of the lighting, then say who was responsible. Check the program to find out who it was. By praising good work, you encourage high standards.

Details

If you have enjoyed a performance, and if you write a good review of it, your readers or listeners will probably feel that they, too, would like to go and see it. There are few things more frustrating for them than to find that you do not mention where or when it is taking place, or how to get tickets.

It is a good idea to end every review with a summary of such details. It can be printed in italics if you wish, to indicate that it is not quite part of the review but a supplement to it:

The King and I is on at the Waigani Arts Theatre every evening except Sundays until July 27, starting at 7.30 pm. Tickets cost $5.50 and are available from Soft Touch, Boroko, or at the door.

Be aware, however, that many radio and television stations have a policy of not giving performance
times or ticket prices, as this may be seen as a commercial activity in conflict with station policy.

**Sound and vision**

It is a good idea to get pictures or sound to go with a review, but it is not a good idea to do this during a performance. This will distract the performers and spoil the pleasure of other members of the audience.

The best time to take photographs, or make video or sound recordings, is at a dress rehearsal, or at a special media session. You should always arrange this in advance.

Typically, radio and television reviews begin with a short segment describing the performance or exhibition, with inserts of recordings of it; then they move on to a reviewer's opinions. Very often, the reviewer will be interviewed by the program presenter, which stops the listener having to concentrate on one voice for too long.

**The danger of defamation**

Defamation is the offence of damaging somebody's reputation by saying bad things about them which could do them harm. We explain this in detail in Chapters 69 and 70 on defamation.

If you are reviewing a performance which you consider to be very bad, you may be worried in case you are sued for defamation. In most legal systems you have no need to worry.

As long as the performance was a public one; as long as the review was fair and your honestly held opinion; and, most of all, as long as you did not write it with the motive to harm the people you criticise, then you should be safe. In some countries, the law might demand that you also give the facts upon which you based a negative opinion.

When people do things in public, like singing and dancing, they must expect the public to have the right to say what they thought of the performance.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Artistic and other creative performances are reviewed for three reasons:

- to advise readers or listeners whether to go to the event
- to let the performers know what people think of their performance
- to provide a historical record of the event

Reviewers need to know what they are talking about

Reviewers should not be involved in any way with the performance

Write a lively and up-to-date intro

Cover all the points which are worthy of comment

Get pictures or recordings to illustrate the review
Chapter 53: Sport basics

This is the first of three chapters on the coverage of sport. In this chapter, we look at how to plan for good sports coverage in your newspaper, radio or television station and how to gather information for people who are interested in sport. In the next two chapters we discuss how to present sports news and results and the challenges of different media.

Readers of the sports pages of a newspaper are generally the most knowledgeable and critical readers of all. They know a lot about sport themselves and they expect a sports reporter to know at least as much. This is also true of people who listen to sport on radio or watch it on television.

So, while it is true that everything you write as a journalist should be accurate, you will never get away with inaccuracy in sports reporting.

**What do sport audiences want?**

Sports readers and listeners demand accuracy and sound judgment. They expect the sports reporter to know when to praise a performance and when to criticise; when to offer support and when to call for changes.

Sports enthusiasts like to play sport and they like to watch sport. They also like to discuss past performances and future prospects; they like to talk about the decisions which the team manager or coach has made and should make; they like to pass judgment on sports administrators, referees and umpires.

Sports enthusiasts are dedicated. They often read the sports pages before any other part of the paper. That is why street sellers often display one pile of papers showing page one and another pile showing the back page or sports section.

Sport is an important part of most societies, whatever they are like. It is a way of stimulating the development of people's bodies in the same way that education stimulates the development of their minds.

Do not forget sports which are traditional in your society, as well as introduced western sports, when thinking about sports reporting.

**The content of sport reports**

Sports pages need to contain a great deal of information. To do the job well, you should try to cover all the following areas.

**Results**

This is the most important part of any sports coverage. People will buy a newspaper or listen to a sports bulletin just to find the results of games in their sport, so you should try to carry the result of every sporting event which may interest some of your readers or listeners, as soon as possible after the event.

**League tables**

If the sport is organised in a competitive league, then each week's results will affect the league table. A team which has won may move higher up the league table, while another team which has
lost may slip down the league table. It is important to followers of any league to know the latest position of each team.

**Reports**

A report of a match is a description of what happened, together with an analysis of why it happened. The sports reporter can often explain the way in which one team's tactics prevented the other team from playing well. In this way, the reader or listener comes to understand the sport better.

There would not be room for a full report of every match in every sport, so less important events can have just the result published. However, it is possible to compromise, and have a very short report, followed by the full results. Even two or three sentences of report on the week's matches, followed by the results, will make the people who support that league feel cared for.

**Analysis and previews**

This is discussion of a sporting fixture which is about to take place, considering what is especially interesting about it and what is likely to influence the result. It is only for the big teams and big matches. Their fans will eagerly read or listen to anything that is written or broadcast about their team. People often identify strongly with the team which they support.

**Sports news**

This may include injuries to top players; changes in personnel - a player changing teams, a coach being sacked, a manager retiring; plans to build new facilities; a new sponsor or other financial developments in the sport; or changes in the rules or administration of the sport. Sports reporters should be warned, though: if you get a really good sports news story, it may well be taken away from you to be published on page one.

**Sports features**

Top sportsmen and sportswomen are people, and each one may be worth a feature. You can talk to them about the sacrifices which they have to make to become so good, and the kind of training schedule they have.

Even the humble performers may provide good features. What about the soccer goalkeeper who lets in an average of nine goals a match? Or the prop forward who weighs 280lbs? Or the club golfer who has just reduced his handicap from 28 to 27 after seven years? You could write a feature about any of these. Many amateur sportsmen and sportswomen would identify with them.

**Racing**

This is a separate area of sports journalism, because people interested in horse racing may not be interested in other sports, and people interested in other sports may not be interested in horse racing. For this reason, racing is dealt with separately at the end of Chapter 54.

**Who are the audiences for sport reporting?**

There are four categories of people who read sports pages or watch and listen to sports programs, and they should all be catered for.

**Participants**

People who play sport, even at a fairly low level, want to see the results of their own team and of
their future opponents published or broadcast, and the league tables published, so that they know how good their next opponents are likely to be. They also want to read or hear reports of their matches, especially when they have just won.

Spectators

People who regularly watch a sports team want to see the results and reports of their team’s matches, and information about the team. They want to see reports of matches even if they have already seen the match themselves, especially if their team won. They can then enjoy the victory all over again.

Casual readers and listeners

While most sports readers and listeners are very keen and knowledgeable, you should remember that there are also people reading or listening in a casual way. They may not have any strong commitment to sport, but will read the occasional report if it looks especially interesting.

These people will require more information than the average reader or listener, if they are fully to understand what is being reported. The keen golfer will know what a birdie, an eagle, a chip and a putt are, but the casual reader may not. Newspapers in particular may consider carrying a panel occasionally, alongside a sports report, explaining the terms used in that sport.

Punters

Some people like to gamble on the outcome of sport, especially on horse racing. They want facts and analysis to help them to increase their chances of winning.

Which sports are popular?

A newspaper, radio or television station should cover the sports in which the public is interested. As far as possible, it should give most space to the most popular sport, the next most space to the second most popular sport and so on, deciding cautiously which sports are not popular enough to be covered at all.

This is easier said than done. It is not always easy - especially in a developing country - to obtain accurate figures on the number of people who play or watch any particular sport. You can try to obtain them from the relevant Government department or from a national sports institute, if your country has one.

Even if you can obtain precise figures, you have still to decide whether to give more coverage to participant sports or to spectator sports. You also have to think about the coverage you will give to sports which are played mostly by only one section of the population, such as golf or squash, which tend to be expensive sports and limited to a socio-economic elite.

Generally speaking, in developed countries more people watch sport – either on television or at games – than actually participate themselves, while in developing countries there is still a tendency for more people to play sport than watch it.

Try to find statistics for your country on who plays sport and who watches it. You may find that the government’s national census or researchers at sports institutes can help you access statistics. They should provide you with the basis for some good decisions on what sports you will choose to cover.

Organising sports coverage

Once you have decided which sports are popular and therefore which sports you will cover, you
must arrange for people to provide you with information. Sports journalism is 20 per cent reporting, 80 per cent organising.

Find correspondents

 Arrange a correspondent for each sport you want to cover, perhaps through the organising body of the sport. This will make sure that you get someone who understands the sport, cares about it and is close enough to the people involved in it to get the information.

 Tell them what you want from them, and the deadline by which you need it.

 For example, you may say that you want all the results by Tuesday lunchtime each week, together with three or four short paragraphs of report at the top. This could be a comment on the most newsworthy result - if the top team has been beaten, or if there has been an unusually high-scoring game, for instance; or it could draw attention to an outstanding personal performance.

 You will need to stress the importance of the deadline. Your correspondent may spend Tuesday morning chasing up all the results, and not bring them to you until 4 pm, too late for the page they should go on.

 Explain that it is better to have an incomplete set of results on time than to have a complete set of results late.

 Brief them

 As we have just seen, you must brief your correspondents on precisely what you need.

 They will need to know the style in which the report should be written and how to present the results. If the correspondent is a member of one of the clubs or teams, warn him or her not to write biased reports.

 They will need to know the sort of thing you want reported - the most interesting result, or the outstanding personal performance, for instance - and the number of words it must be written in.

 They must know the deadline by which you must receive all this; old news is dead news and old sports results are even worse.

 They must understand that there is no guarantee of their report being published, although you will hope to use it every time.

 Organise pages and air time

 Allocate regular space or air time to minor sports, on specific days if possible. Establish the idea that Monday is darts day, for instance, that Tuesday is netball day, that Wednesday is shooting day, and so on. This will encourage a group of regular readers or listeners.

 TO SUMMARISE:

 Find out which sports are popular in your country, and try to cover those

 Arrange for expert correspondents

 Get the right balance of results, reports, previews, sports news and sports features for your media
Chapter 54: Writing about sport

This is the second of three chapters on the coverage of sport. In the previous chapter, we looked at how to plan for good sports coverage in your newspaper, radio or television station and how to gather information. In this chapter we discuss how to present sports news and results. In the third chapter we examine the challenges of different media.

In Chapter 53 we listed the areas which need to be included in the content of sports pages. Let us now consider each one in turn, and think about how to gather and present the information in the best way for the reader or listener.

Results

You will receive the results from the correspondents you have organised, and from your own sports reporters.

As we have already noted, for minor sporting events it may be sufficient just to publish or broadcast the result.

With a couple of paragraphs of report on top, the results of a local basketball league could look like this:

League leaders Club Sportif scored a century of points against village side Tanolu in this week's Efate Basketball League matches.

Masel Manua's personal tally was 38 points, his best ever for the club.

RESULTS: Club Sportif 104 Tanolu 38, Montmatre 73 Eton 56, Pang Pang 61 Wesley 58, Brigham Young 82 Mele 54, Ekipe 48 Onesua 46, Emua 66 Erakor 62, Epule v Matarisu result not available.

For more important sporting events, though, there must also be a report. In this case, the result should still be carried, clearly presented at the beginning of the report. On radio, this means announcing the result first, and then having a match report from a correspondent. In a newspaper, it means publishing the result at the top of the report.

Different kinds of sport need their results to be presented in different ways. There are three categories - sports for which a simple score (perhaps with scorers) is enough; sports which require details of many performances; and tournament results.

Simple scores

For many team sports it is enough just to give the basic score at the top of the report. The sports in this category would include soccer, rugby, basketball, volleyball, hockey and netball. The result might be presented like this:

Navua 1 Nadroga 2

Result like this can be added to by including scorers. This can be done if the match is considered to be slightly more important than the average:

NAITASIRI NORTH 12 RA 6
Performance details

A number of sports require detailed results, including performances by a number of individuals. This includes team sports where the team performance is the total of the individual performances - like cricket or baseball; team sports where the team performance is the total of a number of groups' performances, like lawn bowls; and sports where a large number of individuals compete against each other in a series of events, like athletics (track and field) and swimming. In each case, the results are too long and complex to be carried at the start of the report, and would usually be published at the end of the report or - for a very important game - in a panel beside the report. It is extremely difficult for radio to give results as detailed as these, without boring most of its listeners.

Let us take an example from each of these groups.

For a cricket match, there needs to be a complete score card, including bowling figures:

GORDON First innings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Batsman</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L.Leke</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y.Rafa</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.Neumann</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.Matane</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.Kennedy</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.Samari</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.Temo</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.Leke</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.Sibona</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.Leke not out</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.Manau</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extras (2nb,2w,4b,7lb)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fall of wickets: 1-36, 2-49, 3-68, 4-122, 5-134, 6-154, 7-172, 8-229, 9-229

Bowling: McIvor 14-2-35-2; Ching 17.2-4-47-5; Nula 15-2-44-1; Oala 21-8-39-2; Suk 8-0-53-0.

TOKARARA First innings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Batsman</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>W.Helalo not out</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.Pugh</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.Bill</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.Maki</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J.Suk not out</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extras (lb1)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (for 3 wkts)</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-3, 3-14.
In bowls, a match may consist of several games between groups of people, each called a rink. The score of all the rinks is added together to give the final result. So, you will want to give the team result first, followed by the score of each rink:

**Triples**: Lae beat Popondetta 136–114.
(Lae scores first) Rink 1 21-15, Rink 2 18-17, Rink 3 19-23, Rink 4 38-18, Rink 5 16-20, Rink 6 24-21).

For an athletics meeting, readers will want a full list of the results of all events, plus the times or distances of each successful athlete.

You will need to decide whether to give just the winner of each event, or the first three, or the first six, or whatever. The first three is a normal number, following the tradition in the Olympic Games, in which the first three each receive a medal:

**100m**: 1 E.Arakua 11.4sec; 2 J.Keae 11.5; 3 W.Vui 11.7.
**200m**: 1 P.Maraleu 22.5; 2 R.Lemeki 22.8; 3 D.Marru 23.2.
**400m**: 1 I.Popek 50.4; 2 M.Namun 53.7; 3 J.Rombok 53.8.
**800m**: 1 R.Eava 1m55.7; 2 K.Ng 1m56.1; 3 I.Popek 1m56.2.
**1500m**: 1 R.Eava 3m56.4; 2 S.Lessi 3m59.9; 3 H.Manalo 4m00.4.
**110m hurdles**: 1 B.Pagal 14.7; 2 W.Takira 14.9; 3 P.Miria 15.5.
**High jump**: 1 K.Natera 2.03 metres; 2 R.Rarua 1.99; 3 J.Araua 1.87.
**Long jump**: 1 W.Vui 7.34; 2 D.Gukain 7.09; 3 B.Buka 6.98.
**Triple jump**: 1 B.Buka 14.97; 2 K.Ogil 14.12; 3 B.Manga 13.94
**Shot**: 1 R.Banz 19.11; 2 T.Murphy 18.93; 3 S.Gahuko 18.79.
**Discus**: 1 R. Banz 59.26; 2 S. Gahuko 57.87; 3 D.Lavi 57.40.
**Javelin**: 1 S.Begri 71.66; 2 T.Spia 71.38; 3 B.Tromwe 70.55.

**Tournaments**

Some sports are typically played in a tournament. This can mean a succession of individual matches, after which the loser is eliminated and the winner moves on to the next round to meet another winner; tennis, table tennis, badminton, squash, boxing and fencing are often organised in this kind of tournament. The other kind of tournament is where scores are accumulated over several rounds of competition, like golf.

In either case, the tournament may last for several days. In a weekly newspaper, you may be able to carry the results of the whole tournament in one issue; in a daily newspaper, you will need to carry the latest results each day. Let us look at an example of each kind of tournament, starting with tennis, in which there may be matches of different rounds taking place at the same time:

**Men's singles, Round 2**: E.Mwesigye bt R.Galama 6-4, 4-6, 6-3; P.Gunning bt J.Ngatia 6-0, 6-1; M.Puyokam bt F.Lee 7-5, 3-6, 8-6; B.Jokio bt F.Fox 6-4, 6-4; E.Thirlwall bt P.Kula 6-1, 6-2.
**Round 3**: V.Hula bt R.Lobo 2-6, 6-3, 7-5; P.Gunning bt V.K.Singh 7-5, 6-4; E.Thirlwall bt E.Mwesigye 5-7, 7-5, 8-6.
**Ladies' singles, Round 1**: A.Ho bt V.S.Krishna 4-6, 6-3, 6-3; S.Nausi bt E.Poma 6-2, 6-4; A.Rombuk bt H.Tenanil 6-0, 6-0; N.Srivastava bt V.Ching 6-4, 4-6, 6-4; W.McGrath bt A.Malkoa 6-2, 6-3.

In the results of a golf tournament, it is usual to give the total score first, followed by the score for each round. After three days of a 72-hole tournament, in which 18 holes are played each day, you may publish the scores as follows (note that this is not yet a "result", since the tournament is not yet over: it is called the **leader board**):

**Mazda Classic. Leader board (after 54 holes)**:
217 M.Somare (72-74-71); 218 K.Mara (73-73-72); 220 K.Chong (71-71-78), R.Diaz (75-74-71), H.Smith (74-73-73); 221 J.P.Dorman (77-72-72), J.Pidik (76-72-73).
**League tables**

Arrange for your correspondent to send you a copy of the up-to-date league table with the results. If you have room, you may publish this every week; if not, try to publish it every two or three weeks.

A league table needs to be carefully set out, in columns. It can be in small type, since it does not have to attract the casual reader. A soccer league table might look like this, showing the number of games played (P), games won (W), games drawn (D), goals for (F), goals against (A) and points (Pts):

### Suva League: Division One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Pts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nausori</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samabula</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lami</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raiwaqa</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vatuwaqa</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walu Bay</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamavua</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muankau</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nesese</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namadi</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reports**

Whichever sports event you report, you will need to follow the same guidelines.

- Check the rules and scoring system. The organising body of the sport will probably have a booklet giving the rules; if not, try the public library. Get hold of the rules; read them.
- Check the significance of the event. A cup final or a title fight is much more important than a contest in which nothing is at stake. The more significant an event, the longer the report should be.
- If you have to phone copy and don’t have a two-way radio or mobile phone, find a telephone.
- Find a comfortable place with a good view from which to watch.
- If you do not know the names of the players, find a printed program (and check for any changes from the printed program) or get someone who does know the names to sit beside you.
- Watch everything that happens, carefully and dispassionately - you will be too busy to cheer or get excited. Ignore any friends or relatives who try to talk to you during the game. Make notes.
- Afterwards, get comment from players, coaches or managers - winners and losers.
- Be sure to mention how the victory was won, important moments, outstanding individual performances, injuries, the size of the crowd and even the weather if it affected the result.

You can now write the report, describing what happened, giving relevant details, and analysing why it happened as it did.

**Analysis and previews**

There are two main areas to consider in match previews.

**Significance:** is a championship at stake? What effect will the result have on the team's or a player's record? Are the contestants old rivals? Is the event specially significant for any participant?
**Probable result**: what is the relative strength and experience of the teams? How have they performed against the same opposition? Has either improved during the season? Are there new players or have they adopted new tactics? Have they competed against each other before?

**Beware**! If you predict the result, you will upset the supporters of the team you say will lose. Also, if you are wrong, you look stupid. Do not be eager to predict results. It is better to say that the endless appeal of competitive sport is the uncertainty of the result.

**Sports news**

The bigger and more popular a sport or club, the more significance attaches to news stories about it. A club squash player who injures his knee is not news. How the international rugby hooker is responding to treatment for a shoulder injury, five days before a match against Australia, is news.

**Horse racing**

A good racing service provides three things - full race cards before meetings; selections of likely winners; and full results.

**Race cards**

These need to be clearly displayed to provide the following information: time of race; name of race; distance; special category of runners, if any; number of each horse; previous form of each horse; name of each horse; its draw; its jockey; its owner and trainer; the weight it carries; the betting forecast.

**Selections**

In countries where it is allowed, gambling is an integral part of horse racing, so most people follow the sport in order to bet, and hoping to win. Many newspapers, radio and television stations employ tipsters to forecast winners.

A tipster who can pick winners will attract readers and listeners, especially if he can pick winners at long odds. The racing correspondent needs to study the form of each horse to decide the likely winner - and he will be better placed if he has inside information from owners, trainers and jockeys, too.

**Results**

These need less space than the race cards, but they also need to be clearly displayed to provide the following information: name of race; distance; winning horse (name and jockey) and its starting price; second horse (name and jockey) and its starting price; third horse (name and jockey) and its starting price; the order in which the rest of the field finished; which horses did not start and which started but did not finish; the distances by which the winner beat the second, and the second beat the third.

Here is an example of horse racing results:

**BRISBANE**

1. **Athol Mulley 2yo F Hcp 1000m**: Swift Minnie (S.Sharman) 6-1, 2 Cameola (W.Moore) 9-2, 3 Prospect for Love (M.Maloney) 7-4fav, 4 Tensity Lad, 5 Lovero, 6 Le Sador, 7 Kaleidoscope. Did not run: Black Chariot. Dist: 1l, short head.

2. **George Moore 2yo F Hcp 1000m**: Volatile Lass (W.Goodwin) 7-1, 2 Celebes Sea (W.Moore) 5-1, 3 Aureal Lass (N.Smith) 5-2fav, 4 Star Lero, 5 Vice View, 6 Red Marne, 7 Fearless Courage, 8

3. Roy Higgins Mdn Hcp 1350m: 1 Laird of Luss (W.Goodwin) 25-1, 2 Logic Link (R.Setches) 8-11fav, 3 Tambo Lady (C.Barham) 9-2, 4 Willacross, 5 Topak, 6 Jask, 7 Famocham, 8 Sweet Arthur, 9 Mighty Mustafa, 10 Godsarc, 11 Tin Chips, 12 Renewed Ambition. All ran. Dist: neck, 2l.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Give the results clearly

Show how the latest results affect the competition, e.g. with league tables

Report on matches and tournaments as you would news events, with preparation, attention to detail and objectivity

Provide match analysis and previews, but beware of predicting outcomes!
This is the last of three chapters on the coverage of sport. In the previous chapters, we looked at how to plan for good sports coverage in your newspaper, radio or television station and how to gather information, then how to present sports news and results. In this chapter we examine the challenges of reporting sport in different media.

All the media can cover sport, but they need to do so in different ways. Radio and television have the advantage of speed - they can tell you about the event while it is happening - while newspapers and magazines have the advantage of being able to present lots of tabulated information - results, league tables and so on for people to read at leisure.

Each of the media needs to concentrate on its advantages in planning its sports service. Let us consider each in turn.

**Newspapers and magazines**

Newspapers and magazines cannot hope to be the first medium to give the result of a big match. Anybody who is really interested will probably get the result from radio or television before a newspaper or magazine can be printed.

What the print media lack in speed, though, they make up for in other ways. The advantages of newspapers and magazines include the following:

**Detailed information**

Newspapers and magazines can publish the full results of a wide variety of sports, league tables, fixtures (details of matches to be played in the future), race cards, statistics and a lot of other detailed information.

This can be printed in small type, because it is not designed to be read continuously. Readers will search for the information they want, and read those few words. Using small type allows you to fit much more information on the page.

**Minority sports**

Newspapers can devote some space to sports even if they have only a few followers. It will not annoy other readers, who can ignore that small report and read something else instead.

This is a big advantage over radio and television, where everybody has to watch or listen to the same thing at the same time.

**Pictures**

Radio is fast, but it cannot carry pictures. Newspapers and magazines can give good sports coverage by using plenty of sports photographs. Television, of course, does give pictures; but even when people have seen the moving image on television, they like to see again the crucial moment of the game captured in a still image in the newspaper.

**Radio and television**

Many of the things we have already said about reporting sport apply equally to radio and television as they do to newspapers. You need to understand your audience, and which sports you need to
cover. You must provide previews, match reports and results, which we will talk about in more
detail shortly. You can report sport both as news and as features or documentaries. You need the
same reporting skills of speed, accuracy and attention to detail. The people who listen to sports
programs will be just as critical as the readers of sports pages. They are usually the same people.

Like newspapers, most big radio and television stations have their own sports staff, reporting for
the news or for sports programs. The subject is too large and complicated to discuss in detail here,
but the following is some general advice.

Speed

One of the main advantages radio and television have over the print media is their ability to bring
reports quickly. Radio in particular can bring instant reports of sporting events. With satellite
technology, television stations can now get live reports instantly without having to lay special
cables to the sports grounds. Do not waste that advantage. People want to know results as soon as
possible.

For major sporting events, especially those which might interest general listeners and viewers, not
just the sports fans, you should treat results as news. Give them as soon as possible. Do not save
them for your once-a-week sports programme. You can always provide a longer report for your
sports programme, together with some background detail and analysis of the event.

For minor sporting events, especially those which only interest the participants, the results can be
saved for a regular slot in your sports programs. For example, the results of the regular tennis
competition can be given at the same time each week.

Live commentary

Nowhere is the speed of broadcasting more obvious than in live reports of sporting events, for
example football matches or racing. People at home or listening to a radio in their car can get a
second-by-second report. A good live commentary can make the listener or viewer feel that they
are at the event itself. Do not waste the advantage.

Your commentary must be clear and informed. You must know the rules of the sport and be able to
identify instantly all the people taking part. You must speak confidently enough to report the fast
action at the goal line as well as to fill in the empty minutes while a coach tends an injured player
in the centre of the field. On television, you do not need to describe what the viewers can see
themselves, but you need to tell them who the players on the screen are and describe any action
which the viewers might have missed.

Sports specials

Sports programs are the equivalent of the newspapers sports pages. Such programs are broadcast
regularly, perhaps on Saturday or Sunday afternoons while sport is taking place, or on Friday
evenings to preview the weekend's sport or Monday evenings to look back on it.

You usually need to cover all the sports being played at the time, but focus on a few of the most
important events, perhaps with live commentary from a match or race meeting. As with
newspapers, you need reporters or stringers at all the events, to send reports and results as they
happen. Reporters need to know beforehand how long their report should be, and not exceed that
time limit.

Sports program presenters need to be articulate, able to speak clearly, brightly and continuously
without a script. It often helps if they have at least one guest in the studio, someone who can
answer questions or speak knowledgeably on a topic while the presenter takes a breath.

The program producer must be able to work quickly and logically under stress. They must be able
to find instant solutions to unexpected problems, such as a sudden gap in the program because a report has not arrived. It is useful if they have competent assistants to whom they can assign some of the tasks, such as making phone calls or recording reports. It helps if everyone involved in the program is a sports enthusiast, able to understand the needs of the listeners or viewers.

Fixtures, previews and results

Radio is not a good medium in which to give long lists, of coming fixtures or results. Although television can cope better with them by putting information on the screen, this alone will not help people who are too busy to concentrate or who cannot read; so special care must be taken in reading out tables.

Do not read out long league tables or lists of fixtures. It is better to get someone into the studio to discuss them in a knowledgeable way with the presenter, highlighting the most important or significant matches, performances or changes in the league. You should avoid lists where possible, but if you do present them, do it in a regular, consistent order, usually in order of importance.

You must read at a steady pace, with pauses between matches, games or events. You should establish a rhythm of delivering your words to reflect what you are saying. For example, raise the pitch of your voice slightly when reading the winners, lower it slightly for the losers or contestants down the place order. (Pitch is the high or low tone of your voice. It is not the volume or loudness of it.)

Recording events

Your listeners or viewers want to hear or see the highlights of events - the goals, the final seconds of a race or the knockout punch. These can be recorded and replayed, perhaps several times if they are especially important or interesting.

Television camera crews should be reminded of this whenever they film a match or race. It is best to have several cameras at the event, to capture the best moments from different angles. If this is not possible, one camera crew at least must attend the match for long enough to record the highlights. It is no good sending a camera crew to a football match unless they film the goals. It is no good sending them to a marathon unless they film the finish (and preferably the start as well).

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Find out which sports are popular in your country, and try to cover those

Arrange for expert correspondents

Get the right balance of results, reports, previews, sports news and sports features for your media

Give the results clearly

Concentrate on the advantages of your media:

- For print, the ability to give details, cover minority sports and use pictures
- For radio, the speed at which you can bring live commentary and results
- For television, the speed of live coverage and the ability to show the moving highlights
Chapter 56: Facts and opinion

In this chapter, we discuss what facts and opinions are, and why journalists must distinguish between them. We give advice on reporting both facts and opinions, and suggest ways of dealing with rumours, speculation and lies.

Journalists are constantly faced with problems of reporting facts and opinions. They must be able to distinguish between them. This is important in both gathering and writing news. It affects how you deal with anything you are told and also how you pass the information on to your readers or listeners.

We will explain shortly why it is so important for journalists to be able to recognise certain kinds of facts and opinions and distinguish them from each other. However, first we will explain what facts and opinions mean in the world of the working journalist.

**Facts**

A fact can be defined as something said to have happened or supposed to be true. However as a journalist, you need to know how reliable statements are before you can report them as facts. This determines how you present them to your readers or listeners.

There are three kinds of facts which you have to deal with as a journalist. There are facts which have been proved to be true; facts which are probably true though they have not been proved; and facts which could be true, although they appear to be lies.

**Proven facts**

These are facts which are proved and accepted as true by everyone. They include such statements as "The world is round" or "Barack Hussein Obama is President of the United States". You could check these facts yourself, but they are so universally accepted as true that you do not need to. Of course, facts can change. It is a proven fact that Barack Obama is President at the time this paragraph is being written, but he will one day be succeeded by somebody else. When he is, the fact will become untrue, but for the moment it is a proven, accepted fact.

You can rely on proven facts and report them to your readers or listeners with confidence. They do not depend for their truth on who said them, so you do not need to attribute them. (Attribution is saying who said something. See Chapter 8: Quotes and Chapter 9: Attribution for more on this.)

**Probable facts**

These are statements which it seems reasonable to believe are true, but you are not able to prove yourself, either because you do not have access to the information or because you do not have time to dig for proof (but not because you are too lazy to check). Probable facts include statements by people who are in a position to know the truth and who have no obvious reason to tell a lie. If the Finance Minister tells Parliament that $10 million was raised from taxes last year, you can treat this as a probable fact.

These are not, however, the same as proven facts. Although they are probably true, there is a chance that they might be wrong, either because a mistake has been made or because someone lied. Because this doubt exists, we must attribute probable facts to the people who provide them.

**Probable lies**

People occasionally make statements which seem on the surface to be untrue, but which might just
be true. A claim that "The Prime Minister has secretly married a sixteen-year-old fashion model" may seem highly unlikely, but it just might be true.

You must always check such statements before using them, and never use them without confirming them first. Once you have checked that they are true, you do not need to attribute them. They have become proven facts. Of course, if you find they are untrue, you must not use them.

If you have to report a known lie – for example, when reporting evidence presented in a court case – you must attribute the statements and you should also present the alternative counter view where and when it is given. We will talk more about this shortly.

**Opinions**

Opinions are different from facts. An opinion is a conclusion reached by someone after looking at the facts. Opinions are based on what people believe to be facts. This can include probable facts and even probable lies, although few people will knowingly give an opinion based on a proven lie.

One person’s probable fact can be seen by another person as a probable lie. This is one reason why people have differences of opinion.

Although an opinion can be any statement of what a person believes to be true (as distinct from a proven fact), for journalists there are two main categories of opinions.

**Verifiable opinion**

These are conclusions which can be verified (shown to be true) or shown to be false. People who predict the results of horse races draw conclusions from what they know about horses and racing. They may say that Golden Arrow will win the coming race. It is their opinion. Once the race is over, that opinion is proved to be either correct or incorrect, depending on whether Golden Arrow wins or loses.

Although people usually base their opinions on facts, there is always a danger that they can reach the wrong conclusion. They might have based their opinion on facts which are themselves untrue (such as Golden Arrow’s fitness); they might have failed to consider a relevant fact (the ground was muddy and Golden Arrow runs best on firm ground) or they might have reached the wrong conclusion because of a gap in the logic they used to think it through (Golden Arrow had a strong name, so was bound to win).

You must always treat verifiable opinions as if they could be wrong. You must always attribute them to the person who gave them.

**Expert opinion**

It is worth mentioning here a special category of opinion we call expert opinion. Experts can give their opinion on an issue, based on their special knowledge of the facts. A pathologist gives an expert opinion when she tells an inquest that she believes a person was killed before being thrown in a river. She has examined the body and found very little water in the lungs. Unless there is proof of what happened, this must remain an opinion and be attributed to the pathologist. The opinion may later be verified when the killer confesses and describes what happened.

The best kind of expert opinion is one in which the expert keeps their own personal feelings out of their conclusions. They look at the facts as they see them, and draw a conclusion based only on those facts.

However, even opinion from an impartial expert must be attributed, so that your readers or
listeners can judge the likely truth or otherwise of what they say.

Personal opinion

Personal opinions are the conclusions someone reaches based partly on facts and partly on what they already believe.

Personal opinions can be given by people just because they are asked. If you conduct a vox pop with people on the street, asking what they think about capital punishment, they will give you their personal opinion.

Personal opinions which are based on beliefs or values which a person already has are called value judgments.

These are opinions of what is good or bad and advice on what other people should do about something. For example, a socialist might give the opinion that a new tax on the rich is a good thing; a rich person might give the opinion that it is a bad thing. To understand value judgments, your readers or listeners need to know who is making them and why. Such opinions must be attributed.

As a journalist, you are likely to encounter a lot of people who want to express their personal opinion in order to impress people and to affect other people’s attitudes. They will see your newspaper, radio or television station as a useful way of getting their personal opinions across to people. The most obvious examples of this are people such as politicians, who believe they know what is right or wrong for others. They need to get their opinions to the people, to gain their support. The prime minister who says that his government is good for the people is expressing a value judgment. If he says it often enough, people will believe that it is true, whether or not it is based on fact.

Even experts can make value judgments, although this is quite distinct from an impartial opinion based only on known facts. An expert who gives a personal opinion may be better informed than many other people on that topic, but their opinion is still just a value judgment, based on their own beliefs.

Why distinguish facts from opinions?

We have talked so far about what facts and opinions are and how you must attribute certain facts and all opinions to people. Now we will briefly discuss why.

People use information in all sorts of ways. The most important way is to learn about the world around them and their place in it. They can then decide on what to do. They can use information on a tin of fish to choose whether to buy that brand or another. A villager who learns new facts about hygiene can build a proper toilet and so safeguard both his own health and that of the people around him.

Facts

In order to do something with information, people need to know whether or not it is true. They use facts to reach conclusions about things, to make their own opinions. The villager needs to know the facts about the different materials he can use for his toilet and where to place it.

Of course, he also needs to know how reliable the information is. The villager might believe advice on building a toilet if it is given by an expert in health, but would reject similar advice given by a four-year-old child. If you attribute the advice in your story on building toilets, the villager can decide what information he can trust.

Opinions
Reporting people's opinions is useful to your readers or listeners. Hearing an opinion on an issue might stimulate them to think about the issue themselves. If they hear a variety of different opinions, they can use this information to build up their own ideas.

They can also use other people's opinions as models for their own. If they read of someone expressing an opinion they agree with, they might adopt that opinion for themselves. It is not your job as a journalist to decide whose opinions can be used as models and whose cannot. You must report newsworthy opinions for your readers or listeners so that they can make up their own minds.

People use both facts and opinions when they are making decisions. They may choose to buy Kleeno washing powder because it costs $1 a kilo whereas the other brand, Whito, costs $1.50. Kleeno is cheaper; that is a fact. Or they may decide to buy Whito because the advertisers say "Whito is better" - which is an opinion. Both facts and opinions have value, but they must never be confused.

Whereas we generally accept facts whoever states them (assuming, of course, that they trust the person to speak honestly), we judge an opinion by the person who expresses it. In our soap powder example, we would accept that Kleeno is cheaper no matter who says it, because we simply compare the evidence (the prices). However, we would judge the claim about which is "better" by looking at who says it. When the makers of Whito say their product is better, we might be suspicious. But if the makers of Kleeno also say that Whito is better, we would tend to believe them.
Presenting facts and opinions

Your readers or listeners will find both facts and opinions useful, but they need to be shown which is which. In Chapter 9: Attribution, we showed how you deal with attribution when writing news stories. Here we will discuss briefly how you can present them to avoid confusion in your newspaper or programs.

Comment columns

Newspapers often tell their readers what is a writer's personal opinion by the way they present it in the paper. Most newspapers, for example, have an editorial or leader column where they present their own comments on the day's major events. Regular readers know where that column can be found in the paper.

The column might be headed "Opinion" or something like "The Herald says". It might appear under a smaller version of the newspaper's page one masthead. Some readers turn to the leader column first to find out what the paper thinks.

The leader column is usually written by either the editor or by a specialist senior journalist employed for the job. Within the leader column, opinions are not usually attributed to the writer - it is taken for granted that this is the comment of the people in charge of the newspaper.

Readers also expect to find opinions in review and commentary columns. Again, these are usually in a specific part of a paper, perhaps the feature section. They may be published on the same day each week in the case of daily papers.

Commentary and review columns are usually by-lined, which means they have a line of type saying who wrote the article. In some cases this can simply be the author's initials at the end of the article. (For more details, see Chapter 50: Features and Chapter 52: Reviewing.)

Comment and leader columns do not have a close equivalent on radio and television. Although some stations use short comment segments stating the station's policy on an issue, this is not good journalism. This is mainly because listeners or viewers may not be able to distinguish between news programs and editorial inserts if they tune in once the editorial has started and they miss the attribution. Unless they know that a certain person at a certain time always gives the editorial opinion, they may think they have tuned in to a current affairs program.

Some stations compromise by inviting guest speakers in to give expert opinion at certain times on certain days. Unless this is done with great care, once again there is the danger that listeners or viewers may miss the attribution. Besides, journalism is always at its best when people's opinions are challenged, even the opinions of experts.

Letters to the editor and talkback radio

The letters page and talkback programs on radio are opportunities for ordinary readers and listeners to express their opinions on issues of the day. Many newspapers specifically state on the letters page that the views expressed are not necessarily those of the newspaper.

Letters to the editor are almost always straight opinions, and most newspapers have special pages or distinctive layouts for them. Some radio and television stations have programs when listeners can express opinions. These are either structured feedback programs, when they read out letters from listeners or viewers commenting on what they have seen or heard, or talkback programs when listeners call in and their opinions are broadcast live on air.

All of these are valuable opportunities for people to have access to the media. However, if you are in charge of letters pages or talkback programs you should remember that you are legally responsible for the material you include. If it is defamatory, you can be prosecuted as well as the
Radio talkback or phone-in programs usually make use of a studio delay system to prevent defamatory or offensive comments going on air. This is equipment in the studio which stores seven seconds of program in memory before sending it to the transmitter. Delay is usually switched on for phone-ins and talkback programs so if a caller says something that should not go on air (e.g. defamatory comments), the presenter can press a "dump button" which effectively deletes the preceding seven seconds and returns the program to real time transmission. It is usually the job of the producer or presenter to switch the delay system on and off for programming.

Whether it is letters to the editor or radio talkback, you should give people a fair hearing. They might write or say things which are legally safe but which you personally dislike. You should not censor their comments for personal reasons. Their letters or calls may express an opinion about you, perhaps criticising a program you presented or a report you wrote. You should remember that you have already had your say and it is now the chance for your readers or listeners to give their opinions. It is unfair for journalists always to have the last word by adding footnotes to readers' letters or making the final comment on a talkback program.

**Rumour and speculation**

You should now have some reasonably clear guidelines on how to present facts and opinions in the news. However, ordinary people do not operate by journalism's rules of checking accuracy and finding proof. In day-to-day conversation, most people are not so careful about the accuracy of facts.

Take the example of a man who runs into your newsroom shouting: "The Acme Building has fallen down! Hundreds of people have been hurt!" He most certainly has not stopped to survey the extent of the damage or count the number of people injured. It may turn out that one wall has collapsed into the street and has injured six people. That is news. What the man was giving us was speculation. When other people repeat such speculation without checking its accuracy, we have the spread of a rumour.

It is part of the journalist's job to separate fact from speculation and rumour. The only time you should mention a rumour is when you are writing a story about its effect and you need to identify the source of the effect. For example, if there is a widespread rumour that there will be a shortage of sugar, your first step should be to find out whether or not it is true by contacting the major importers, the government department concerned and a sample of store-owners. Then you can write a story based on facts. Sometimes rumours are so strong that they make people behave in a certain way, even when the rumour is not true. So, if people are panic-buying sugar because of the rumour, you can mention that fact and the rumour, but be sure also to mention whether or not the rumour is true.

**Lies**

Even the best journalists can be tricked by lies into presenting misleading news.

Sometimes the lies are unconscious. Informants can think they are telling the truth but are really fooling themselves. They may report seeing what they wanted to see: for example, they report seeing a policeman arresting a youth when he was, in fact, giving the youth directions.

You must check the facts, both for your own sake and for the sake of your informants, who would not wish to appear foolish.

Sometimes, however, the informant is deliberately trying to trick you for his or her own reasons. Perhaps it is to cover up a mistake, perhaps to avoid appearing ignorant, occasionally to give false information for more sinister reasons, such as creating ill-feeling between groups or tricking people into giving money. How can you uncover such cases of lying?
Reputation

Look at the person’s reputation. If the person telling you something has a reputation for dishonesty, everything they tell you should be treated with suspicion. You should be extra careful if they have fooled you or a colleague before.

If you have any doubts about the honesty of a potential interviewee, do a bit of background checking before the interview. Anything suspicious should make you more critical of what they say. You can then ask more probing questions.

Their story

Most people find it more difficult to tell a lie convincingly than to tell the truth. When we tell the truth, we can rely on our memory and fit all the facts together. With a lie, we have to use our imagination. The more complicated the lie, the more difficult it is to think up ways of linking all the pieces together. Holes will start to appear in the story and it will begin to show gaps in the logic.

Once you have the slightest suspicion that this is happening, probe deeper. Ask more searching questions, especially those which will allow you to cross-check with something else the person has said. For example, if someone is describing something they allegedly saw, ask them to describe the surroundings. They should be able to do it if they were there. If you are still suspicious, you can then visit the scene yourself to check out the truth of what was said. You can ask yourself: "Was there mud on the ground at that point? Could he have seen round the tree as he claimed?" Good journalism can be very much like detective work.

Check

It is always good journalism to cross-check what people say with at least one independent source, even if cross-checking means approaching their opponents for confirmation of details. You should do this anyway in most cases, to achieve balance in your story. We talk more about this in the next chapter.

If someone comes with a story that they have been robbed of the wages they received that morning, you could check with their employer how much they got paid and when. Check with the police that the crime has been reported. Check with anyone who may have witnessed the event - not only the people the victim says were witnesses.

You should also cross-check the credentials of people who come to you saying they represent a certain group or organisation. Check the telephone directory, business guides or Who's Who? Get in touch with a reliable source within that group. You do not have to say that you disbelieve them: there are much more subtle ways, such as ringing up to check the spelling of their name then asking a few discreet questions.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

People use fact and opinions to make decisions; you must help by showing clearly which is which

You must attribute all opinions and any facts for which there is no commonly accepted proof

Commentary columns should be clearly distinguished from news

Never repeat unchecked rumour or speculation

If you suspect someone is lying to you, check what they say with an independent source
Chapter 57: Fairness

In this chapter, we discuss the reasons for fairness in reporting. We advise on ways of maintaining fairness throughout news gathering and news writing. We discuss the need for special care in writing comment columns, in campaigning journalism and in reporting elections and court cases.

There are three basic qualities which should guide the work of a good journalist - it must be fast, fair and accurate:

**Speed** comes from increasing knowledge, confidence and experience.

**Accuracy** comes from constant attention to details and from hard work in finding, checking and re-checking details.

**Fairness** is the hardest to define, but it has a lot to do with avoiding bias, treating people equally and allowing people to have equal chances to do things or express themselves.

**What is fairness?**

Even if you are not able to put it into words, you may have a natural understanding of fairness if you care about other people and are sensitive to their needs.

Fairness is made up of two parts:

**Objectivity**, which is not forcing your own personal opinions on the news. The opposite of objectivity is subjectivity.

**Impartiality**, which is not taking sides on an issue where there is a dispute. Impartiality also includes presenting all sides of an argument fairly, what we call balance.

Even if you have strong feelings about an issue, you must not use the news to put over your own arguments; you must not try to give extra time or better coverage to people you agree with and less time or worse coverage to those you disagree with.

For the good journalist, objectivity and impartiality are two sides of the same coin. If you can be objective and control your personal feelings on an issue, you can also be even-handed in your treatment of all sides.

Although impartiality or bias can enter all areas of journalism, the greatest dangers lie in reporting politics, industrial disputes, religion, race and sport. Any area in which people have very strong feelings can lead to conflict and to bias in reporting the issue.

The same general principles which govern objectivity can also help you to be impartial. Forget your personal preferences while working on a story, stand back from it and try to look at the issues through the eyes of people both for and against. That may not change your personal opinion that something is wrong, but it will help you to be fair.

If you do believe very strongly in a particular cause, you must develop two personalities - the You-at-Home and the You-at-Work - and keep them separate. Many journalists in democratic countries support one political party or another. They may vote for a party or even be a member. But to keep a reputation as an unbiased journalist, they should not allow their party loyalty to influence their news judgment. The party supporter must be kept to the You-at-Home; the objective,
impartial journalist is the You-at-Work.

Being objective is only part of the battle against bias. The other part involves recognising when one side in a dispute is applying unfair pressure to get their case in the news (or another side is not getting its fair share of coverage). This can be obvious and easy to correct, or more subtle and much harder to put right.

**Practising fairness**

There are several ways you can allow personal bias to destroy objectivity and impartiality in the way you handle news. You should be aware of the dangers at each stage of the process of news production, from the first decision to cover a story through to its presentation on a page or in a bulletin.

**Selection of news**

Busy newsrooms are constantly having to make decisions about which stories to cover and which to ignore. The selection of stories can introduce a very basic bias if it is not done objectively. Simply because you disagree with a government, a group or an individual does not mean that you can suppress all stories which show the good side of them and cover only those which show them unfavourably. You should be even-handed. This is particularly important at such times as election campaigns.

Your decisions on which stories to cover should be made on the principles which govern what makes news. News should be new, unusual, interesting, significant and about people.

The exact balance of these criteria may vary depending on your audience. If you work for a scientific magazine, you may select different stories to a journalist who works in the newsroom of a pop music radio station. You must develop an accurate understanding of what is news to your audience, then be fair and consistent in the selection of every story.

**Choice of sources**

Even if you have to overcome a personal prejudice and decide to cover a story you find disagreeable, you must still take care that you are fair in your choice of sources of information. It is not fair to choose to interview an attractive personality for a cause you support but an unattractive or muddled person for a cause you oppose.

There is also the danger that, if you are asked to cover a story you dislike doing, you will fail to put enough energy into finding interviewees and arranging to talk to them. For example, someone you dislike may not want to talk to you. You must not say: "Oh well, let's forget him." You should try your hardest to get an interview or at least a comment.

If you want to be a good journalist, you should put your best effort into every story. That way you produce a good product and help objectivity.

"No comment"

In some cases people will be unwilling or unable to give an interview. Maybe they are just too busy, maybe they hate the sound of their own voice. Of course, you should try your very best to convince them they should do the interview, but if that fails you should not say: "Ah well, they had their chance and they missed it. I'll just give the other side."

You should still try for balance, even if it means finding someone else to speak for them or writing about their previous position on the issue. (Be careful, though, that your story makes clear that
Many journalists take the easy way out by writing: "Mr Rahman was not available for comment." They occasionally write: "Mr Rahman refused to comment", but this is unfair because it implies that everyone has a duty to speak to reporters. You can only "refuse" if someone is ordering you to do something. If you ask Mr Rahman for a comment and he will not give one, you should write: "Mr Rahman declined to comment." This tells your audience that you offered Mr Rahman the chance to comment, but he did not take it.

Always try to get some comment because using phrases like "declined to comment" shows that you are unable to present a fair and balanced report. If this happens too often, your reputation as a fair and honest reporter will suffer. But remember this: To maintain balance, you do not need to present both sides of an argument in one story, even though it is preferable. Balance will be achieved if you give an opposing view in the follow-up story.

Interviewing techniques

Do not abandon objectivity when you conduct the interview. It may be difficult to interview someone who stands for something you oppose or who has done something you dislike, but you must continue to be fair and accurate.

For example, if you are interviewing a drug addict or a thief, remember you are not there as a policeman or prosecutor. Do not demand answers in an aggressive tone. Keep your temper. The golden rule of all interviewing is to be polite but persistent.

Questions should be fair and you must take as much care when taking notes or recording as for any interview. If accusations have been made against the interviewee, do not make them sound like your accusations. Instead of saying: "You ran away from your responsibilities, didn't you?" you should say: "Critics say that you ran away from your responsibilities. Did you?" The outcome is the same, only the tone is fairer.

This advice applies particularly to broadcast journalists, some of whom like to ask aggressive questions for dramatic effect - the so-called tough interviewer. If that is your style, you must use it with everyone, not just the people you dislike.

Selecting material

Having conducted your interviews, you now have to put your material together into a story. Whether working for newspapers, magazines, radio or television, you have to select which facts and quotes to include and which to leave out. You will probably write your story in the usual inverted pyramid, with the most important things at the start.

Here again, you must be fair in choosing material. There are usually two sides to every argument, so do not be one-sided in choosing what facts to include or which words to quote. If your interviewee has said: "I support the present government, but with some serious reservations", it would be wrong to use only the quote: "I support the present government." Be fair and quote accurately, making sure that the meaning of each comment is put in context with what else is being said.

If the person you have interviewed stressed the importance of one particular aspect, do not omit it simply because you disagree with what was said. You should judge each comment independently under the criteria for what is news. That way you maintain objectivity.

Language

The language you use to write your story is very important. It is quite easy to change the whole of a sentence by adding one or two words loaded with a particular meaning. For example, your
interviewee might have made some remarks quite forcefully. It would be wrong to describe them as "firm" simply because you liked him, or "harsh" because you did not.

Stick to facts. If he moved his finger as he made certain remarks, you can mention it but remember that there is a lot of difference between such words as "waved" (which some people do with their fingers naturally while speaking), "wagged" (which people usually do while telling someone off) and "jabbed" (which is used to make a forceful point or accusation). In fact, it is better to keep such descriptions out of news stories, although they can be used when writing features to show something about the person involved.

Any words you use instead of the verb "said" when attributing facts and opinions can add a bias to your reporting. Journalists often like to find alternatives for the word "said", because they think that repetition becomes boring. If you do use alternatives, you must recognise that some imply that you believe the person quoted while others imply that you do not believe them.

See the table below. The left column is words which imply disbelief, the right column words suggest belief, while the centre are reasonably neutral:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISBELIEF:</th>
<th>NEUTRAL:</th>
<th>BELIEF:</th>
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<tr>
<td>claimed</td>
<td>said</td>
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<td>alleged</td>
<td>spoke of</td>
<td>pointed out</td>
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<td>inferred</td>
<td>stated</td>
<td>emphasised that</td>
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Many journalists use a thesaurus to find alternative words to enliven their copy. A thesaurus should only be used if you have a very good understanding of the language. It is much better to use a dictionary to find the exact meaning of a word. If you use clear and simple language and leave out as many adjectives and adverbs as possible, you will limit the chance of bias entering into your copy.

Once again, if your interviewee accuses someone, you must make it clear that they are the interviewee's words, not your own. For example, if he says that the regime in Tilapia is brutal, attribute the remark to him, either in reported speech or in a quote. Do not allow it to be seen as your own comment. Remember, one man's regime is another man's government. One man's cabinet is another man's junta.

There are also good legal reasons for choosing your words carefully. In most countries you can be prosecuted for making false statements about someone which causes them harm. (For more details, see Chapter 69: Defamation - what you can't do.)

You should not blemish a person's name without a special reason, even though what you say is factually correct. There is no need to call a person who kills his daughter "a beast". If he has not been tried it is for the courts to decide his guilt or innocence. If he has been found guilty, your story will be stronger if you carefully and accurately record the facts without gory details and personal judgments. It will also keep your reputation as an objective journalist.

Compare the following and see which is both more objective and more powerful:

**RIGHT:**
At four o'clock on Christmas morning, Manuel Ortez walked quietly into his baby daughter's room and plunged a carving knife five times through the heart of the sleeping child.

**WRONG:**
In the heavy dark of Christmas morning the fiendish beast Manuel Ortez slunk into his innocent daughter's room and, in a bloody frenzy, hacked the child to death with a gleaming knife.

Predictions

There is danger of introducing bias in the tenses which you use when writing. When you describe
what is happening or what has happened, it is natural to use present or past tenses. However, when you use the future tense to predict what you think may happen, remember that this is speculation. It may be well-informed and extremely accurate speculation, but it is not yet a fact.

It is safer to use words like "may" and "is expected to" when writing about events yet to come. If someone says they will do something, quote them as making the promise, do not let it seem that the prediction is yours. For example:

**RIGHT:**
The Finance Minister says he will reduce income tax before the end of the year.

**WRONG:**
The Finance Minister will reduce income tax before the end of the year.

Placing the story

If you are a sub-editor in a newsroom, you should be fair where you place a story in the paper or bulletin. Do not let personal feelings interfere with your news judgment. Just because you are strongly opposed to whale hunting, you cannot choose to lead with that and put the story about the Prime Minister's assassination further down if they are both new. There is no excuse for hiding a story down the page or bulletin simply because you do not like what is said.

Your readers or listeners may disagree with you over the order in which you rank stories because they also have special likes and dislikes. But if you are fair and follow the guidelines of news value, you will be able to defend your news judgment against all sides.

**Comment columns**

There are opportunities in the media for journalists to give their personal opinions - in writing reviews and in the commentary columns of newspapers and magazines. Journalists usually write under their own name or use a pseudonym (a made-up name). A special column called the editorial or leader column is where the paper gives its own opinion on specific topics such as a new foreign policy or a harsh prison sentence.

Any commentary column should clearly show that the statements are the personal opinions of the columnist or the opinion of the newspaper itself. This is normally shown by placing the column in a regular slot on a specific page. The title of the column or the inclusion of the author's by-line usually indicate that the column is that person's own comments. Some newspapers even use a small block saying "Comment" at the top of such columns.

Unfortunately, many journalists allow their own comments to spill over into genuine news reports. Well-educated readers can tell where fact ends and personal opinion begins, but less educated readers can be confused.

For a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 50: Features and Chapter 52: Reviewing.

**Commentary on radio or television**

There is really no place in radio or television for newspaper-style commentary columns (for reasons which we discussed in Chapter 56: Facts and opinion). If you think it will help your listeners to understand an issue by giving them some expert comments, it is better to bring in experts rather than do it yourself. This is best done in an interview in a news or current affairs program. If a politician wants to express an opinion on an issue which the newsroom does not regard as newsworthy, they should apply to buy air time for a party political broadcast, if these are allowed.

Occasionally an editor will ask people like foreign correspondents or specialist reporters to give an analysis of an event. Such segments should be kept factual and free of personal bias.
Radio and television stations may also allow their journalists to express personal opinions in reviews, perhaps reviewing a film on an arts program or judging a recipe on a food program. Such reviews should be kept separate from news bulletins and should be clearly identified as the personal views of the journalist concerned.

**Campaigning journalism**

Sometimes journalists come across things which affect them emotionally. These can be injustices, cases of cruelty or simply people who need the help of the media. In such circumstances journalists take one side of an issue and fight for that side. For example, journalists have campaigned against bad prison conditions, against political oppression or against street crime. Clearly they are not being totally objective, and in such cases the reader or listener understands why.

However, campaigning for a cause should not stop you attempting to be as objective as possible in your treatment of a story. You should still prefer facts to opinions and give people a chance to answer any allegations made against them. If the situation is really as bad as you believe it is, simply giving people the facts will be enough to convince them. Let your audience judge the rights and wrongs of the issue.

The purpose of campaigning journalism is to make other people feel deeply about something, just as you do. The best way to do this is to ask yourself what made you feel the way you do: what did you see or hear which convinced you? Whatever it was, that is what you should present to your readers or listeners, so that they might have the opportunity to feel about the issue, just as you do. If you want somebody to know what it is like to have a pin stuck in them it is a waste of time standing next to them crying in pain. It is much more effective to stick a pin in them! Similarly, saying how deeply you feel about injustice will not convince your listeners; put the injustice in front of them to see for themselves.

Campaigns often take a long time and journalists can become so involved in them that they lose sight of the original issue. It is a good idea occasionally to stand back from the issue and assess objectively. Ask yourself: “Am I still being fair and accurate? Have I exaggerated my case?”

The golden rule about objectivity is to be honest about yourself. If you recognise personal prejudice in your work, fight against it. At the end of the day, your reputation as a journalist who can be trusted is at stake.

**Contacts**

Journalists rely on contacts to tell them what is happening or give them hints on stories which might be worth covering. Contacts can range from an official within the government to the boy who keeps his eyes open for stories while selling newspapers.

Some contacts will tell you things simply because they like you or they like the idea of being involved in the media in a small way. They are not part of the story and have no particular interest in giving you one side against another.

Others, however, will tell you things because they want the news covered in a certain way. These people can be politicians who expose an opponent's wrong-doing to score political points; company public relations officers who want to sell a particular product; activists who want to highlight what they see as an injustice; a criminal who wants to get even with a corrupt policeman by "telling all". The list is endless. They all have one thing in common - they are not interested in balance, they will not help you to give the other side of the story. You can use such contacts to give you story ideas, but must go to other sources as well for balance.

**Public relations**

It is easy to be drawn into taking the side of contacts, for all sorts of reasons. Businesses,
governments, politicians and police forces in particular have recognised the value of employing special people to present their case to the media and the public. Whether they are called public relations executives or press officers, they still owe loyalty to the person who pays them. They are not there to help the media, they are there to protect and promote their employers.

The clever public relations officer or PR will be very pleasant to deal with. He or she will always try to be available to journalists, even at home. They will call you by your first name and share jokes with you. They will arrange interviews for you and issue press releases to keep you informed. They will, in effect, do everything they possibly can to make your job easier and save you digging for a story. They know that journalists who dig often find more than they were originally looking for.

They also recognise a basic fact of human nature, that if journalists can get news more easily from one side than the other they will favour that side over the other, either consciously or subconsciously. It is difficult for young journalists to have a very friendly chat with a helpful PR then write something critical about his company or organisation. How much easier it is to take their side against the opponent who angrily accuses you of trying to stir up trouble then slams the telephone down!

As well as finding the good PR more pleasant to deal with, journalists may also find them better informed and better communicators. Many companies, political parties or pressure groups now either employ professional journalists as public relations officers or send their PRs on special courses to learn how to handle the media.

So beware of the temptations offered by public relations officers. It is much easier today for a busy reporter to ask the PR manager of a shipping line to get a comment from his chairman than it is to go out and track down the opposing union official who also works full time "down on the dockside somewhere". To be a good journalist you must accept that some tasks are easy, some are difficult. Do not allocate the same amount of time to getting each side of the story - aim for the same level of achievement.

Conflicting news sources

Whenever you are getting news from a number of independent sources, whether they are wire services, contacts or witnesses, you may find conflicting information. In some cases these may be small variations, in others major differences.

For example, you may have been given two different days when strike action is due to start. By checking back, double checking and cross checking sources, it may be possible to find where the difference lies and deal with it easily. Often a phone call is all that is needed.

In other cases, where your access to information is limited, you may never be able to find out exactly who is correct. In such cases you should attribute the facts in doubt to the individuals, groups, companies, organisations or governments which gave them. For example, if one army claims to have fired three missiles and their enemy says they only fired two, quote both sides and let the reader or listener judge from experience who to believe. If you are still unhappy about that solution in really controversial areas, leave out the details in question.

Sometimes you may receive conflicting details from two usually-reliable news agencies. For example, Reuters may say that 1,000 people have been killed while Associated Press says 2,000. If you cannot see an obvious reason for the different figures (such as the AP story being more up-to-date than Reuters), contact the agencies themselves, perhaps by telex. If you cannot determine which is correct, you may have to quote both of them - as long as you are sure that this will not confuse your audience. You must, of course, clarify the situation as soon as possible. The alternative is to wait until the situation is clearer before running the story.

Whenever there is conflict between two reports from the same agency, look for reasons why (such as one report being more up-to-date or from a bureau nearer to the event). Again, if you cannot find an obvious reason, contact the nearest branch of the agency for an explanation.
**Favours**

As a journalist, you must never accept a favour or a gift if you suspect that it is being used as a bribe. They can quite easily affect your credibility as a journalist.

If you accept any gift on the understanding that you will write favourably about the donor - whether they offer a carton of beer, a car or a trip abroad - you have said that there is a price on your honesty as a journalist. You can be bought. You are no different from the corrupt policeman who publicly defends the law but privately commits crimes.

Even the smallest gift or favour destroys your credibility as a fair journalist. By breaking down your protection of honesty, it also makes it easier to accept the next bribe, then the next.

Even if the gift does not make you act any differently, you might find it difficult to convince other people of this. The donor might also try to blackmail you over the issue to get your support.

If someone offers you anything free, such as a sample of their product or a free holiday to try their hotel or airline, you should tell the news editor or director of news immediately. They will then decide whether or not you can accept it. It might be possible to accept it, but only on condition that everyone involved knows that it will not influence your judgment. If the car you test drive is bad value, you will say so. If the airline is unpunctual, dirty and overcrowded, you will write that too. Very few public relations officers would offer you a direct bribe, but they might wrap it up in an innocent-looking offer. (See Chapter 58: Pressures on journalists.)

**Elections**

You must be especially careful about being unbiased during elections. What you write could alter the outcome.

It is the journalist’s duty in a democratic society to keep the people well informed of the choices available to them at election time. You should report who the candidates are, what their policies are and what are the main issues of the campaign. You should also tell people what is happening in the campaign generally, who is saying what, where and to whom. Only if the electors are well informed can they make wise decisions about voting.

Journalists usually have plenty of material at election times. The politicians and their parties make sure that the media are told about what they are doing and saying. Many politicians and parties now employ press officers to feed the media information which shows the candidate or party in a good light.

Poorer politicians and smaller parties may not be able to employ specialists and have to do such work themselves. An independent media should make sure that no-one gets an unfair advantage because they have more money to spend on campaigning.

Often the best way of ensuring fairness and balance is to set guidelines at the start of the election on how the candidates and parties will be treated.

Some newspapers and broadcasting stations try to give each a fair share of publicity by counting the number of column centimetres or amount of air time each one gets. This would only include stories which can be seen as campaigning. For example, you could count stories about campaign trips, appearances, speeches, policy statements, predictions about polling and attacks on opponents. You would not count hard news stories about the candidates, such as an appearance in court on a driving charge. Because such hard news stories are usually bad for the person concerned, one cannot argue that they are helping his or her campaign.

This approach has a number of variations, such as allowing space in proportion to the size of parties or number of candidates they are fielding. Thus in a situation where there are two major parties and one minor party and a few independents, the paper or station may decide to allow the
major parties 35 percent of the election coverage each, the minor party would get 20 percent, and the independents would get 10 percent divided equally between them.

In practice, this should not mean censoring news, simply keeping a daily or weekly check on how much the parties and candidates get and adjusting them to get a balance over a period of time.

Your country may have laws governing how much time or space you must give each candidate or party to maintain balance. In many countries, broadcasting laws state that balance must be maintained and records kept throughout the campaign period. You must check what the law says in your country.

Reporting court cases

It is especially important to be fair when reporting court cases. The whole point of a court case is for the law to decide guilt or innocence. It is not your job to take sides and either condemn or clear someone in print or over the airwaves.

Not only is it very unfair and undermines the impartiality of the legal system, it is often against the law. If a court thinks that you are trying to do its work for it, you may be prosecuted for contempt.

In some countries, such as the United States, journalists can make all kinds of comments about current legal proceedings. This is because the American Constitution has to balance the individual’s right to a fair trial against the First Amendment protecting free speech. In countries which have based their laws on the English legal system, the balance is in favour of a fair trial; free speech has to be limited to protect the individual’s right to a fair trial. The judge or jury must not be influenced by what they read or hear on the news (see Chapter 68: Contempt).

All reports of court cases should be fair and accurate giving time and space to both prosecution and defence. Any comments on the case must wait until the case is over.

(For a more detailed discussion on balance in reporting court cases, see Chapter 64: The rules of court reporting.)

Public displays of support

It is often difficult for journalists not to get involved in some issues. Your everyday work brings you into contact with injustices and cruelties of all sorts. Some journalists feel the need to do something, not only to write about it. There are also others who become journalists because they support a particular cause. Although they may try hard to be objective and impartial at work, they may continue to be a member of a political party, organisation or pressure group in their free time.

If you take sides on any issue, as a journalist it is not wise to show the fact. Opponents may use it as a weapon to attack your reporting, even though you feel that you are being entirely objective.

So avoid wearing T-shirts or badges which show your support for a particular group. Certainly never wear them at work or when conducting an interview. Even the smallest badge or sticker can lead people to think that you are biased. For example, a tiny anti-nuclear badge will be noticed if you are sent to interview a visiting admiral of the United States Navy.

As long as you are a reporter, you should avoid taking a leading role in public demonstrations, speeches or rallies. You should also avoid taking a public role in any controversial organisation. For example, being a Scout or Guide leader is acceptable, but giving a speech supporting a political candidate is dangerous.

Once you are publicly seen to be taking sides, you will never convince people again that you are impartial, even though professionally you may be.
**TO SUMMARISE:**

Reporting should be objective and impartial

Be fair in your:

- selection of news
- choice of sources and interviewing technique
- news writing
- use of the story

Avoid open displays of support for one side in a conflict
In this chapter we consider the ways in which journalists are tempted to go against their ethical standards. We also consider ways to resist these temptations.

Journalists are professional people, trying to work within a code of professional ethics. As we saw in the last chapter, this includes the need to be fair to all parties involved in any news story.

However, journalists cannot operate in a vacuum, doing what they think is right without pressures being put on them. Journalists face pressure from a variety of sources, all trying to make the journalist behave in a way which is not the way the journalist would choose.

It is important that you try to resist all these forms of pressure, as far as possible.

Of course, you will sometimes fail. This is an imperfect world, and journalists are also imperfect. Nevertheless, you should always try to resist the kinds of pressure which we shall discuss in this chapter.
**Employer**

Your employer pays your salary. In return, they expect to say how you will do your job. This can lead to ethical problems for journalists.

If you work for a government-owned news organisation, then your government will be your employer. This could make it very difficult for you to report critically on things which the government is doing.

Ministers will often put pressure on public service journalists to report things which are favourable to the government (even when they are not newsworthy) and not to report things which are unfavourable to the government. They can enforce public service discipline, to make journalists do as the government wants. This is especially difficult to resist in small developing countries, where there may be little or no alternative employment.

It is not only government-owned media where such pressure exists, though.

Commercial media are paid for by a mixture of advertising and sales. To increase sales, newspapers, radio and television stations sometimes sponsor sporting or cultural events, and then publicise them. Your boss may demand more coverage for the event than it is worth, in order to promote the event as much as possible. You will need to persuade them of the danger of this - that other events will have to be neglected to give extra coverage to your sponsored event, and that this will risk losing readers or listeners.

Advertisers can also bring pressure to bear upon owners and editors. A big advertiser may threaten to stop advertising unless you run a news report of something good which the advertiser has just done; or, much worse, it may threaten to stop advertising unless you ignore a news event which is unfavourable to the advertiser.

Ideally, any news organisation should dismiss such threats, and judge each story only on its news merits. However, this is easier in a large community with a diverse and developed economy than it is in a small country with a developing economy. When a commercial news organisation is operating on a tiny profit margin, it will not be easy to turn away a big advertiser, and its owners may feel forced to give in to the pressure.

In some cases, the advertiser may even be the government. In many countries the government is the biggest advertiser - with job advertisements, calls for tenders, public announcements and so on - and this can be a way in which governments bring indirect pressure to bear upon commercial news media.

What should you do about this kind of pressure? The first thing which any junior journalist should do is to report it to their editor. It will be for the editor to decide what to do. He or she will need to resist the employer as far as possible, pointing out the dangers of failing to report the news fully and fairly. The main danger is that readers or listeners who already know of the event which is being suppressed, realise that it is not being reported and so lose confidence in the newspaper, radio or television station involved. This may, in the long run, result in more serious problems for ministers than some short-term embarrassment, and may do more long-term damage to your organisation's finances than the loss of one advertiser.

The truth is, though, that your power to resist pressure from your employer is limited. You can only do your best, and accept that the rest is beyond your control.

**Authority**

Both government-owned and commercial news media may face pressure from authority - the government, the police, customs, or some other branch of authority.

Governments can threaten, or make, laws to force all news media to be licensed. This would give
them power to grant licences only to those news organisations which please the government. Even the threat to introduce such legislation may be enough to frighten journalists, and to make them afraid of criticising the government too much.

The best way to resist such pressure is to stimulate public debate on the issue of media licensing. As with any proposed legislation, the news media should encourage public debate before it comes in, so that leaders have the opportunity to judge public opinion.

If society generally is opposed to licensing of all news media, then a democratically-elected government will think very seriously before introducing such a thing. On the other hand, if society wants news media to be licensed by government, then it is something which journalists will just have to accept, however much they may disagree with it.

Other forms of authority may bring pressure to bear on you in less official ways. Police may attempt to confiscate your camera when you are taking photographs which the police do not like; or they may deny you access to a court room or a public meeting; or they may order you not to report certain things. Junior journalists should always report such incidents to their editor. The editor will best resist this kind of pressure by knowing precisely what he is allowed to do, and what he is not allowed to do. If he knows that the police are acting outside their powers, he can politely approach a very senior police officer, or even the Police Minister, and report the incident. They can then handle it. If the police act outside their powers and no action is taken, even though it has been reported, then the editor can publicise the fact in a major news story. It is wise, though, to try to sort out such problems quietly first, since in this way future relations may be more positive.

**Threats**

Many people think they can avoid bad publicity by threatening journalists with violence, or with legal action. Such threats should always be resisted (unless you are advised by a lawyer that you are legally in the wrong).

Junior journalists should always report any threat which they have received to their editor. If the threat was a threat of violence, then the editor should seriously consider informing the police. It is usually a criminal offence to threaten violence against somebody, and journalists are protected by such a law as much as anybody else.

If the threat is of legal action, then the editor's response will depend upon the facts of the case. The editor should know the law well enough to judge whether or not to take the threat seriously. If he suspects that there may be grounds for legal action, he should consult a lawyer. Then, if he finds that he or his reporter is in the wrong, of course he should immediately set things right. If, however, he finds that there is no basis for legal action, then he and his reporter can happily ignore the empty threat.

**Bribes**

Journalists do not usually earn big money. You may therefore be vulnerable to bribery - somebody offering money (or goods or services) in return for a favourable story being written, or an unfavourable story being ignored.

To accept a bribe is dishonest. Your honesty is like virginity - it can only be lost once. Once you have accepted a bribe, you can never again be trusted as a professional person.

Journalists who are offered bribes will usually be offered them in private. This is so that the person attempting the bribe can later deny that it ever happened. If this happens, you should immediately invite somebody else into the room, and then ask the briber to repeat their offer. They are unlikely to do so but, if they do, you will have a witness.
In any case, report the matter to your editor.

**Gifts and freebies**

Commercial companies sometimes try to buy journalists' friendship by giving them small presents or by giving them the opportunity to travel at the company's expense (sometimes called freebies).

Often this travel is legitimate. An airline which is introducing a new route to and from your country may well offer you a free seat on the first flight. You will then have the opportunity to write from first-hand experience about the service and about the destination. If the airline is confident that its service is good, and that the destination is interesting, they will be satisfied that whatever you write will be good publicity for them.

As long as it is understood that you are free to write whatever you like, without the company that provides the free travel having any influence, such an arrangement is acceptable. However, if you are offered a ticket in return for writing "something nice" about the company, this is not acceptable. Poor newspapers, radio and television stations may be grateful for charity to top up inadequate travel budgets, but they should never be so poor that they sell their professional honour.

In any case, such offers should never be accepted or negotiated by a junior journalist. Only the editor should do so, and any offers must be referred to the editor. The editor can judge whether or not the terms of the offer are acceptable.

Gifts are a difficult area. Small gifts, such as a tie or a bottle of whisky, may be acceptable, but the gift should not be so big as to buy your loyalty. The golden rule for each journalist is whether they would care very much if the company decided not to offer another gift like this in the future. If you do not care whether they offer you such a gift again, then you have not been bought. If you deeply desire another similar gift, you are in danger; remove the temptation by telling the company not to send any more.

The former editor of the *Hindustan Times*, Khushwant Singh, once said that he would accept a bottle of whisky from anybody, because he would still feel free to criticise them; but he would not accept a case (12 bottles) of whisky, because he was afraid that might influence the way he did his job.

In any case, all gifts, however small, should be declared to your editor. If your editor considers that any gift is too large or too generous to be accepted, you will have to return it, politely but firmly. People need to know that you and your news organisation have moral and ethical standards, and are prepared to live by them.

Sometimes, executives in companies or government departments will devote a lot of time and energy to making you into their friend. They may take you out for meals, buy you drinks or invite you to their home. Beware of this. If it is genuine friendship, there may be no problem; but it may be an attempt to win your loyalty. It is as bad to run a story which is just a free advertisement, or to suppress bad news, as a favour to a friend, as it is to do the same thing in return for a bribe.

**Family**

In many societies, a person's first loyalty is to members of their extended family, or clan, or tribe. This is expected to take priority over all other loyalties, including their loyalty to the ethical standards of their profession. Thus, a doctor who saved the life of a traditional clan enemy could meet with disapproval from his own relatives.

Journalists, too, face conflicts of loyalty like this. It may not only be pressure from your family, clan or tribe; it may also be from members of a club or association or church to which you belong.

For young journalists in small societies, this is often the hardest kind of pressure to resist. They
understand that they should have a loyalty to their professional ethics, but deep down they are certain that they must not offend the family. To do so, and to be cut off from the family, would be unthinkable.

It is important, therefore, that you avoid such conflicts of interest whenever possible. If you are told by your editor to cover a story which involves your own extended family, or clan, or tribe, you should point out to the editor this conflict of loyalty and ask that the story be assigned to another reporter.

The hardest job is that of the editor himself. He cannot avoid the clash of responsibility in this way, and must make the decision either to please his family and sacrifice his organisation's credibility; or to maintain his professional standards and cut himself off from his family. Neither decision will be easy, but it is to be hoped that senior journalists in such situations will be able to set an example of professional and ethical courage to their junior colleagues.

**Tradition**

In societies which are in rapid change from traditional to modern Western ways, there is often a clash between the way in which things were done in the past and the way in which the profession says they should be done now.

For example, freedom of speech may itself be a recent imported concept. Traditionally, it may be that only men of a certain rank had the right to express their views; or that certain clans had the right to express their views on certain subjects; and it may have been the case that very few people had the right to question a chief.

All this is very different to a Western-style free Press, in which everybody is encouraged to speak on every subject, and journalists, however junior, are encouraged to cross-examine leaders, however senior.

Tradition will often be used as a weapon to pressure journalists into patterns of behaviour which go against their professional ethics. Junior journalists should always report such instances to their editor, and seek guidance.

The way forward will require careful thought. The professional ethics of journalists in your country may still be developing. They will be influenced by professional journalists' ethics in other countries, where journalism is more established; but they will also be influenced by the traditions of your society. Out of a clash of cultures, a new culture may develop, suitable for your society in the modern world. Only you, and other journalists in your society, can form these new ethical standards for your society; and you must be prepared both to listen carefully to other points of view and to act according to your judgment, while these new standards are emerging.

**Personal conviction**

Journalists may come under pressure from their own strong beliefs.

For example, a journalist who is deeply opposed to capital punishment may be writing a story about crime. In the course of gathering the information, they may interview somebody who calls for the death penalty as the answer to increasing crime. The journalist may be tempted not to report these comments, and to leave the question of capital punishment out of the story. This would clearly be unethical.

It is as bad to censor the news to suit your own views as it is to censor the news to please your family, or clan, or tribe. This is contrary to the most fundamental principle of free speech - that we may disagree with what somebody says, but that we must fight to defend their right to say it. See Chapter 57: Fairness for a fuller discussion of this principle.

It is not only the things you really believe in which may cause problems. Some journalists accept
contracts to advertise products, as a way of earning some extra money. You must think carefully before you do this.

If you are seen by your readers or listeners to be in favour of a particular product, they will not believe that you are impartial if you later report a story about that or any rival products.

It is important for journalists to be impartial. You may know that you have no special liking for the product which you advertised - you only did it for the money - but your readers or listeners will not know that.

**Codes of ethics**

In many countries journalists try to work within a professional code of ethics. This usually lays down in simple, straightforward terms the kind of things they should and should not do. Typically such codes contain rules about issues such as honesty, fairness, independence and respect for the rights of other people such as interviewees, victims and readers or listeners.

In most free press democracies, journalist codes of ethics are usually voluntary, perhaps monitored by a professional association or journalist union. In such cases, the only real sanctions against journalists who breach the codes are criticism from colleagues and perhaps loss of membership of the association or union. In some cases media employers might use the journalist code of ethics to set standards for journalists they employ, in which case breaches of the codes might lead to discipline or even sacking.

In some countries where the media are suppressed, the government may try to control what is written or broadcast by imposing a code of ethics backed by law and policed by the authorities. These are like any other laws in such countries; breaking them may lead to punishment, so it is up to journalists themselves to decide whether to obey oppressive codes or follow the higher principles of journalistic ethics and risk the consequences.

A good example of a journalist code of ethics in free press democracies is from the Australian Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). It states:

**AJA CODE OF ETHICS**

*Respect for truth and the public’s right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role. They search, disclose, record, question, entertain, suggest and remember. They inform citizens and animate democracy. They give a practical form to freedom of expression. Many journalists work in private enterprise, but all have these public responsibilities. They scrutinise power, but also exercise it, and should be accountable. Accountability engenders trust. Without trust, journalists do not fulfil their public responsibilities. MEAA members engaged in journalism commit themselves to*

- **Honesty**
- **Fairness**
- **Independence**
- **Respect for the rights of others**

1. Report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give a fair opportunity for reply.

2. Do not place unnecessary emphasis on personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, family relationships, religious belief, or physical or intellectual disability.

3. Aim to attribute information to its source. Where a source seeks anonymity, do not agree without first considering the source’s motives and any alternative attributable
source. Where confidences are accepted, respect them in all circumstances.

4. Do not allow personal interest, or any belief, commitment, payment, gift or benefit, to undermine your accuracy, fairness or independence.

5. Disclose conflicts of interest that affect, or could be seen to affect, the accuracy, fairness or independence of your journalism. Do not improperly use a journalistic position for personal gain.

6. Do not allow advertising or other commercial considerations to undermine accuracy, fairness or independence.

7. Do your utmost to ensure disclosure of any direct or indirect payment made for interviews, pictures, information or stories.

8. Use fair, responsible and honest means to obtain material. Identify yourself and your employer before obtaining any interview for publication or broadcast. Never exploit a person’s vulnerability or ignorance of media practice.

9. Present pictures and sound which are true and accurate. Any manipulation likely to mislead should be disclosed.

10. Do not plagiarise.

11. Respect private grief and personal privacy. Journalists have the right to resist compulsion to intrude.

12. Do your utmost to achieve fair correction of errors.

**Guidance Clause**

Basic values often need interpretation and sometimes come into conflict. Ethical journalism requires conscientious decision-making in context. Only substantial advancement of the public interest or risk of substantial harm to people allows any standard to be overridden.

Other useful codes can be found at:

The Philippines Press Institute
The Canadian Association of Journalists (CAJ)
The British National Union of Journalists (NUJ)

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) website has links to a Declaration of Principles on the Conduct of Journalists.

Journalism.org, the Pew Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism has links to several industry and professional codes, mainly in the US.

Ethicnet has links to codes of ethics and practice for most European countries but be warned, some of them come from countries where independent media are suppressed and the codes are used by governments to constrain journalists. With a similar warning, Medialaw.com gives several codes of ethics for Asian countries.

Finally, Al Jazeera provides an example of how a media organisation can develop a sophisticated professional code of ethics for its journalists.
**TO SUMMARISE:**

Live by the ethical standards of your profession; resist all forms of pressure to lower your standards

Report any threats, bribes or other secret pressure to your editor

Do not sell yourself for a gift or freebie

Avoid reporting stories in which you have family interests or other loyalties
Chapter 59: Sources of information

This and the following chapter are on sources of information. In this chapter, we discuss the ethics of gathering and using information. We suggest ways of judging the reliability of different sources. We examine the use of information given on the record, non-attributable and off the record. In the next chapter we discuss the issue of confidentiality in journalism.

News is happening all the time: People are being born or dying, banks are being robbed, roads are being planned, companies are making profits or losses, storms are destroying homes, courts are sending people to jail or freeing them, scientists are discovering new drugs. Every minute of every day something newsworthy is happening somewhere in the world.

Even if you are a journalist working in a small country, something newsworthy is probably happening in your country at this moment, while you are reading this book. Your job as a journalist is to get information on those events and present it to your readers or listeners. But you cannot be everywhere all the time to see those events for yourself. So you need other ways of getting information on all those hundreds (maybe millions) of events you cannot witness yourself. When someone or something provides you with information, we call them a source.

Sources of information can be people, letters, books, files, films, tapes - in fact, anything which journalists use to put news stories together. Sources are very important if you want to report on events or issues and explain the world to your audience. Journalists try to work as much as possible from their own observations, but this is often not possible. Some events or issues are finished before the journalist gets there. Others are like plants which only show their stem and leaves above the ground - the all-important roots are hidden from sight. Journalists who only report what they see can miss much of the news unless they have sources to tell them of more details or other aspects which are out of sight.

Types of sources

Journalists should deal in reliable facts, so it is important that the sources you use for writing stories can give you accurate information about what happened or what was said. But just as there are lots of different news events, so there are many different sources of information. Some of them will give you very accurate information and we call these sources reliable (because we can rely on what they say). Others are less reliable, but still useful, while some can hardly be trusted at all. The main way of judging sources of information is on their reliability.

Reporters

One of the most reliable sources of information (although not completely reliable) are other journalists. They may be your colleagues or reporters from a news agency which supplies your organisation. If they are well trained, experienced and objective, their reports will usually be accurate and can be trusted. However, if there are any essential facts missing from their reports, these will have to be provided. Either they will have to provide them or you will have to find the missing facts yourself. Mistakes can happen. This is why news organisations should have a system for checking facts. A reporter's story should be checked by the news editor then the sub-editor. In small newsrooms, where the reporter may also be the editor or newsreader, the reporter must be especially careful in checking facts.

There is also the danger that reporters misinterpret what they think they see and then present that as a fact. This often happens when reporting such things as the size of a crowd. Unable to count every person in it, they make an estimate, often sharing their guesses with other journalists on the scene. This is just an estimate and any report which says "there were 40,000 people present" should be treated with caution, unless the reporter knows the exact number who came through the
All sources, including reporters, are said to be reliable if we think they can be believed consistently. If a source is always correct in the information they provide, we will believe them next time. If they make a mistake, we may doubt what they say. Reliability is built up over time.

Your personal reliability as a journalist is important. If you have a good record for fair and accurate reporting, you will be believed. If you get a reputation for being careless in your work or biased in your interpretation, your colleagues, readers or listeners will not be able to rely upon you. In all cases it is better only to report what you know and make it clear in your report that everything else is either an estimate, an opinion or the word of someone else, perhaps a witness. You must always try to give precise facts and attributed opinion. If you cannot do that, you can use phrases like "it is believed that ..." or "it appears that ...". It is better to do this than to leave your readers or listeners believing that what you have said is a proven fact.

Primary sources

Often the source is someone at the centre of the event or issue. We call such people primary sources. It might be a man who fell 1,000 metres from an aircraft and lived to tell the tale; or a union leader who is leading wage negotiations. They are usually the best sources of information about their part of what happened. They should be able to give you accurate details and also supply strong comments.

The fall survivor might say: "I saw the ground rushing up towards me and I kept thinking `So this is death'." The union leader might warn: "If the employers want blood on their hands, we are ready to supply it."

Of course, just because a person was present at an event does not mean that they are either accurate or fair. The fall survivor may have injured his head after landing and so be confused. The union leader will want to present his side in the best light. It is vital to double-check and cross-check facts with other sources.

A word of warning here: If any of your sources, however reliable, gives you information which is defamatory, you can still be taken to court for using it. You are responsible for deciding whether or not to publish the defamatory material. (See Chapters 69 and 70 on defamation.)

Written sources

Not all primary sources will be spoken. Written reports can make an excellent source of information for a journalist. They are usually written after a lot of research by the authors, they have been checked for accuracy and are usually published with official approval.

However, just because information is printed, that does not mean that it is reliable. With typewriters, computers and modern technology, it is relatively easy to produce printed material. You must look at who has produced the document. Are they in a position to know enough about the topic and have access to the reliable facts? Do they have a reputation for reliability?

This is especially important with information on the Internet. Anyone can put information onto the Internet and unless you know how trustworthy they are you cannot judge the reliability of what they write.

One advantage of the Internet is that you can quickly cross-check numerous sources, but beware: a mistake on one site can easily and rapidly be repeated by people writing on other sites. Even major online references such as Wikipedia rely on volunteers writing the entries and checking their accuracy and there have been numerous cases of people using entries in Wikipedia and other online reference works to spread untruths.

In many countries, official transcripts of the proceedings of a court or parliament have some legal
protection from actions for defamation. (See Chapter 67: Privilege and Chapters 69 and 70 on defamation.)

Leaked documents

You may occasionally be given documents which have not been officially released to the press. They may be given to you by someone in a company or government department who does not want to be seen giving them to the media. We call these leaked documents.

Documents are often leaked by people who believe that the public should know the contents (such as an environmental report), but who are unable to reveal it in public themselves, perhaps because they do not have the authority to do so. In some cases, documents are leaked by a person to gain an advantage over someone else, perhaps someone who is criticised in the report.

Leaked documents are often excellent sources of news stories because they can contain information which someone wants to keep secret. This might be a plan to do something which the public might oppose, such as bulldozing homes to make a new road. It might be a report on corruption within an organisation which the heads of that organisation do not want to be publicly known. Just because a government, company or other group does not want information to be known, that does not mean that you should not report it. If you believe that it is important to inform your readers or listeners of certain facts, you must do that, even if the information was given to you unofficially. Of course, like any information, leaked documents must still be checked for accuracy before they can be used. (See Chapters 39 to 41 on investigative reporting.)

There are also legal dangers to consider when using leaked documents. They might, for instance, have been stolen. It is usually an offence to receive stolen property if you think it could have been stolen, even if it is only a few sheets of paper. As we explain in the chapters on investigative reporting, photocopying the document then returning it is often a way to overcome this problem.

Leaked documents could also be covered by copyright, so you could be breaking the law by quoting directly from them. You are on safer ground in reporting the substance of what was said, in your own words. (For more details on copyright, see Chapter 63: Introduction to the law.)

Secondary sources

Secondary sources are those people who do not make the news, but who pass it on. The official police report of an incident or comments by someone's press officer can be called secondary sources. Secondary sources are not usually as reliable as primary sources.

Most eyewitnesses should be treated as secondary sources for journalists because, although they are able to tell what they think they have seen, they are often not trained for such work and can be very inaccurate, without meaning to be.

You have to assess the reliability of secondary sources and if necessary tell your readers or listeners where the information came from.

For a more detailed discussion on attributing information, see Chapters 8 and 9 on quotes and attribution.

Tip-offs

Occasionally someone will call with a story tip-off but refuse to give their name. These are said to be anonymous (meaning "no name"). These are the most dangerous sources of information and should only be used with extreme caution. Although anonymous tip-offs can provide good story ideas, they must never be used without a lot of checking. If they are wrong, you will be held directly responsible unless you have checked what they said with other more reliable sources.
Often people who ring up with a tip-off will tell you their name if asked, but on the promise that you do not reveal their name to anyone else. You must still cross-check what they say because, of course, you cannot quote them as your source if there is any dispute about accuracy, for example if you are taken to court for defamation.

**Attribution**

When you get information from a source, you normally need to attribute that information to someone. Attribution means to tell your readers or listeners the name and title of the person you interviewed or document you got the information from. You do it, for example, through the verb "to say" or a phrase like "according to ..." (See Chapter 9: Attribution.)

There are three levels of attribution, depending on whether your source is happy about being publicly identified or whether they want to keep some secrecy about what they tell you. These three levels (which we will explain in detail) are:

- **On the record**, which means you can use both their words and their name;
- **Non-attributable**, which means you can use the information, but not the source's name;
- **Off the record**, which means you cannot use either the information or the source's name.

All of these terms are only used to describe reporting methods. They should not appear in your finished story. Let us look at these three in detail:

**On the record**

Most information you are given will be on the record. People will tell you the details openly and allow you to quote their names and titles. The politician making a speech, the witness describing a crash, the police officer reporting an arrest, the company chairman defending an increase in prices, all are usually prepared to be quoted and to give their names. Even if they are unhappy about the story you are writing (perhaps because it makes them look bad), most people will understand your need to report fairly and accurately what they say.

It is always best to get information on the record. You can remain accurate by using the exact words people say. You can also make the story seem more human by using direct quotes (or by using their voices on radio and television). But most important, people judge what they read or hear by the person who says it. They are much more likely to take notice if the Justice Minister says he believes in capital punishment than if the man who sweeps the street says it. On the record comments have an extra level of understanding for people because they know who is speaking and exactly what was said.

**Non-attributable**

Sometimes a source will give you information on the understanding that you can use the information but not attribute it to them.

Your source may do this for one of several reasons. Perhaps they are not officially allowed to give you the information, but they think it could be made public. Perhaps they do not want to be in the public eye.

Politicians sometimes give non-attributable details of a plan so that they can find out public reaction to it without any risk. If the public likes the plan, the politician can then go on the record and claim the credit. If the public do not like the plan, the politician can abandon it without losing face because his name was never associated with it anyway. The danger for journalists is that, if the politician does decide to abandon an unpopular plan, you will be left looking like a fool for writing about a story which the politician will then deny ever having considered. Politicians
occasionally leak document to the media for similar reasons - to test public opinion on an issue unofficially.

If you agree not to use your source's name, there are phrases you can use instead, such as "a spokesperson for...", "a reliable source at..." or "sources within..." These should only be used if you cannot convince the source to go on the record. They are an admission that you cannot tell the whole truth.

If your source refuses to go on the record, ask them if they mind some information being used and attributed to them, but leaving the more sensitive information not attributed specifically to them. They may allow their name to be used for certain parts but not for others.

For example, the Police Minister, Ari Katoa, may tell you about a forthcoming operation against drug growers, but not wish to be quoted on the details for fear of offending his police commissioner. However, he will be quoted on the problem itself. You might then write the story:

Police in East Island are to launch a major offensive against marijuana growers.

Extra police will be drafted in from today and helicopters will be used to search out drug plantations.

Sources within the Police Department say this is the biggest operation of its kind ever mounted on the island.

Police Minister Ari Katoa says drug abuse is a serious menace to the stability of the nation and the lives of young people.

You should try to avoid making any agreement to accept non-attributable information unless it is unavoidable. Your job as a journalist is to pass on news as accurately as possible. Unattributed stories will not seem as accurate to your audience as stories where information is attributed.

Off the record

You will occasionally be given information on the understanding that it is totally off the record. Although you will have to ask your source exactly what they mean by such a phrase, it usually means that you should not even write about what they tell you. And you must certainly not use their name.

People usually give information off the record when they want you to understand the background to something which is too sensitive for them to talk publicly about. For example, you might get a tip-off of a major police operation planned for the next day against the hide-out of a criminal gang. You ask the police chief for more information, but he will obviously not want you to publish anything which might warn the gang. On the other hand, he might not want to say "no comment" because you might start asking questions somewhere else. So he might say he will tell you off the record, on condition that you do not tell anyone else.

Because he is asking you a favour - that is to keep secret something you already know a little bit about - you should expect a favour in return. If you agree not to publish details of the story before the raid, ask him whether, as a sign of goodwill on his part, he will allow you to accompany the police on the raid. You will then beat all your competitors to the story of the raid itself and have a scoop.

One thing to remember about any request to treat information off the record is that it is only a request. You can agree or disagree. If a person says they will only speak to you off the record, you must decide how important their information is - and whether you can get it from somewhere else. If you cannot, perhaps you can agree to their conditions. In any case, you should bargain with them to give it on the record or at least non-attributed.
If a person gives you an interview and only tells you at the end that it was all off the record, argue that they should have said so earlier and not wasted your time. You are in a strong position because you now know what it is they want to keep a secret.

**Using assumed names**

You occasionally have to protect a source's identity by giving them an assumed name. This arises most often when you are writing about the victims of some kind of abuse, usually in feature articles or documentaries. These people may not mind you telling their story, but they do not want other people to know exactly who they are.

Children especially should be protected, although you can use assumed names for anyone with a good reason to have their identity kept secret, such as alcoholics, drug addicts or battered wives.

It is usual in such cases to give the person assumed name, for example "Tony" or "Juanita", and no surname. You must, of course, tell your readers or listeners that this is not the person's real name, but is being used to protect them. If you use a picture them, make sure they are not recognisable in it. If you use their voice, it is common practice in radio and television to electronically change it so it cannot be recognised.

You may also have to disguise other facts of the story if there is a chance that these will lead people to identify the person. This should only be done after careful consideration and with the approval of your editor.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

You must assess the reliability of all sources of information; this determines:

- what information you use
- how you present it to your readers or listeners

Avoid agreeing to keep information off the record unless there is no alternative
As a journalist, you can always decline to accept information from a source unless they agree to be identified. However, once you have made the promise not to identify them, you must never break your word. If you do, people will never talk to you again. This introduces us to the idea of confidentiality, one of the most important areas of journalism ethics.

What is confidentiality?

The words "confidence" and "confidentiality" are based on the Latin word for trust. When you are given information in confidence, this usually means that you promise that you will not tell anyone else where you got it from. Your confidential informant trusts you to keep their identity secret. Agreeing to accept non-attributable information is the most common example of confidentiality.

People usually ask for confidentiality because they are afraid of other people finding out they gave you information. There are all sorts of reasons why they need confidentiality:

- They might fear that their bosses will punish them for giving the information.
- They might be afraid of what other people think about them if certain information is shown to have come from them.
- They might be in a position of power but limited by rules about what they can say officially.

Confidentiality of sources is central to the ethics of journalism. As a journalist, you rely on people telling you things. Sometimes those people do not want their identity revealed to others. Although it is always better to be able to quote someone by name, in certain circumstances you have to quote what your source says without revealing away their identity. If you name a source who has given you information in confidence, you betray their trust. They will probably never give you confidential information again. But more importantly, anyone who knows that you cannot be trusted will probably refuse to give you information in confidence. If people mistrust you, they might carry that mistrust to all journalists. Any journalist who betrays a trust weakens the whole of the profession.

It is important too that you do not give away any clues to the identity of a source who has asked to remain anonymous. This means taking extra care in phrasing the way you describe how your information was obtained. It can also mean leaving out newsworthy pieces of information which would identify the source.

For example, the Prime Minister's secretary may have given you secret information in confidence or off the record. If you write the story attributing the details to "sources on the Prime Minister's personal staff", you risk exposing your source, especially if there are only one or two people on the Prime Minister's personal staff. It might be better to attribute it to "sources in the Prime Minister's department" if it is a big department, or even "Government sources" if you feel that will protect your source better. Of course, your readers or listeners will judge the value of information by how close the source of it is to the event or to the people making decisions. You need to balance the need to show that your sources are close to the centre of the information (and therefore reliable) against the need to protect the identity of a confidential source.

In some cases, your editor will ask who your confidential source is. Editors often want to know so that they can assess how reliable the information is. After all, they too can be sued or sent to jail for what is published or broadcast. You must get approval from your source before you reveal their
name even to your editor. Once you do so, your editor must guard that confidentiality as strongly as you do.

This promise of confidentiality is particularly hard to keep in cases where the law may demand that you reveal your sources. In many countries, courts, tribunals, parliamentary committees and royal commissions can order you to reveal your sources of information if they think that this will help them in the administration of justice. If you fail to obey their order you may be fined or imprisoned (or both) for contempt. In some cases, journalists have been jailed for lengthy terms, to be released only when they purger their contempt by revealing the information first demanded by the court. It is more common for journalists to be released from their promise of confidentiality when the source himself comes forward to give his identity.

It is the legal opinion in many countries that journalists have no special protection under law. Lawyers, priests and doctors are often protected by law in their dealings with their clients, parishioners or patients - journalists are not. (See Chapter 68: Contempt.)

The journalist's position is extremely unpleasant in cases where confidence comes in conflict with the law. On the one hand you will be accused of obstructing the law by refusing to name your sources. On the other, you will betray one of the central ethics of journalism if you reveal the name of someone who spoke to you in strictest confidence (even though they may be criminals).

Although journalists are always encouraged to work within the law, confidentiality is one situation in which you may have to defy the law for a greater good. Revealing a confidential source may assist the law in prosecuting one case, but you must defend a system of confidentiality which encourages the exposure of many future cases.

Journalists are bound by the law; but they believe it is in the best interests of society to have a way in which injustice, abuse and corruption can be made public. It is not in society's best interests to have only one channel (the legal system) through which wrongdoing can be brought to light. The legal system itself has flaws, so there must be other methods of correcting wrongs; journalism can be one of those ways.

You must not see confidentiality only as protecting one source of information; it is also protecting freedom of speech.

Once you have given your word to a source that you will protect their confidentiality, you must stick to that promise all the way, even if that takes you to prison. Unless the source agrees, you cannot tell the police, the judge, your editor or even your mother.

So if you do not feel that you can go to jail to protect a confidential source, do not give your promise to them in the first place. Tell them at the start of any interviews that you will reveal their names if ordered by a court. They will probably then refuse to give you any more information.

For more on contempt and confidentiality see Chapter 68: Contempt.

**Police requests for media pictures**

It is worth mentioning finally that you may have to defy the law to protect someone who did not even ask for confidentiality. This can happen in particular circumstances when you have evidence such as photographs or video footage which the police need in order to prosecute a case. The most usual example of this is when you take pictures of a mass event such as a protest meeting or demonstration. The police may ask you to give them your pictures because they want to see who was in the crowd. Perhaps they want to prosecute some people but need your pictures to identify them.

You may seem no harm in handing over such pictures, but your action could have a bad effect on the whole of journalism within your society. If people believe that you could be acting for the police in any way, even after the event, they might try to stop you recording the event as a journalist.
They might ban you from it or prevent you taking pictures, perhaps by force. Unlike the police, you will have very little protection against such actions. You will not be able to do your job properly. More important, they might ban or attack any journalist they see taking pictures. If they know that you have handed pictures over to the police before, they might distrust all journalists. Again, the profession as a whole will have been harmed.

**Eavesdropping**

A final word on eavesdropping - the obtaining of information without the consent or knowledge of the people communicating it.

Good journalist should always keep their eyes and ears open for story ideas, even if this occasionally means listening to someone else's conversation on the bus or in an office. If you do this by accident, people may complain, but they cannot usually prosecute you.

However, if you do it deliberately, such as opening private mail or bugging a telephone call, you will probably be breaking the law.

The problem arises most often in broadcast journalism, when reporters try to record someone without their knowledge. Journalism codes of ethics usually state that you must tell people who you are and who you work for before doing any interviews for broadcast. Further, in many countries the law itself states that you must ask the person being interviewed if you can use the recording on air.

If you believe that you may have obtained information by illegal means, you must be especially careful how you use it. A prosecution will not only mean trouble for you and your organisation - it will often distract people's attention from the main issue for which you got the information in the first place.

However, there are many occasions when a good journalist can get confidential information without the need to obtain someone's agreement or break the law.

One enterprising journalism student regularly used to search through waste paper bins next to the university's photocopying machines. He knew that secretaries often threw away poor quality copies of important documents they had photocopied. The photocopies were rubbish to the staff who threw them away, but for the journalism student they were the source of many good stories for the university newspaper.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

You must assess the reliability of all sources of information; this determines:

- what information you use
- how you present it to your readers or listeners

Avoid agreeing to keep information off the record unless there is no alternative

You must keep any promises you make to protect confidential sources
In this chapter, we examine what bad taste may mean in your society. We consider how you can avoid hurting or distressing people unnecessarily when writing news. We look at the use of pictures which might offend against accepted taste. We discuss the use of humour and stereotyping in journalism.

What is taste?

As a journalist, you must be sensitive in what you report and the words and pictures you use. It is very easy to offend people, often without knowing it.

If you obey the standards accepted by a society, you are said to exercise taste in your behaviour or writing. (Good taste has a different meaning in English. It means that you are judged by a particular group as sharing the same values and making the same kind of judgments as them. It normally refers to judgments on art, furnishing, clothes etc.)

If you do or write something which offends the generally accepted conventions or customs, this is said to be bad taste.

For example, in many societies, mentioning bodily functions during a meal is regarded as bad taste (or tasteless). Many societies do not like people who make fun of a person’s race or sexuality, who joke about a person’s religious beliefs or mock the poor or uneducated. You offend against the way a community likes to see its own world.

Assessing bad taste

It is important to recognise that one person’s idea of bad taste may not be shared by all members of society. Bad taste varies from group to group. For example, it is generally agreed in most liberal societies that publicly laughing at the handicapped is bad taste. However, there are sub-groups which take pleasure in doing just that. Perhaps they are men drinking in a bar, perhaps youths hanging around street corners. Standards of behaviour also vary from society to society and can change with time. For example, it is acceptable in most developing countries for women to breastfeed their babies in public. However, this is not generally encouraged in some western societies (even though it happens and is becoming more common).

The bad taste you must be aware of as a journalist is that which offends conventions and customs which are generally accepted within your society.

Of course, some individuals are more easily offended than others. You cannot please everyone. What matters to you as a working journalist is to ensure that you do not offend your readers or listeners on matters which are generally regarded as sensitive within your society as a whole.

Reporting sensitive issues

You may sometimes have to report issues which are not normally discussed in society. You should only do so for a good reason, such as exposing an abuse or defending the right of people to be informed about matters which affect them or their society.

For example, you may be covering a story about the sexual abuse of children. You interview a woman who was abused as a child. It is a genuine issue of concern and should be covered because it is newsworthy. However, in your society, any public discussion of such issues may be taboo, so you are faced with a dilemma. Do you use a story which is of real public interest or not use it
because it will probably offend people?

In democratic societies, the right of the people to be informed on public issues is most important. Your task is to find the best way of reporting this story properly while reducing the risk of offending your audience.

You would not, in this case, concentrate on the physical aspects of the sexual abuse, but focus instead on the effects it has on the child, the family and the community as a whole. You would need to include a reference to the physical problems, but it can be as brief as a sentence like: "Tina says she was sexually molested by her father every Saturday night for four years, whenever he came home drunk."

Protecting victims

Note here that, when you write stories about sensitive issues, you must consider whether or not you need to protect people, especially the victims. You must be aware of the likely reaction people will get from their community. In our example, will the woman be ridiculed or shunned because of what she reveals through your interview? If the risk is high, you should think about using an assumed name for her, to protect her identity. In such circumstances, you must, of course, tell your readers or listeners that this is not the person's real name. The use of assumed names is most common in stories about children, the handicapped and other vulnerable groups.

In most countries using the English legal system, when reporting court cases it is against the law to identify children. However, even when it is legal to reveal the identities of children, there may be strong ethical reasons for protecting children from publicity. Children can be easily hurt and are less able to defend themselves. People might treat a child differently because of what you write, and this could affect their growth. Something unpleasant said about a child can be remembered long after the child has matured and perhaps changed.

So even when the law allows you to identify a child in unpleasant circumstances, you should avoid doing it without a very good reason.

The special problems of radio and television

Radio is more accessible to people than newspapers. Most homes or communities have a radio set and the news goes to them mixed with all the other programs. They do not have to make special provision to buy it or have it delivered every day. It can be switched on and heard by everyone able to understand the language; they do not have to be able to read.

Because whole families might be listening to the radio or watching television at the same time, you cannot aim your stories only at adults or only at men or only at women. You need to present stories in such a way that you do not offend against what is generally accepted taste within ordinary families in your society. Of course, you could schedule reports which might be harmful to children later in the evening, but even then you cannot guarantee that children will not be listening or watching. By comparison, newspapers require a greater degree of learning before they can be read - and they can be kept away from children.

Additionally, it is more difficult for people to avoid reports which are offensive on radio or television. Although newspaper readers can stop reading a story they find offensive and move on to another story, radio and television audiences cannot avoid offensive material so easily. They can, of course, switch off that particular report once they know it offends them. But how do they know when to switch on again for the rest of the news or the current affairs program? Many people will endure a report they find offensive so that they do not miss the rest of the program.

You can help by warning your audience in advance that some of them might be distressed by the material you are about to broadcast. You can summarise the reasons simply by describing the material as "sexual" or "violent". Although people might not want to switch off (for the reasons we have just discussed), they can turn the sound down, look away from a television screen or send
children out of the room while the item is on.

Because most people can listen to radio or watch television, not matter how old or young or illiterate they are, journalists do not usually broadcast grizzly descriptions of death, such as "His head landed 50 metres down the track and fellow passenger Mrs Patel later found bits of his flesh in her hair". Television journalist must take great care in selecting scenes of bombings or violent death.

You should not treat all your listeners or viewers like children, but you must remember that some of them are children.

Whether you work for a newspaper, radio or television station, you should not report exact details of how someone committed suicide. People who are depressed or mentally unstable might try to kill themselves using your description, while children might be tempted to experiment, with fatal results. This does not mean that you do not report suicides. But you can report, for example, that a person "died from an overdose of drugs" without naming the drugs or the quantity used.

**Language**

You must beware of bad taste in the language you use in your stories, even the language you give in quotes or as actuality on radio and television. This is especially so of swear words. Although some broadcasters will occasionally leave swear words in a piece of actuality to show the power of the speaker's feelings, this is best avoided.

There is a lot to be said for powerful language, but you must always be sensitive that not everyone will share your idea of what is powerful. It is no good condemning people as narrow-minded when they are offended - that will not lessen the effect.

Swear words do not usually add anything to meaning. Take out the swear words and you can still understand what people say.

You may face a problem in your society in choosing words to describe things which are not openly discussed. In many English-speaking societies, for example, there are no polite words to discuss certain parts of the body or bodily functions. People might use slang expressions among their friends and find it difficult to discuss the topic at all among strangers. As a journalist, you will have to find alternatives to slang words which offend against accepted taste in your society. Medical expressions are often acceptable alternatives, but in some cases these too will give offence to a lot of people. In addition, medical terms might not be understood by everyone.

In some cases, you will simply have to rewrite your story to avoid the danger area altogether. It should be possible to write an interesting and informative story without offending people unnecessarily.

It is worth keeping in mind the legal aspects of language use. In many countries, it is an offence to use obscene language. Whether the words are your own or an interviewee's, the journalist is responsible for them in law if a court decides that the words were obscene. The law does not often give you guidance on what it means by obscenity, talking vaguely about "the tendency to corrupt". So stay on the safe side in your language. You may believe your readers or listeners are too sophisticated to object to certain words. The law will judge whether the words were also obscene to less-sophisticated people, and they may be the ones who complain. (We say more on obscenity in Chapter 71.)

In multilingual societies, bad taste may enter the news through translations. Do not rely on your own understanding in cases where taste may be involved. Take the advice of other speakers within the group and, if you are still unsure, seek outside advice from language experts if available.

In any situation where you are uncertain about words which might be in bad taste, you must consult your editor. You might also want to discuss it with some people who know your society well
and whose opinion you trust. Remember the classic rule: If in doubt, leave it out.

**Images**

Photographs and television pictures can offend people if they are in bad taste. In fact, journalists often face their biggest problem when deciding whether or not to use a picture which might offend readers or viewers. You may want to use a particular image because it is powerful and shows what happened more clearly than words. Journalists can usually find alternatives for words which are offensive, but you cannot usually find alternatives for powerful pictures.

One of the most famous war pictures of all times is a photograph of a naked child running screaming down a road in Vietnam after being burned by napalm bombs. The girl is naked and the expression of terror on her face is very distressing to see. But the photograph put all the horror of war into one image - and was used around the world.

You may have to make similar tough decisions about using a powerful picture which might offend or distress people. If you are ever faced with this dilemma, ask yourself these questions:

1. Is the picture legally safe (for example, not obscene)? If it is safe, ask:
2. Would many readers or viewers find it offensive? If they would, you must ask:
3. Is this the only image I can use to properly illustrate the story? If it is, you must still ask:
4. Is the story important enough to risk offending people by using this image?

If you get to Question Four and can still honestly answer “Yes”, perhaps you should take the risk and use it. Remember, if you intend broadcasting something which might offend or distress your listeners or viewer, **warn them in advance**.

Some newspapers and magazines use photographs which have little or no news value, but which interest some of their readers. The best example is pictures of naked or semi-naked women. These can be offensive in many societies, not only because they show nudity but also because they present an image of women as being objects for men to get excited over. They may sell newspapers, but they are not real journalism.

**Humour**

There is a place for humour in journalism, but taste in humour is a very personal thing, not shared by everyone. Something you might find funny may leave another person cold. More important, funny remarks can actually offend lots of people. The kind of joke you can tell within a group of friends may not be appreciated outside it. The difficulty you face is in not knowing what might offend and what will be seen as funny. If in doubt, leave it out.

There is certainly no room in objective journalism for jokes at the expense of people with handicaps or with any other characteristics which are socially undesirable and beyond their control. There is no room for racist or sexist jokes; these will always offend someone.

In broadcasting, beware the "throw-away" line (this is usually an unscripted remark at the end of an item). Listeners often pay more attention to what you say than you imagine. Thus if you say at the end of a report on dwarfism "Well, I'll be back shortly", there may be someone who will place the wrong interpretation on your words.

**Stereotyping**

Stereotyping is the process by which we think we recognise a common feature in members of a particular group (whether a race, religion, sex, occupation etc) and then attribute that feature to every member of the group, whether they possess it or not. Stereotyping becomes offensive when we attribute undesirable characteristics to people.
The most common form of stereotyping is racial or national. The English tell jokes about Irishmen being stupid; white Americans make jokes about black people being lazy; many races make jokes about Jewish people being greedy. Most nationalities or races have similar kinds of stereotypes about other groups.

Stereotyping is a lazy way of defining people and often incorrect. Even when the stereotypes are true about a lot of people in the group, there will be some members who do not fit the stereotype. Although you can report people's images of other people as opinions, you should not report stereotypes as facts. There is no place for stereotyping in news reports.

Stereotyping can be quite subtle, even down to choosing whether or not to cover a story which either confirms or denies the stereotype. All sorts of people commit crimes, but when Chinese people in a non-Chinese society break the law, the stories are often accusations that they belong to a secret criminal society (or Triad). Chinese people are often stereotyped as members of a criminal gang, even though most Chinese people are law-abiding.

News should be judged on its news value - whether it is new, unusual, interesting, significant, and about people - not on how it reflects a racial or sexual stereotype.

**Fear and alarm**

It is worth mentioning here that you should also be sensitive to the effect your story may have on people beyond simply offending them. If you write something which causes unnecessary fear or alarm you are demonstrating a lack of sensitivity.

There is a difference between warning people of a danger and exaggerating that danger just to make your story more interesting. You should never try to provoke interest by frightening your readers or listeners. For example, if you discovered a case of typhoid within a community, it would be wrong to write that typhoid was raging through it. It might make a more powerful story, but it would not be the truth. It is better to give the facts and maybe quote expert medical opinion, then allow your readers or listeners to decide how seriously they should take the threat.

Again, you should remember the power of the media. The written word is still regarded as absolute truth in some societies, while radio can be heard by people of all ages. What an adult might find interesting could cause a child to have nightmares.

The classic example of bad taste leading to fear and alarm was a famous broadcast by American actor Orson Welles on October 30, 1938. To enliven a radio play based on the H.G. Wells novel *War of the Worlds* for listeners of the American CBS radio network, Orson Welles pretended that the invasion by Martians was taking place there and then in New York. He even had make-believe "news flashes" telling how the Martian war machines were devastating the country.

An estimated two million listeners, not realising it was only a drama, fled their homes in panic, creating the biggest traffic jams in history and causing chaos in communications as terrified people tried to warn their families and friends of the "invasion".

Fortunately no-one died in the chaos, but Welles' action was widely condemned as irresponsible. Many people threatened to sue him and the radio network for damages.

A similar broadcast on a radio station in Ecuador the following year had similar results, but when the listeners realised they had been tricked, they burned the radio station down, killing six members of staff.
**TO SUMMARISE:**

Always be aware of what is bad taste in your society

Avoid swear words and other language which will offend

Do not make jokes at the expense of people’s disabilities

Do not present stereotypes as facts

Do not incite unnecessary fear and alarm when warning your audience of danger

If in doubt, leave it out
Chapter 62: Privacy and public interest

In this chapter, we look at the relationship between a person's right to privacy and the public's right to know about that person's life. We discuss what it means to be a public figure and what rights journalists have to examine their lives and the lives of their families. We conclude by examining the rights of people to grieve in private.

The first duty of a journalist is to let people know what is going on in the world around them, so that they can make their own decisions about what to think, do or say.

Problems arise where the right of society to be informed conflicts with the right of individuals to privacy.

This is an area where sensitivity is important and where your concern for the individual must be balanced with your responsibility to society as a whole.

On issues of privacy and public interest, there is often no clear-cut distinction between right and wrong. We can give some general guidance and suggest a few rules, but you will have to decide what to do case-by-case.

**The conflict for journalists**

Whenever you cover a story where there is a chance of conflict between the public's right to know and the individual's right to privacy, the first thing you should do is ask yourself two questions:

- Will I intrude on a person's private life by the way I collect the news? For example, should you go up to grieving parents and try to interview them about their murdered son? Should you approach a politician at a social event and ask him questions about his work?
- Will I intrude on people's private life by publishing or broadcasting the story? For example, should you publish a story about a local sporting star leaving his spouse and children for another woman or man?

It is often possible to justify publishing something about a person's private life in the public interest, even though you cannot justify upsetting them in the way you gather the news. An example of this is when covering a tragedy. You may be able to justify telling your readers or listeners about the murder of a child, even though the publicity will cause the parents further grief. But you might not be able to justify going up to the parents and asking questions while they are shocked and grieving.

There are some very clear conflicts and not many simple answers. We will guide you through some of the main problem areas, giving you as much advice as possible. But in the end, you and your fellow journalists will still have to make hard decisions yourselves.

**Private lives**

It is important to define what is meant by "private lives". In cases where people have jobs with normal working hours, the boundaries are usually clear between their private lives and their work. The bus driver becomes an employee when he starts his working day and reverts to being a private individual when he finishes work. He can be as rude, unhelpful and abusive as he wants in private, but is expected to be polite and helpful when on duty.

The distinction between private and public lives becomes less clear when people carry on part of their professional life outside of normal working hours. A successful businessman needs to make contacts at any time, a social worker may decide to call on a client on his or her way home, just for
a chat. They are carrying their professional lives into their private time, but are they merging their professional and private lives?

The distinction almost ceases to exist in cases where an individual's work or professional life depends entirely on them presenting their total selves to the public. Politicians are the best examples. People elect politicians to office for who they are, not just for their skills in a particular job. A politician's career depends on meeting lots of people and being popular with voters. Priests are another group who present their total selves to the public, especially their parishioners.

Then there are people in the world of entertainment who depend for their success on the image they project to the public. Many deliberately blur the distinction between their on-screen and off-screen personalities to achieve success. For example, many film stars like to appear glamorous in real life and have their photographs published in newspapers and magazines so that they remain well-known and will be chosen for another movie.

Although it is often difficult to separate a person's private life from their public role, most of us can recognise the limits in individual professions and specific cases.

**Public figures**

How far can you probe into a person's private life to get news? This is most easily answered where the individuals are public figures, especially where they are people who have put themselves forward for public positions of trust. We are talking here particularly about people like politicians, group leaders, clergymen and all those people whose personalities and private morality are essential parts of their work.

You must make a distinction between those people who have voluntarily entered the public arena and those who are forced into it by circumstances they could not reasonably have expected. For example, a businessman who holds a press conference to announce some new money-making project is seeking public attention; the airline hostess who suddenly discovers she has contracted a rare tropical disease has simply been thrust into the news against her will.

You could justify probing into both the public and private finances of the businessman. You cannot justify digging up scandalous details of the flight attendant's private life where it does not have any relevance to the story of the disease.

There is also the question of who is a public figure. Most journalists would accept that it is their duty to examine the whole life of someone like the President of the United States in detail because he put himself forward to be President. His press secretary acts as the President's mouthpiece on many public issues and is expected to reflect the President's thinking. Is the press secretary a public figure? Would journalists be justified in publishing stories about his affair with an office cleaner?

The answer to the first question is that maybe he is a public figure. The answer to the second question is probably "No", we should not write about his affair with the office cleaner - unless he was giving the cleaner government secrets in bed, and she was passing them on to an enemy. Or if there was a chance that he could be blackmailed into betraying his public trust because of the affair.

**Royalty and other hereditary leaders**

It is difficult to put hereditary leaders such as royalty in the classes we have just discussed. Although they are obviously public figures, they did not put themselves forward for office in the same way as politicians. Neither do they depend on being liked by the public, although most of them probably want to be.

So the question is: How much privacy can they expect? The answer will vary between different societies and different hereditary leaders. In some societies, royalty is treated almost like public
property, with the media feeling that they can comment on anything they do, in public or in private. In other societies, it is not acceptable to criticise royalty at all, even in their public lives.

You must bear in mind the conventions in your own society, and ask the following questions: Does your society in general believe that their hereditary leaders should be questioned or criticised? If it does, how far can the media go in criticism? Can you criticise their public performance in office? Can you examine even their most private lives?

Do you as a journalist have the right to criticise their behaviour under special circumstances, even if the tradition is not to question them? If they accept public funds, can they be criticised for corruption? How bad must their behaviour be before you should report on it?

There is no single answer to these questions. The answers depend on your society. But if you ask yourself the questions, you might find the answers for your society.

The right to know

There are a number of specific reasons why the media have the right to probe the private lives of public figures.

Where a person's character is an essential part of performing their public role, the public has the right to know any facts which reveal special aspects of their character, especially faults. This is because:

- Private morality can tell us something about the person's character, and how it could affect their professional performance. If, in his private life, a public figure is found to have lied in a serious way, the public should be made aware that he could be lying in his work, too. Where public figures are responsible for setting a moral tone in society, any private immorality should be exposed as hypocrisy. For example, society should be aware that a leading campaigner against child abuse regularly beats his own children.

- The media should constantly examine the lives of public figures with responsibility for public funds and other assets. Politicians who have the power to influence the awarding of contracts should accept that their private friendships with business people should be open to public view. After all, it is taxpayers' money they could be giving away illegally. Politicians can promise voters that their friendships will never influence them in public office. As a journalist, you should monitor whether they keep that promise.

- If any misdeeds in private could be used to blackmail that person into compromising their public trust, the public has the right to know about it. In 1963, newspapers revealed that the British Defence Minister John Profumo had been sleeping with a woman who was also having a sexual relationship with the military attaché at the Soviet embassy in London. Although it was never suggested that the woman had passed British secrets from Profumo to her Soviet lover, Profumo was forced to resign in disgrace, largely because secrets could have been passed. To make matters worse, Profumo, a married man, had lied to the British Parliament about his affair. High office carries a heavy burden as well as great rewards.

News must be unusual and interesting, but we cannot expect always to find an educational aspect of every story we cover. Many people read newspapers and listen to the radio simply to know what is happening in the world around them, whether or not it will make them better people.

However, there is a dividing line between those things which the public has a right to know and those which individuals have a right to keep private, no matter how interesting they might be to other people. If a public figure's strange behaviour in the privacy of his own home has no possible effect on his public role, the media cannot claim they have a duty to report it. They would simply be invading the person's privacy.

It is not easy either to define or maintain a balance, but you have the responsibility to try.

The right to privacy
Public figures still have the right to some privacy, where it can be shown that there is no overlap with the performance of their public role.

They have the right to relax away from the eyes of the public. For example, it might be unwise for a prime minister to play cards for money if gambling is not approved of in your society. However, if he plays with a group of friends within the privacy of his own home, perhaps he is entitled to some relaxation.

The public does have the right to question their methods of relaxation when public figures use their position to gain preferential treatment. For example, if a government minister asked the local golf club to close its greens for the day so that he could play uninterrupted with his friends, it could be argued that he was abusing his authority. The community (especially members of the club) should be informed.

Celebrities

In the matter of privacy, entertainers often make a plea for special treatment as public figures. They argue that, as they are not appointed or elected to positions of public trust, their off-stage or off-screen lives are nobody's business but their own. They say that they play a fantasy role in a movie or a television show, and their real lives are private.

For journalists, the issue centres on whether public figures use publicity to promote a good image of themselves to the public. If they do, they cannot reasonably claim that the media should also not expose their bad qualities.

Much depends on the way they portray themselves both on and off the screen (or stage or page). If the entertainers themselves deliberately merge their on-screen and off-screen personalities, the media and the public can be forgiven for confusing the two and taking an interest in their private lives. If a serious actor makes his living from his performances but does not attempt to gain extra publicity when off the stage, he would have more success in demanding a private life away from media attention.

This argument also extends to sportsmen and women who try to be public personalities off the field as well as on it. If they use the media to make money, they cannot be surprised when the media use their private lives to sell newspapers.

The more that people use the media machine, the more they can expect to be used by it.

Families

How far should the families of public figures be the subject of media scrutiny? If a famous film star's son is arrested on a drug charge, should that be given more prominence than another person on a similar charge? The media often argue that they cover such stories not from the angle of the son's misdeeds but the effect it has on his famous father, assuming that the star's life is public property. Some journalists also argue that the son probably enjoyed the financial or social benefits of his father's position in the community and should, therefore, accept the responsibilities which go with the benefits. However, the situation is far from clear. Inexperienced journalists should leave such decisions to their senior colleagues until they have gained enough experience to know in their own hearts what is right.

The situation is slightly clearer in cases where people have been thrust into the public eye through no decision of their own. Should the media concern itself with the private lives of the families of the astronauts who died in the Challenger space shuttle? If one of the widows marries a man half her age, should the media cover the story even though it causes her distress?

You are often able to make judgments based on your own perception of what is news for your readers or listeners in particular cases. For example, would you cover any or all of the following
stories?

- A film star's son commits suicide.
- The Police Minister's wife is caught stealing.
- The council surveyor's daughter is on a drink-driving charge.

We stress that there is no single right or wrong answer, but these are the kinds of questions you should discuss with colleagues, taking into account all relevant factors.

**Grief**

Journalists have to be especially sensitive during certain times in people's lives. The media should respect the privacy of even the most prominent public figure if a loved one dies. This does not mean that you avoid covering the story. In fact, tragic deaths are often the kind of story your readers or listeners will be interested in. However, you should approach all tragedies with sensitivity and even try to find alternative sources of information.

Many people have family and friends who gather round at times of tragedy. Often, one or two relatives or friends will take responsibility for doing practical tasks such as arranging the funeral or answering telephone calls, while the others mourn. Instead of approaching a dead man's grieving widow or a murdered child's mother, first try the close relative who has taken on the role of communicating with the outside world. Once you have established links with them, you can ask whether or not you can talk to the wife or the mother, but stress that the decision is entirely theirs. Some people actually welcome the opportunity to talk to the media at such times, either because it is an emotional release or because they believe that their loved one was important enough for their death to be recorded in the media.

In radio or television, you can justify broadcasting an interview with a grieving relative, sobs and all. However, the sobs and gasps should not be included simply for the emotional effect they will have on your viewers or listeners. They must be part of the way your interview is telling the story.

If, in an emotional outburst, the subject tells you to go away and leave them alone, it would be insensitive to broadcast that simply for effect. People should be allowed to grieve in their own way and we should not judge them at such times.

**Journalists as public figures**

Everything we have said about privacy and publicity applies also to journalists. If you believe you have the right to inform the public and you do it responsibly, you can argue for the same treatment for your private life.

However, if you overstep those boundaries to sell more papers or attract more viewers or listeners, you have no right to argue for special treatment if others overstep the same boundaries to examine your private life.

This is especially true of those journalists who indulge in the cult of the news personality. The more journalists put their own personality into their presentation of the news, the more they can expect others (especially other journalists) to focus attention on their personalities, both public and private. The person who simply and objectively reads the news bulletins can expect to enjoy a private life; the one who presents a television chat show or writes a personal comment column in a newspaper must accept the risks associated with fame.
**TO SUMMARISE:**

You have a right to report on the public life of public figures.

You can report on the private life of public figures if:

- it tells something about their character which might affect their public duty
- they are responsible for public assets
- their private misdeeds could affect the public good

You have no right to intrude on a person’s private life where there is no public benefit.
In this chapter we introduce the section of The News Manual which deal with the law as it affects working journalists. We look at where law comes from, who is involved in the legal system, and at the difference between the two main types of law - criminal and civil.

What are laws?

In any society, everybody is subject to the law. Everybody must do as the law says, or face the punishments which can be handed out to law-breakers. Journalists are no different. They, too, must obey the laws of their society. However, there are certain laws which will affect journalists especially, and that is what we shall deal with in the next few chapters.

Societies have laws in order to protect people from the actions of other people. It is clearly impossible for everybody in any society to have absolute freedom: as one person exercised that freedom, it would trample upon somebody else's freedom. For example, if my neighbour plants pineapples in my garden, then I am not free to use that piece of land myself. It is for this reason that societies have property laws.

The law puts limits on each person's freedom in order to protect other people's freedom. We are free to drive a car on the road, but only if we possess a valid driving licence; and, even then, we must keep to one side of the road, and obey speed limits and road signs. In this way, although our freedom to drive is restricted, we are protected from other people's careless or unskilled driving, which would make it impossible for us to drive safely at all.

In order to make people obey the laws of the society, there have to be punishments. If you decide to drive a car even though you have no licence (and if you are caught), you may be fined. If you cannot or will not pay the fine, you can be sent to jail. The main reason that many people obey the law is that they know they may be punished if they break the law.

There are many different legal systems in the world - traditional and modern, Christian and Islamic - and they regulate society in different ways. However, the reason the laws are there at all is the same - to limit people's rights in certain ways in order to protect other people's rights; and to punish those who ignore the laws.

Sources of law

There are many different sources of law in any society. Some laws will be written in the country's Constitution; others will be passed by the legislature (usually a parliament or congress); others will come from long social tradition.

Let us consider each main source of law in turn.

Constitution

In any country with a written Constitution, the Constitution will take precedence over any other source of law. For example, if the Constitution says there is freedom of speech for all citizens, but the social tradition is for women not to speak in public, a court will protect the right of any woman to speak in public if she chooses to do so; the Constitution takes priority over tradition.

Customary law
In developing countries which have been decolonised since the 1940s or 1950s, the law is generally a mixture of law introduced by the former colonial power and customary law which was there before colonisation. That customary law often still takes priority in certain areas of life.

Typically, customary law applies in those areas of life least affected by colonisation. These may include land ownership, customary titles and family relationships.

There may be special courts to deal with these matters, conducted according to tradition and presided over by a customary chief or group of elders. Alternatively, these matters may be dealt with by an ordinary court, but customary law may take precedence over other kinds of law in these cases.

Common law

English common law is the customary law of England, yet it has become influential in the laws of many other countries. The United States and most countries in the Commonwealth have legal systems based on English common law.

If there is nothing in the Constitution to cover a situation, and if no specific law has been passed by parliament to cover a situation, a court in a Commonwealth country may decide the case depending upon English common law. Indeed, some Commonwealth countries have the British House of Lords as their final court of appeal.

This is not true in all countries, of course. There are many different legal systems, and they do things in different ways. It would be impossible, within the limits of a book like this, to deal with them all. We are therefore limiting ourselves in this volume to talking about those legal systems which are based on English common law.

If you want to know more about common law and the differences between it and other legal systems, click here.

Legislation

Any law passed by a lawful government which is different from English common law will take precedence over common law.

For example, under the English common law principle of habeas corpus, the police are not able to hold a person for longer than a certain period (typically 24 hours) without bringing them before a public court. Habeas corpus can be loosely translated from Latin to mean "show us the person" and it is meant to prevent authorities holding people in secret without due legal process.

However, in times of emergency such as war many countries pass legislation suspending these provisions. In the so-called "war on terror", many countries have introduced anti-terrorism laws which override habeas corpus to allow authorities to hold people, often in secret, for much longer periods. Some prisoners held by US authorities in Guantanamo Bay prison off the American coast have been held for many years without trial or even appearing before an American judge.

[For more on this subject go to Chapter 72: Security and anti-terrorism laws.]

Case law

Legislatures pass laws, but courts work out what they mean in practice. Laws are interpreted and tested by a succession of trials, over a period of time, under a variety of circumstances.

For example, the law says in some countries that cars should drive on the left-hand side of the
road; but it also says that boats should pass port-to-port (that is, as if they were on the right-hand side of an imaginary road). What should happen in the event of a flood, where a truck driving along a flooded road meets a boat coming the other way?

Is the road still a road? If so, they must keep left and pass right-side to right-side. Or is it now a waterway? If so, they must keep right and pass left-side to left-side. The legislation will state clearly what the rules are in each case; but it is unlikely to say clearly how deep the water has to be before a road turns into a waterway.

Courts often have to decide such things. An important part of legal training is to learn what judgments have been made in the past, in order to know exactly what each law means. This is called case law, and lawyers will quote previous cases in court, in order to show how the law should be applied in this case.

Any case law that is from a court of equal or higher rank to the one where a case is now being heard, will normally take precedence over common law, should they differ.

Also, a decision by a higher court (for example a court of appeal or supreme court) is binding upon a lower court. The lower court must follow what the higher court has said, in another case where the circumstances are similar.

**Who’s who**

The law is a huge game, and there are lots of players in it. This can be confusing. Basically, however, the players can be grouped together in three teams.

**Legislature**

A legislature is a body which has the power to make laws. It may be a Parliament, or a Congress, or an Assembly, or a town council, or a council of chiefs. It may have the power to pass laws which apply to the whole country, or just to part of it.

**Judiciary**

The judiciary applies the laws which have been passed by the legislature. Typically, this takes the form of court cases, in which one person (the prosecutor) argues that the defendant is guilty, another person (the defence lawyer, or the defendant himself if he wishes) argues that the defendant is innocent and a third person (the judge or magistrate) or group of people (a jury) decides who is right, by deciding that the defendant is either guilty or not guilty.

Usually, there are different levels of court. The most serious crimes will usually be heard by a High Court or National Court or Supreme Court. This will usually be presided over by a judge or judges sitting together. The prosecution and defence will be presented by trained and experienced lawyers.

In some countries, there is a jury - typically 12 people, without any special training, whose job is to listen to all the evidence and decide on the facts: what actually happened? In other countries, especially where family and clan loyalties would be so strong as to take priority over any desire for impartial justice, there is no jury and the judge makes the decision on the facts. In either case, after a defendant has been found guilty, it is the judge’s job to pass sentence - to decide what the appropriate punishment will be for the crime.

There are also lower courts - often called Local Courts or Magistrates Courts - typically presided over by a magistrate. The prosecution will often be handled by a police prosecutor rather than a lawyer. There is no jury. These lower courts generally deal with less serious crimes, although they may also have to hear the evidence about very serious crimes, sometimes, to decide whether or not the case should be heard by a higher court. These are called committal proceedings, and are
Police

The job of the police is to enforce the law as passed by the legislature and interpreted by the judiciary. Typically, they do this both by acting to prevent crimes being committed, and by investigating crimes which have been committed. They gather evidence, arrest people who seem likely to have committed the crime, and charge them with the offence.

This does not yet mean that the person is guilty. It is up to the courts to consider the evidence which the police have gathered, weigh that against the evidence which the defence will present, and decide on the truth.

Journalists should always take care when reporting an arrest: you must not say that the person arrested committed the crime. The police may believe so, and may even say so to you; but this does not make it a fact. It may be a fact that the person has been arrested; if so, you may say so. It may be a fact that the person has been charged; if so, you may say so. But until a court says that the person committed the crime, it is not a fact, and you may not say so. In many common law legal systems, there is an automatic presumption of innocence, which means that everyone must assume that an accused person is innocent until a court finds them guilty.

If you do state that a person who has just been arrested actually committed the crime, and if the person is later found not guilty, he or she may be able to sue you for defamation. We will deal with this in detail in Chapter 69.

There may be other law-enforcement agencies in your society, too, such as Customs officers, harbours police, game wardens and others.

Criminal and civil law

Not all court cases involve crimes. Many of them do, of course; but many others involve what is called civil law, rather than criminal law.

Criminal law deals with offences by people against society as a whole. Prosecutions are usually brought in the name of the Head of State, or of the State itself.

Civil law deals with offences by people against other individuals. This may include disputes over fences and other land matters, defamation cases, damaged property, broken promises or a host of other disputes between people.

In a criminal court, the two sides are called the prosecution and the defence. In a civil court the two sides are called the plaintiff (that is the person who is bringing the complaint) and the defendant or in some cases, the respondent.

In a criminal court, the judgment at the end of the hearing will be that the defendant is either guilty or not guilty. In a civil case there is no question of guilt, because nobody has been charged with any crime; the judgment will simply be either for the plaintiff or for the defence.

In a criminal court, a defendant who has been convicted (that is, found guilty) will be sentenced - usually by either a fine or imprisonment. In a civil case, there is no sentence. However, if judgment is for the plaintiff (that is, the person bringing the complaint wins), the court may award damages against the defence. This means the court agrees that the plaintiff has been wronged by the defendant, and orders the defendant to pay a sum of money (called damages) by way of compensation. The court may also, under certain circumstances, order the losing side to pay all the legal costs of the winning side. This would happen usually if the judge considers that the loser has acted unreasonably in fighting the case at all, and should have settled out of court without forcing
the other person into expensive legal proceedings.

**Legal language**

Many journalists have a problem with legal language because it seems so technical and hard to understand.

In any area of life, the journalist’s job is to simplify things for the readers or listeners, while still being accurate. This is as true of the law as it is of other areas.

Very often, when a person is charged with an offence, the charges may be in language which is complicated. For example the charge may be that a person “did drive a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol”.

Ask the police, or a lawyer, what the charge actually means. Then try to rephrase it in simpler language and ask the police or lawyer if that is accurate. For our example, you may ask them if “drove a car while he was drunk” is accurate. They will tell you that is not the same – the charge is not that he was drunk, which normally means foolish and incapable; but that he had too much to drink to drive safely.

Try again. Ask them whether “drove a car after drinking too much alcohol” is accurate. If they agree that it is, you can use that in your story. Make a note of it too and remember to use it in future whenever you report this charge.

One of the most misunderstood words is “alleged”. To *allege* something is to claim that it happened. When police charge a person, they allege that the person committed the crime. It is not a fact at this time. If a court convicts the person (finds them guilty) it will become a fact; until then it is an allegation.

You cannot refer to a person as “the thief” when he has been charged but not convicted. He is “the alleged thief”. But you can refer to “the theft” because it is a fact that the theft took place, not an allegation. It would be silly to refer to “the alleged theft”, unless it was not certain that the theft occurred at all.

When things are facts, they are not alleged.

You must take special care when someone had been unlawfully killed. If a person is charged with murder, they are “the alleged murderer” but the killing itself should not be called “the murder”, unless you are quoting someone speaking during the actual court proceedings themselves. There are many kinds of killing, and the court may eventually decide it was *manslaughter* (a much less serious offence) rather than murder. It is best to play safe. The undisputed fact is that there has been a *killing*. Use that word rather than ”murder” or even “alleged murder”.

**Consult a lawyer**

From all that has been said already in this chapter, you will realise that it is impossible for all the details in the following chapters to apply to every country. Even if your country has a legal system based on English common law, your customary law, legislation and case law will probably differ.

Use the following chapters only as guidelines for the general principles of the law as it affects working journalists. Do not depend upon it being accurate in detail for your country. Above all, do not attempt to defend yourself if you are sued for defamation by producing this book in court!

It would be wise to ask a lawyer in your country to read this section of the book - Chapters 63 to 71 - and to point out to you the ways in which your country’s laws differ from the general model presented here.
TO SUMMARISE:

There are many different sources of law:

- The Constitution
- Customary law
- Common law
- Legislation
- Case law

This book will deal with the law as based upon English common law

There are different participants in the law:

- Those who pass laws (legislature)
- Those who apply laws (judiciary)
- Those who enforce laws (police and others)

There are two main kinds of law:

- Criminal law
- Civil law

The law in your country may be different from things we say in this book; consult a lawyer
Chapter 63a: Legal systems

In this supplement to Chapter 63, we expand on some of the principles of common law as they affect journalists. We also discuss some other legal systems operating around the world.

As we saw in Chapter 63: Introduction to the law, there are several different types of legal systems operating in countries around the world. The one used by most Commonwealth countries and the United States is based on common law.

The other main legal systems will be discussed later. These are civil law - which we will refer to as the civil code system to avoid confusion with the civil/criminal legal distinction under common law - religious law and totalitarian law. Many countries also have some elements of customary law existing alongside their main legal system.

Although there are differences in the history, development, principles and applications of these different systems, when applied within a nation they may share common features.

Common law

This system developed from a set of traditional laws first brought together in England around the 12th Century. The name derives from the fact that it was one set of laws "common" to the whole kingdom, rather than different sets of laws used by individual communities or tribes.

One of the distinguishing features of common law is that it developed through usage rather than being imposed by codified legislation as with the civil code system. (*Legislation* means laws - sometimes also called *statutes* - that are made by a representative body such as a parliament. *Codification* is when individual laws of a similar nature are bundled together under one new, overarching law.)

Common law developed based on the outcomes of individual court cases. Each court case provided a basis for judging the next case of a similar nature. Over the centuries and many thousands of court cases, this process led to a body of laws covering most aspects of society and based on principles shared by the society in general.

There are several core principles which guide common law, though they are not necessarily unique to it. These include:

1. The rights of the individual exist alongside those of the state;
2. It is adversarial;
3. It has a presumption of innocence;
4. It develops case law through judgments and precedents;
5. Case law co-exists with statute law and - in most cases - a constitution;
6. Crimes are punished and civil wrongs are rectified by compensation.

We will now look at each of these in order, then see how other legal systems work.

1. Based on the rights of the individual

Common law derived originally as a way of determining individual rights - especially property rights - and balancing them against the best interests of society. In medieval England where common law first developed, kings could decide what they wanted and order people to obey. For centuries to come they continued to do this, albeit with diminishing authority. The common laws which were developed and applied by succeeding judgments were meant to regulate the lives of individuals living in society rather than impose laws from above. Commentators contrast this to civil code
systems in which the best interests of society itself - made up of individual citizens - is of paramount importance in deciding laws and imposing rules of good behaviour on individuals.

Proponents of common law say it also builds laws from the ground upwards - from the "grassroots" - case-by-case, rather than imposing them from the top, even by parliaments which are meant to represent the people. Common law is therefore said to be more responsive to individual needs and circumstances.

It is interesting to note that the founding fathers of the United States of America continued the colonial common law tradition when they gained independence from the British. They then underpinned it with a Constitution which emphasised the rights of individual citizens. By contrast, a few years later Napoleon imposed a codified system of laws to bring order out of the chaos of post-revolutionary France. Both systems work in their own environments and now are thought to reflect something of the national character of each country.

2. Adversarial

Common law systems rely on adversarial justice. This means the two sides in a case have the chance to present their arguments equally before a neutral umpire for a decision. Depending on the court, these neutral umpires can be judges, juries, magistrates or chairs of tribunals - some cases combinations of these. The judge - or jury - is expected to hear all the evidence presented by each side, together with legal arguments, and make a decision on who has the strongest case. In most criminal cases, sentence is passed by a judge, whether or not there is a jury. In civil cases juries can sometimes determine the extent of compensation.

In criminal cases the two adversaries are the prosecution representing the state and the defence representing the accused person. In civil trials, the plaintiff makes a complaint against another person or company called the defendant (or in some cases the respondent). In many common law countries it is considered so important that the adversarial system operates fairly that the judge may appoint a lawyer paid for by the taxpayer to defend someone who cannot afford their own lawyer. This is often called legal aid.

Under the adversarial system, each side is usually allowed to bring witnesses to testify in the court. These witnesses are usually questioned by the lawyer who called them and are then cross-examined by the opposing lawyers. The magistrate or judge makes sure both sides get the chance to present their case fairly.

At the end of the trial or hearing, both sides then summarise their case to the judge or jury. If there is a jury, the judge will then normally present his or her own summary of the case to them before sending them into a private room to discuss the case and reach a verdict. If the jury returns a guilty verdict (or a finding for one side in civil cases), they are usually allowed to leave and the judge will then consider the punishment or the size of the compensation, usually called damages. In some countries juries can decide the extent of compensation.

If one side does not like the outcome, they may ask the court for "leave to appeal" to a higher court, where the main points of the case are argued again in front of a new judge or a group of judges sitting as a bench. This adversarial system can go all the way to the highest court in the land if the matter is important enough or involves significant constitutional matters. The highest court's decision is usually final, unless new evidence comes to light in later years which convinces them to re-open the case.

3. Presumption of innocence

The presumption of innocence means that an accused person is innocent of the accusations until a judge or jury of their equals has determined they are not. The accused does not have to prove innocence - that is presumed. The accuser, acting through a prosecutor, must convince a court of their guilt "beyond reasonable doubt". Under common law in modern democracies, if a judge or
jury has any doubt that the accused is guilty, they must return a verdict of not guilty.

This has important implications for journalists in many areas of the law. For example, when reporting a trial you must not say the accused is guilty before a judge or jury returns a verdict, otherwise you can be found guilty of contempt. Neither should you report any information obtained outside the trial itself which might influence a jury to suppose the accused is guilty, such as mentioning previous convictions.

In writing or broadcasting about people you must take care that accusations are supported by evidence or are at least reasonable, otherwise you can be sued for defamation on the grounds that the accused person is presumed to be innocent of the bad things you said about them. To use the defence of truth in a defamation case against you, it is your responsibility as a journalist to prove what you wrote was true; the defendant does not have to prove their innocence even though they are the plaintiff in the case.

4. Case law

Judges play an active part in deciding law. Their judgments are binding on lower courts unless overridden by specific legislation. This is not true in civil code systems where the interpretations of judges is either given less weight or banned altogether, as in the Napoleonic Code - one of the earliest and most common of the modern civil code systems.

One of the features of common law systems is that courts not only have to determine the facts in a case but they also have to argue all the relevant legal precedents set by previous courts making decisions on similar matters. Both the prosecution and the defence lawyers present not only evidence of events but also evidence about how these previous cases were resolved. Judges and juries too are expected to consider not only the facts of the current case but also the arguments about previous cases.

For this reason, judgments in common law cases are often long and involved. This is so that future lawyers, juries and judges can see how a verdict was reached when considering their own cases. Traditionally these lengthy and intricate judgments were printed annually in a court's law reports, but increasingly they are being made available on the Internet, for example through the World Legal Information Institute.

Because judges at all levels in a country's legal system are making decisions about laws every day, the common law system is very adaptable to change. It can be quickly updated to meet new circumstances, often before politicians get round to formulating and passing new statutes.

For example, in Australia for more than 200 years the law acted as if the original Aboriginal inhabitants had no prior legal claim to land. This was the concept of terra nullius ("land belonging to no-one"), that there were no legal titles to land in Australia before white settlement. In its celebrated Mabo judgment of 1992, the High Court of Australia overturned the concept of terra nullius and said that Aboriginal people did have a common law legal title to land they had a long, strong and continuous connection to under customary law. Later High Court judgments such as Wik further clarified the position by deciding that pastoral rights of settler-farmers could co-exist with native title and in some cases supercede them. Sadly, Eddie Mabo, one of three Meriam men who originally took the case to court, died of cancer five months before the judgment was made. You can read the whole Mabo judgment of the High Court here or a summary of the case and its consequences by Chief Justice Sir Gerard Brennan here.

5. Co-exists with other laws

Following on from 4. above, judges interpret the constitution and statutes (i.e. parliament-made laws) where they are unclear. Of course, the constitution of a country is the paramount law and judges are not able to change its basic provisions. But even with the constitution they can interpret how it is applied in real life. In strong democracies, judges have a role in interpreting laws as they interact with each other. For example, a court may decide that legislation passed by a parliament is
unlawful because it clashes with more important constitutional rights. Such cases are usually eventually determined by the highest court in the nation or state, such as a high court or supreme court. If these courts decide a statute is unconstitutional, parliament will normally amend it, otherwise it cannot be successfully applied.

The ability for judges to interpret statute law against a background of common law means legislation does not have to state every possible circumstance. It can state the general principles and set limits (for example on the maximum amount an offender can be fined) and leave the rest for the courts to determine in line with other statute laws and common law precedents. Opponents of common law say this gives too much power to judges, whereas its supporters see this ability to interpret legal statutes in real life situations as a strength. As in many things to do with common law - or any law for that matter - the quality of judges and others people in the legal system such as lawyers and the police determine how successfully the system will work.

6. Punishment and compensation

Punishment and compensation as remedy's to wrongdoing are not unique to common law, though it is useful to understand the principles behind both.

In common law, the concept or compensation is normally applied in the civil rather than the criminal sector, where the state prosecutes and the courts impose punishments for an offence against the state itself.

In civil courts, the principle is that a victim of a wrong by another person (or group such as a company) should be compensated for that wrong, usually with money, known as damages, but also by a court order to do something to put matters right, such as rehabilitate land which has been damaged. Common law says that compensation should be sufficient to return the victim to the state they were in before the wrongdoing took place. Of course, in a civil action where someone has lost a limb, no amount of damages will ever replace a real limb. But the courts will set an amount so the victim should have no further ill effects from the harm they were done by the perpetrator - the one who is ordered to pay.

Sometimes, the concepts or punishment and compensation can be applied in the same case. For example, when awarding damages for defamation a judge may award compensatory damages to restore the victim to their former state (or as near to their former activity as they can get), but they may also award punitive damages against the defendant. This is meant to both punish the wrongdoer but also send a signal to deter other people from doing similar wrongs. These are also called exemplary damages, to set an example.

In common law, judges decide the extent of punishment and compensation by considering numerous factors including the circumstances of the wrongdoing, the extent of the harm and the condition of the victim - sometimes even the remorse or otherwise of the wrongdoer. They also look at what other judges have awarded for similar cases in the past. Increasingly the levels of punishment and limits of compensation are set down in legislation. Politicians like to be seen to be sending a message to the public about how they view crimes and some civil harms, so passing laws with stiffer or more lenient consequences achieves this. Thus the maximum jail for armed robbery may be 20 years, but within this judges have the discretion to sentence people to less if the circumstances warrant it.

The only way a judge can send a person to prison for longer than the statutory maximum is if the person is found guilty of more than one offence, in which case a judge may order the sentences be served consecutively, i.e. one to begin after the other is finished. Normally, however, judges sentence people for multiple offences to be served concurrently, that is all starting at the same time. This means the convicted person goes to prison for the duration of the longest sentence.

Other legal systems

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, there are other legal systems apart from common
law. While common law is most usual in English-speaking countries and members of the Commonwealth, these other systems might also apply in certain areas. Some countries have legal systems which are mixtures of common law and other forms of law.

Civil code systems

This is the most common type of legal system in the world, either in its pure form or as a basis upon which other elements such as religious law are added.

The civil code or civil law system is also called by other names such as Roman law, Continental law or Napoleonic law. All are systems where laws are legislated by parliament or some other form of representative government and codified (i.e. brought together). They are distinguished from common law mainly because they come from parliaments, not from court cases. Indeed, in civil code systems the courts do not usually have as much freedom to interpret laws. In the original Napoleonic courts judges were specifically banned from interpreting statute laws.

The underlying principle of civil code systems is that the laws applied to citizens are made by citizens through their political representatives. Judges are there to administer laws, not make them.

Laws are codified, which means laws of a similar nature are bundled together to create a rational system across the whole area. Advanced societies try to ensure that all laws have consistent principles and interact with each other in a logical way without conflict between laws. In complex societies codified laws are vast and detailed. Critics say this means they are hard to change but proponents argue they give certainty and predictability.

Civil code systems are mainly inquisitorial rather than adversarial. That means courts are there to track down the truth, not to be a forum where two sides battle to demonstrate to a judge or jury who is right and who is wrong. Judges in civil code trials are usually more active in questioning witnesses, challenging evidence and even - in some cases - directing investigations. This is quite different to common law trials where the judge is supposed to be impartial.

Although the presumption of innocence is not usually stated explicitly in civil code laws, many countries have subsequently built it into their systems by adopting external or international obligations. For example, most European countries have ratified the European Convention on Human Rights which guarantees the right to a fair trial and the presumption of innocence. Thus these principles have become part of their national laws.

Trial by jury is less common in inquisitorial systems, especially when judges have a strong role in hunting down the "truth" in a case rather than arbitrating between two adversarial parties. The common law developed to give accused people the option of trial by their "peers", meaning people from society in general rather than from the country's rulers. Juries are, however, used in some civil code countries such as France, Norway, Spain and Brazil, albeit usually for a limited range of offences, mainly criminal.

However, even in some common law countries trial by jury is either unusual or unused, especially in societies where tribal or clan loyalties might make it difficult to find people unaligned to either party (i.e. the accused or their alleged victim) to make the objective judgment so important to the jury system. Papua New Guinea's Constitution provides for trial by jury but they are not used. They were abolished in India in 1959 after a particularly contentious case.

Religious law

Here we are not talking of laws governing the religious practices of believers but of a country's legal system being based on religious laws which apply to people as citizens in both their private and public lives.

Although throughout history many countries have had legal systems based wholly or partly on
religious laws and teachings, today by far the most common are those aligned to Islam.

The University of Ottawa's Faculty of Law website lists 36 countries with legal systems based wholly or partly on religious law. These range from countries such as The Maldives where the legal system is almost exclusively Islamic to Singapore and India where religious law plays only a small part in the overall legal system.

Islamic law (Sharia) is based on the Koran and Sunnah holy books, supplemented by interpretations over the centuries by Muslim scholars and jurists. It provides rules on how practising Muslim should live their lives. Like common law and civil code law, Islamic law is still evolving and there are still disagreements about exactly what makes up Sharia and its scholarly interpretations (Fiqh).

Islamic law shares some similarities with common law, principally the fact that it has evolved through application, with current judgments based on precedents and the analysis of previous cases of a similar nature. There are, however, some fundamental differences in areas such as individual rights and equality before the law, especially in the treatment of women.

Although some Islamic scholars disagree, judges in Islamic law are given freedom within Sharia and Fiqh to analyse precedents (case law) and contemporary circumstances to provide judgments suitable to the present day. In some countries, however, judges are encouraged or even required to make very literal applications of the laws, with little room for contemporary interpretation. For example, there is still ongoing debate between fundamentalists and modernists in Islam about the correctness of severing limbs for crimes.

Many countries where Islamic law forms part of their legal system also utilise elements of civil code law. This is especially true of countries which have gained independence from colonial powers which themselves relied on civil code law. This cross-influencing shows itself in either the adaptation of one system by the other or more commonly by the way in which new laws are devised specifying how the two systems can work together. Indonesia is a good example of how the latter can be applied. In many countries, civil code laws apply to certain aspects of public life while Islamic law applies to other aspects, usually more personal matters such as family law. In many countries two separate court systems are maintained to deal with these differences.

Totalitarian law

Through modern democratic eyes, totalitarian legal systems - whether hardline communist states, feudal autocracies, personal dictatorships or absolute monarchies - are not so much separate systems of law as the arbitrary application of some elements of the other three systems and the rejection of some basic principles of human rights.

Probably the most common system of totalitarian law is socialist law, though this is currently on the wane throughout the world. Even in its most virulent days, socialist law was arguably little more than an amalgam of civil codes law overlaid on Marxist-Leninist theory. It differed from traditional civil code legal systems in areas such as the rights of the individual, property law or unbiased court processes.

One cannot, however, dismiss socialist and other totalitarian states as being merely misapplied civil code law. The fact that their laws lacked provision for the individual to challenge the state meant they could never evolve. The great strengths of common law and civil code law - and some modern brands of Islamic law - are that they change through application and correction at the hands of the people themselves - individuals involved in court cases in common law and through the democratic process of legislation in the case of civil code law.

It is fruitless in a discussion such as this to single out corrupted legal systems from those which simply do not work well. Not only are there significant differences in emphasis between common law, civil code law and religious law systems and vast disparities in their application around the world, but measures such as human rights, crime rates or the severity of sentences are open to subjective interpretation depending on one's views on individual rights compared with the
obligations of citizenship.

Modern China, for example, is evolving from a socialist law system to a more mainstream civil code law system, though is still a considerable way short of countries such as France in applying principles such as equality before the law or freedom of speech.

There are, however, dictatorships such as Burma or North Korea in which is is difficult to distinguish any consistent system of laws and their application beyond the personal whim of those in power.

For more information on which systems are used in different countries, there are a number of good reference sites:

World Legal Systems at the University of Ottawa presents the information in several ways, including a world chart, a table of the 192 member states of the United Nations and a chart comparing numerically how the different systems are used globally.

Legal Systems of the World at Wikipedia gives useful explanations of the different systems and a country-by-country description of which systems are used, including mixed systems.

The CIA World Factbook Field Listing of Legal Systems gives a brief description of the legal system or systems used by each country (and some of their overseas territories), as well as whether or not they have accepted the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).
Chapter 64: The rules of court reporting

This is the first of three chapters on court and legal reporting. In this chapter we consider why it is important for court cases to be reported, and how to do it safely and properly. In the next chapter we look at how to write reports that are accurate, fair and interesting. In the final chapter we follow a legal case through from beginning to end.

The justice system

It is vital that all people should have a fair trial, if they are accused of doing something wrong or injuring another person in some way.

People who have done nothing wrong should not be afraid that they will be punished if they are charged, perhaps by mistake, or if someone takes legal action against them in a civil case. They should be able to be confident that they will be cleared of the accusation. Otherwise, all people will live in fear of the law, instead of feeling that it is there to protect them.

A court is the place where society employs specially trained people to decide whether or not a person really did something wrong.

If a crime has been committed, then the police need to find the person responsible; but it is not the job of the police to punish that person. That is the job of the courts, and before they punish anyone they need to be convinced that the police have caught the right person - the person who actually committed the crime.

At a trial, the police or their lawyer present the evidence which makes them believe that the defendant is the guilty person, and the defendant (or their lawyer) presents evidence in an attempt to show that the police are wrong. When the court has heard all the evidence, the jury (if there is one) or the judge (if there is no jury) decides whether the defendant is guilty or not guilty.

In these chapters we tend to focus on criminal proceedings rather than on civil law. This is because criminal processes are generally simpler and more common in everyday society whereas civil proceedings are often very specialised, complicated and less common. But most of the principles behind covering criminal cases also apply to civil cases too.

A fair trial

Because it is so important that everybody should have a fair trial, nothing which would be likely to interfere with a fair trial is allowed to happen. This means that journalists working in many legal systems - especially those of the Commonwealth - are not normally allowed to publish or broadcast certain things during court proceedings, from the moment that somebody is about to be charged with an offence up to the moment that the court finishes dealing with it.

Sub judice

From the time that somebody is about to be charged with an offence, up to the moment when the court finishes dealing with it, the case is said to be sub judice.

In practice, sub judice normally starts when a person is arrested, charged or a warrant is issued for their arrest and ends when the judge or jury gives a verdict. In civil cases, sub judice normally starts when legal papers are lodged with the court and ends with the court’s decision.

Sub judice is a Latin phrase meaning "under judgment". It is pronounced "sub JOO-da-see". While a case is sub judice, journalists are strictly limited as to what they can write. This is to make sure
that they do not interfere with the job of the court in giving the defendant a fair trial.

We shall look in detail in a moment at what we are and what we are not allowed to write.

It is the job of the courts, and nobody else, to decide whether or not the person charged did in fact commit the crime. Nobody should be tried and convicted by crime reporters, in the columns of a newspaper or over the air waves.

Of course, it is also important to society that journalists (and other people) have the right to talk about things, and we shall talk more about that later in this chapter. But where two important rights clash, one has to be limited in the interests of the other.

For example, anyone has the right to drive from one town to another. However, because the people who live along the way have the right to walk safely around their homes, the speed at which you can drive may be limited. And because people driving the other way also have their rights, you may be limited to driving on only one side of the road.

In the same way, the right to talk about a crime is limited in order to protect the defendant's right to a fair trial.

**What can we report?**

When a crime has been committed, reporters need to tell people about it. They may talk to people who saw the crime, or whose property was stolen or damaged, and quote the things those people have to say.

However, as soon as the police have caught someone they believe to be responsible for that crime, and are about to charge them with that offence, then reporters are limited in what they can say about the crime. You can report the fact that the crime happened, that someone is being charged and any facts about it which are not likely to be challenged in court. If a man has been charged with breaking into a store and stealing $500 in cash and goods worth $250, then we must report the fact that he has been charged. We may write:

*A man has been charged with burglary, following the break-in at Cut-Price supermarket at the weekend.*

*Bruce Maupiti, 28, of Avarua, Rarotonga, has been charged with stealing $500 in cash and goods worth $250 from the store on the night of July 25.*

It is important to note that we did not say that Maupiti actually committed the crime - that is not a fact. It is the job of the courts to decide whether or not he did it. All we said is that Maupiti has been charged with the crime - that is a fact - and that there was a break-in at the store at the weekend - that is also a fact.

Anything which reporters publish about the details of the crime or the suffering of the victims, after someone has been charged, could interfere with the court's job. If there is to be a jury, they could be influenced by what they read in the papers, or by what they hear in the news. If the sad stories of how the victims suffered continue to be published right up to the day of the trial, the jury may feel bitter and angry towards the accused person. This will make it difficult for him to have a fair trial.

Even in countries where there is no jury system, judges do not like cases being commented on, or background being published, until the case is finished.

So, from the time that someone is charged with a crime - or, more accurately, from the time when the police tell you that someone is about to be charged with a crime - the case is *sub judice*. From that moment on, until the court case is completed, you should write nothing about the crime.
except details which emerge while the court case is being conducted.

We will return later in this chapter to consider how this relates to defamation and privilege.

**Why report court cases?**

The courts are there to act on behalf of ordinary people, so it is important that they carry out their business in public, for all to see.

It is a vital principle that **Justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done.** In other words, courts have to do the right thing, and the public have to see and understand that they do so.

For that reason, any member of the public may attend any court case, except for certain minor exceptions, which we will come to later in the next chapter.

Reporters are members of the public, and so are the readers or listeners they represent. Reporters therefore have the right to attend court cases, and a duty to be there whenever possible on behalf of their readers and listeners who cannot be there.

Court reporters may be given a special place in the courtroom to sit, called a press gallery. Essentially, though, there is no difference between the court reporter and any other member of the public in the courtroom.

There are three main reasons why journalists report court cases: to encourage public confidence in the law, to help the law deter future crime, and to get strong news stories.

**Public confidence in the law**

If ordinary law-abiding people are to feel that their society is strong enough to protect them from criminals, then they have to have a system of law enforcement which they feel confident about.

That means that they have to trust the police to catch criminals; and they have to trust the courts to punish people who break the law, to release people who obey the law, and to know the difference between the two.

In other words, society has to believe that the police and the courts are effective, fair and consistent. Let us consider each of these.

**Effective:** The police must have the willingness and the ability to catch people when crimes have been committed, and to make sure that guilty people are punished.

**Fair:** The police have to question people because they believe they can help with inquiries, and arrest people only when there is reason to believe they have broken the law. If people believe that the police arrest anyone, without good reason, then they will have no confidence in the police.

Similarly, if the courts convict or acquit people just because they are pretty or ugly, rich or poor, or come from the same part of the country as the judge, then people will have no confidence in the courts. Only if the police and courts act fairly will society have confidence in them.

**Consistent:** If a judge last week sent a man to jail for three years for stealing $1,000, and this week he finds another man guilty of stealing $1,000, then society will expect the man to be sent to jail for three years as well. If there are other factors, of course, the sentence may be different - one man may have committed an offence for the first time, while the other has been jailed for stealing money before. But if the circumstances are more or less the same, society will expect the
punishment to be more or less the same.

If the courts are not consistent, then it is unlikely that society can feel confident about the courts’ ability to protect it properly.

Deterrence and publicity

Society needs journalists to attend court cases and to report exactly what happens there - who is accused of what, what evidence is brought for the prosecution and for the defence, what the court’s decision is, and so on.

Society's confidence in the legal system depends upon people being informed about what is going on. That is part of the journalist's job, and it is a vital one. It is a job which needs to be done responsibly.

As we saw in the last chapter, one of the reasons for punishing people who break the law is to deter other people from doing the same thing.

It cannot possibly do this unless people know what punishment is handed out to law-breakers.

In some countries today (and in many countries in the past) murderers and other serious criminals are executed in public. Other criminals may be beaten in public. This is one way of letting society know the way in which law-breakers are punished, and this acts as a deterrent. However, most countries nowadays prefer to use newspapers, radio and television to let people know what happens to those who break the law.

Journalists have an important part to play in publicising the workings of the police and courts, so that society knows what happens to law-breakers. In this way society is helped to operate more smoothly.

If people believe that they can break the law and get away with it, they are more likely to break the law.

If people believe that the police and courts are so arbitrary that innocent people are as likely to be punished as guilty people, then they are more likely to break the law. After all, if you are going to be punished anyway, you might as well enjoy the benefits of the crime.

Only if people believe that law-abiding people are defended by the law, and law-breakers punished, will they be encouraged to live by the law. So the smooth running of society depends partly on people being informed about what happens in courts.

Strong stories

There is another very good reason why newspapers and broadcasting stations send reporters to court, as well as the social duty they perform. There are hundreds of very interesting news stories there.

Almost every case to come before the courts is full of human drama. There are murders and rapes and assaults, thefts and burglaries and robberies, broken promises, land disputes and broken contracts. Every one of these, written the right way, can give an interesting news story at the same time as informing the public about the workings of the courts.

Every editor should think very seriously about having one reporter permanently in the courts, if they have enough staff.

Defamation & privilege
We have seen that it is in the interests of society that everything which goes on in court is reported - the charges, the name of the defendant and all the evidence, as well as the verdict and sentence.

However, as we shall see in Chapter 69, there is an offence called defamaton (or libel in some countries), which stops people saying untrue things about other people which will damage their reputations. Is this not a worry to the court reporter?

Suppose a court reporter has taken down all that the prosecuting lawyer had to say, and all that the prosecution witnesses had to say about the defendant; and suppose the court reporter has done her job and written a report which has been published. It is likely that it will all be damaging to the defendant's reputation.

Now suppose that, at the end of the trial, the defendant is acquitted - that is, he is found not guilty. Can he now sue the prosecution lawyer and all the witnesses for defamation? Can he sue the reporter for defamation? After all, what was said and written was damaging to his reputation, and it can now be seen that it was not true.

The answer, of course, is that he cannot sue them for defamation. If he could, then it would be impossible for the courts to do their job. To allow the courts to do their job, anything that is said in court as part of a hearing is protected by privilege, and that is dealt with in detail in Chapter 67: Privilege.

The good news for court reporters, though, is that privilege protects more than the lawyers and witnesses. It also protects a news report of court proceedings, as long as it is fair, accurate and not malicious. In many legal systems, this special protection for reporting cases is called qualified privilege, because it has some conditions or qualifications. We shall deal in a moment with what each of these means.

It is interesting to note that privilege is the court reporter's best friend. The limitations placed on what we can report by a case being sub judice may seem like a difficulty; the risk of defamation may seem frightening; but privilege puts everything back into balance.

The court reporter may have to wait to tell the full story, but when the time comes it can all be reported fully, without any fear of defamation.

Let us look now at the three conditions a report must meet in order to be protected by qualified privilege.

It must be fair

If evidence has been given by both prosecution and defence, the report must contain both sides. It is not necessary to report every word that was said, but the overall balance of the court case must be retained in the report. For example, if the prosecution case took twice as long as the defence case, you could fairly devote two-thirds of your report to the prosecution evidence and only one-third to the defence evidence.

It is essential that a newspaper or broadcasting station which starts to report a court case, continues to do so every day until it is finished. Otherwise the report of the case as a whole cannot be fair, and it will then lose the protection of privilege.

It must be accurate

It is essential that court reporters do not make mistakes. What the witness says may be quoted, but it must be an accurate quote. Court reporters need good shorthand.
Any significant inaccuracy will leave the whole of a report unprotected by privilege.

**It must not be actuated by malice**

If the reason you publish or broadcast a court report is to do harm to the defendant - that is, you are being malicious - then you can lose the protection of privilege.

This is not something which you need to worry about very often. You will report court cases on their merits, day after day and week after week. You will report them for the reasons we have already discussed - to inform readers or listeners about what is happening in courts. There will not normally be any malice towards anybody involved in any case.

The only time a problem might arise would be if the defendant is a known enemy of you or the owner or editor of the newspaper, radio or television station. In this case, you must be very careful to treat the case in the same way you would treat any other similar case. If you publish every word of prosecution evidence, on page one, and the person is later acquitted, he may try to sue you for defamation. If he can show that the way the case was reported was actuated by malice, you will lose the defence of privilege.

**Contemporaneous reporting of a court case**

*Contemporaneous* is a long word, but it means the next issue of the newspaper or the next news bulletin.

In some legal systems, such as Britain, as long as you publish or broadcast a court report contemporaneously, you will have a special kind of protection from privilege (called *absolute privilege*). In this case, your report only has to be fair and accurate; it does not matter whether or not it was actuated by malice.

For a daily morning newspaper, a court report is privileged in this way if it is published in the next morning's issue.

For a daily evening newspaper, it must be published in the same day's issue, unless the hearing finished too late, in which case it must appear in the next day's issue.

For a weekly newspaper, it must appear in the next issue.

For radio or television, the report is privileged in this way if it is used on any bulletin up to the start of the next day's hearing. It can be used on the evening bulletin, and again next morning, but not after that.

We shall return to consider the different kinds of privilege in more detail, in Chapter 67.

**Sub judice illustrated**

To help you understand how sub judice applies during legal processes, see this Sub judice Chart. It illustrates how sub judice, defamation and privilege work at different stages in legal processes. While sub judice restricts what else you can report about the legal process, fair and accurate reports of the proceedings themselves are protected from defamation by privilege.
**TO SUMMARISE:**

Courts are usually open to the public; journalists are free to report what goes on there.

Reports are protected against defamation, as long as they are:

- Fair
- Accurate
- Without malice
Chapter 65: Practical court reporting

This is the second of three chapters on court and legal reporting. In the previous chapter we considered why it is important for court cases to be reported, and how to do it safely and properly. In this chapter we look at how to write reports that are accurate, fair and interesting. In the next and final chapter on court reporting we follow a legal case through from beginning to end.

How to report a court case

The job of court reporting is essentially the same for all the media - newspapers, radio and television - but there are some differences. We shall first consider those differences, and then move on to the things they share in common.

Newspapers

For every court case which you report, the following information should be carried in each report:

- The names, addresses and places of origin of all defendants (plus ages, if considered important)
- The offence or offences they are charged with
- The plea of each defendant to each charge - guilty or not guilty
- The court where the case is being heard

If a case lasts for five days, five weeks or five months, these details should be included in your report each time. The precise address details will vary from one newspaper to another. For example, some newspapers like to give the address accurate to the house number in the street whereas others – perhaps national newspapers – may only name the town or village.

In addition, you should give the following information if possible:

- The name of the judge or magistrate hearing the case, especially when reporting the verdict or sentence
- The names of the prosecution and defence lawyers

You must also give the names and other personal details of all witnesses whose evidence you quote in your report.

Every report must also carry:

either the court's verdict; the sentence, or the information of when sentence is to be passed

or, if the case is not finished, the words "The case continues". Whatever else is cut out by sub-editors from a court report (and such cuts should only ever be done with extreme care), these three words should always be left as the final words of the report of an unfinished case

The rest of the report will be an account of the day's proceedings, quoting what was said by those who spoke - lawyers, the judge, witnesses.

Radio and television

Court reports for radio and television cannot be as long as court reports in newspapers. This means
that they must give fewer details, in order to concentrate on the story.

- The details which you will need to give are:
  - The names of all defendants, and briefly where they come from
  - The offence or offences they are charged with, simplified as far as possible
  - The plea of each defendant to each charge - guilty or not guilty
  - The court where the case is being heard

As with newspapers, it is important to let your listeners know if the case has not yet finished. Instead of "The case continues", however, it sounds more natural to say "The case is continuing". These should be the last words of your report.

All journalists

Whether you are reporting for a newspaper, radio or television station, your report must be accurate, and it must be fair, but it does not have to be boring. Do not lose your judgment of what is news.

Court cases are full of the stories of dramatic events, but courts like to hide the drama. It is your job to see the drama which lies behind the serious and dignified proceedings, and convey that to your readers or listeners.

The intro

Your intro on a case which has finished should always focus on the crime rather than on the court case.

If a man who was once a policeman is sent to jail for a year for obtaining money by false pretences, your intro should report the offence. The punishment given to him can then be the second paragraph:

A former policeman pretended to be someone else to get $500 out of a savings fund.

Yesterday he was jailed for a year at the National Court.

Many young reporters find this strange. They think that the court's decision is much newer than the crime and that it should therefore be the intro. They are missing the point.

What is new is the fact that the former policeman committed the crime. Up until the moment he was found guilty, it was only an allegation. This is the first opportunity to say that this man did this wrong thing. That is the news and it must be your intro, unless the court's sentence is so unusual as to be more newsworthy than the crime itself.

Colour

Some court cases are more newsworthy than others. Some will involve a prominent public figure; others will deal with crimes which were widely reported at the time - a mass murder, for instance. Reporters usually want to add some colour to their reports of these big trials.

Colour in a news report means extra details which help the readers or listeners to visualise what happened - such as descriptions of the courtroom, of the people involved and how they spoke, and of the atmosphere. This is a good thing to do, but it must be done with great care.

Readers and listeners may be very interested to know what the defendant and the witnesses wore, and whether they appeared nervous or confident while giving evidence. However, none of this information is privileged, and it could be considered by the judge to be contempt of
You must take care that the colour which you introduce does not prejudice the trial. You can describe how the defendant twisted a handkerchief in her fingers while giving evidence, but if you say that she was nervous then you may imply that she was lying. You can say that the defendant cried while she was being cross-examined, but do not say so in a way which is designed to make the readers (and the jury) feel sorry for her.

**Balance**

A court case needs both sides of the case to be heard - the prosecution and the defence. Only then can the jury or the judge decide whether or not the defendant is guilty. If justice is to be seen to be done, any reports of that case must present a fair balance of both sides of the case.

If a case is heard all in one day (or all in one week, as far as a weekly newspaper is concerned), the report must carry both prosecution and defence cases, at roughly equal length. If the case lasts for a number of days, then roughly equal space must be given to the defence case as was given to the prosecution case.

It would not be fair to lead a page with 400 words while prosecution witnesses gave their evidence, and two days later carry only 150 words at the foot of the page while defence witnesses gave their evidence. Similarly, it would be unfair to give 60 seconds in each day’s bulletin while the prosecution is presenting its case, but only 15 seconds each day while the defence is being presented.

**Accuracy**

If a report is not accurate, it is not privileged. So it is vital that an accurate note is taken of exactly what is said by the judge or magistrate, the lawyers and witnesses. Most countries do not allow journalists to use tape recorders inside court. For this reason, it is essential that court reporters can take shorthand at no less than 80 words per minute, and preferably 100.

**Special circumstances**

Most court cases are just as we have already described them. However, there are a number of circumstances when the courts work in special ways, which affect the court reporter.

**Remands**

When accusations are made or charges are laid, they must proceed through the court system until the truth is discovered and a verdict is reached. But investigations may take a long time, documents have to be prepared and courts are busy places, so the accused person may need to have his case postponed to a later date. The process of legally postponing a court case is usually called a *remand*. It is a chance for the accused person to appear in public in court, so the community can see he is still both available and safe. For economy and convenience, remands normally take place in the lowest courts in the system, most usually in front of a magistrate. If the preparation for trial takes a long time, the accused may be remanded many times.

There are two main ways an accused person can be remanded: either in custody or released on bail, free to wait in the community.

- **Remands in custody** are usually made if the magistrate thinks the person could commit another offence, run away or interfere with the legal process by harming witnesses. In many countries, the accused is kept in a remand centre, either within a larger prison or in a separate facility.
- **Release on bail** is to allow the accused to go back out into the community to continue their normal life until the case is heard. This is usually chosen for minor crimes and low-risk
cases. However, to encourage the accused to turn up for their court hearing, the magistrate may insist that they pay or promise to pay an amount of money, which they will lose (forfeit) if they fail to show up. This money is called surety, though in many countries the word also refers to the person who puts up the bail money. The magistrate may also impose other bail conditions, such as the accused must report regularly to police or hand in their passport to prevent them leaving the country.

Journalists are usually free to report on remand proceedings, including the bail conditions, although in some countries you may not be allowed to report the reasons why bail is refused. Check the situation in your country.

When reporting remands, remember that the person is still only accused - no decision has yet been made on whether they are guilty or innocent. Under most English-speaking legal systems, there is a presumption of innocence, which means that everyone should presume the accused is innocent unless and until a court decided otherwise. Be careful that your reports make this clear and do not imply that the person being remanded is guilty. Once a person has chosen to make a plea - either 'guilty' or 'not-guilty' - you should report this too in all your reports on the proceedings.

**Committal proceedings**

Serious crimes, such as murder, rape or theft involving large sums of money, are tried in a higher court. Lesser crimes are tried in lower courts. Village courts and district courts are cheaper than national courts, so it makes sense to use them whenever appropriate.

Even for serious crimes, lower courts are used to take a look at the evidence first and decide whether there is a case for the defendant to answer. If there is, the magistrate will commit the defendant for trial at the higher court; if there is not, the magistrate may dismiss the case. The magistrate may decide that he or she can deal with it, and do so. In this way, the expensive higher courts are used only for those cases which need to be heard by them.

These hearings in the lower courts, to assess the evidence, are called committal proceedings.

There may be special dangers in reporting committal proceedings, because the things which are said in court may well be the substance of the trial when it comes to the higher court. In many countries, it is considered important that the media do not publish that evidence before it is presented in court. That could prejudice the defendant’s chance of a fair trial.

You will need to check in your own country whether the reporting of committal proceedings is restricted. If it is, then even though committal proceedings are heard in public, all that may be reported is:

- The name of the court and the name of the magistrate hearing the case
- The names, addresses, ages, places of origin and jobs of the defendants and relevant witnesses
- The offence or offences with which the defendants are charged (or a summary of them)
- Names of lawyers or police prosecutors involved
- The decision of the court
- If a defendant is sent for trial, the court to which he is sent and the charges on which he is sent (which may be different from the original offence with which he was charged)
- If the committal proceedings are adjourned, the date and place to which they are adjourned
- Whether or not bail is granted (but not the reasons why bail is refused)
- Whether legal aid has been granted, if there is a legal aid scheme

What may not be reported is any of the evidence given by any of the witnesses, or the submissions by the lawyers or police prosecutor, or any of the magistrate's comments.

A report of committal proceedings may be just the bare bones as outlined above and will not have
the flesh put on it yet. That will come later, when the full trial is heard.

However, since these reporting restrictions are there to protect the defendant's rights, he may choose if he wishes to have the restrictions lifted. For example, he may consider that publicity will encourage new witnesses to come forwards, who may help him to prove his innocence.

If the defendant asks the magistrate for reporting restrictions to be lifted, and if the magistrate agrees - or if your country's legal system allows general reporting of committals - then you can report the committal proceedings just like any other court case, with all the evidence, lawyers' submissions and magistrate's comments. If there is more than one defendant, only one of them needs to ask for reporting restrictions to be lifted and they will normally be lifted.

If the case is not sent for trial - if it is either dismissed, or dealt with on the spot by the magistrate - then the whole proceedings are complete. The case is no longer *sub judice* and you can carry a full report of the committal proceedings, with no restrictions.

If one defendant is dealt with on the spot by the magistrate (or released) while the others are sent for trial, then the situation is more complicated. You can report all the evidence which relates only to the case of the one person, to show the readers or listeners why he was treated differently. However, any evidence which relates also to the defendants who have been sent for trial may not be used in your report until their trial is over.

If the case is sent for trial, then once that trial in the higher court is finished you can report full details of all the evidence which was given at committal proceedings. In other words, committal proceedings are not secret; you are just prevented from reporting straight away the full details of what happens there. You may have to wait until the case is finished, so that you do not prevent the defendant having a fair trial.

**Children in court**

Children sometimes behave so badly that they have to appear before the courts. Usually there are special courts for them, called *children's courts* or *juvenile courts*, although they may also appear before village courts or district courts.

In most countries, whichever court a child appears before, the same golden rule always applies:

**You may never identify an accused child in a court report without special permission from the judge.**

The reason for this is simple. Children are punished in order to make them behave better in future, not for revenge. It will not help them to stop being bad and become good citizens if they become known publicly as criminals.

The age at which young people legally stop being children or juveniles varies from country to country. Sometimes it is 16, 17 or 18, sometimes younger. You must check the legal age in your country.

It is not simply a matter of not naming a child; it is important that no information is given which would identify the child.

For example, to describe a child as “the nine-year-old son of a community school headmaster from Laho Village” identifies him just as precisely as if you had used his name. As a general rule, you can only use the child's age, sex and the general area he or she comes from. For example:

A ten-year-old Nadi girl ...

Sometimes two members of the same family appear in court together, charged with the same
crime. One of them may be an adult and the other a child - father and son, for instance, or two brothers.

In such a case, you are allowed to name the adult, of course; but if you also say that the two are related, you will identify the child. There are two ways to report a case of this kind.

The first is not to report the relationship, but to call them "Bruce Maupiti, 28, of Avarua, Rarotonga, and a nine-year-old boy from Rarotonga." In this way the boy is not identified.

Sometimes, though, it is impossible to report the case without mentioning the relationship. In such a case, it is best not to name either the man or the boy, but to call them "a 28-year-old man from Rarotonga and his nine-year-old son."

The second restriction on reporting court cases involving children in many countries is that you may not give any of the evidence or the lawyers' submissions, or the magistrate's comments. All you may give is a summary of the charges and the court's decision. For example:

A ten-year-old Nadi girl was yesterday put on a good behaviour bond for one year for stealing a video recorder from a headmaster's house.

Finally for now, even in some countries where there are restrictions on identifying children accused of crimes, journalists are able to name or identify children who are taking part in court cases as witnesses or victims. Because of the differences between laws in different countries and because the consequences of a wrong decision of your part could be severe, you should check with experts in your country.

**Coroner's courts**

Coroners are people who carry out inquiries on behalf of the State into the cause of sudden deaths, the cause of fires, missing people, accidents involving ships and other matters. They are usually magistrates and they carry out the duties of coroner along with their normal work.

An inquiry into the cause of a sudden death is known as an *inquest*.

The powers which a coroner has are the same as those which a magistrate has at committal proceedings. If the coroner finds at the end of an inquest that the person has been unlawfully killed, and that the evidence suggests it was done by a particular person, the coroner can commit that person to a higher court for trial.

As far as the court reporter is concerned, coroner's courts should be treated just like any court where a magistrate presides, where there are no reporting restrictions.

**Family courts**

Marriage is a public thing, because people in a society need to know who is married to whom. In this way, social relationships can proceed properly.

Just as marriage needs to be public, so does divorce. People need to know when a marriage has ended, so that they know the legal status of the people involved, in just the same way as they need to know when a marriage has taken place.

Marriages which are made under law - as opposed to traditional customary marriages or *de facto* relationships of people just living together - can only be ended under law. The courts which decide whether there are reasons for ending a marriage are usually called Family Courts.

The reasons for a court to grant a divorce are typically that one partner has committed a
matrimonial offence, such as adultery, cruelty (physical or mental), desertion for a stated period of
time or persistent bad behaviour.

It is helpful if the results of divorce cases are reported, so that society knows who is married and
who is not. It is also a matter of great public interest when a well-known figure is divorced, so it is
a big news story. However, you will probably be unable to report any details of what happens in
court.

Check in your own country what you are allowed to report; it may be just the court's decision,
announcing that two people have been granted a divorce, the court which granted it and when.

In some countries, you are allowed to say who the witnesses were and give a brief statement of
the charges, defences and counter-charges in support of which evidence is given, plus the judge's
summing-up, his decision and any comments he may make when giving his decision.

In other countries, it may be possible to report divorce proceedings without any restrictions.

Family courts also hear cases involving children - typically custody orders and applications for
adoption. The golden rule regarding children also applies here: they should not normally be
identified. Indeed, in most countries, such hearings are conducted in camera.

Indecent evidence

Some types of hearing may need the judge or magistrate to hear evidence which is intimate and
may be indecent. For instance, a woman may seek a divorce on the grounds that her husband's
sexual demands were cruel, and the judge will need to hear in some detail what those demands
were, in order to decide whether they were cruel. Also, in a rape or sexual assault case, the
evidence of a doctor who examined the victim after the assault may need to be heard.

You will not normally publish anything indecent in a court report, even if it was said in open court.
If indecent evidence is given, you may report the fact that evidence was given, but not the details
of that evidence. For example, you may say:

Mrs Bairiki described her husband's sexual demands, which she claimed were cruel.

Or you may say:

Dr Stephen Betio gave evidence regarding the physical condition of the victim after the alleged
rape. He described her injuries in detail and said that these were consistent with violent sexual
intercourse having taken place.

In camera

In certain circumstances, the court may decide to hear evidence in camera. This is a Latin phrase
which means literally "in the room", and in practice means "in private". No reporters or other
members of the public are allowed into the courtroom while that evidence is heard.

Even if you somehow manage to find out what was said, you are not allowed to publish it.

A court will normally only hear evidence in camera if it involves national security, evidence or legal
arguments which a judge does not want the jury to hear or in certain cases involving children.
**TO SUMMARISE:**

To ensure that defendants have a fair trial, there are some restrictions on court reporters:

- You should not discuss the background to a case, or comment on a case, while it is *sub judice*
- You may not be able to report committal proceedings in full
- You cannot identify children involved in court cases without the court’s permission
- You may not be able to report what happens in divorce cases
- You cannot report any hearing that is *in camera*

Make court reports lively and interesting for the reader or listener

When somebody is found guilty, base the intro on the crime, not the verdict; if the sentence is very unusual, you may base the intro on that
This is the third of three chapters on court and legal reporting. In the previous chapters we considered why it is important for court cases to be reported, and how to do it safely and properly. We also looked at how to write reports that are accurate, fair and interesting. In this, the final chapter on court reporting, we follow a legal case through from beginning to end.

What follows is how a case may be reported in the newspapers from the day the crime is committed until the end of the court case. Bear in mind that, for radio or television, your reports would be much briefer than these. [All characters are fictitious.]

NOTE: In some countries, journalists are allowed to report more or less detail at different stages of the process. For example, in some countries you are not allowed to identify the accused until they appear in open court. You should get local professional advice on how restrictions apply in your country.

The crime

It is the afternoon of Tuesday, July 9, and an armed gang in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, has just stolen K60,000 from security men as they carried the money out of a bank to an armoured car. (The Kina is the currency of Papua New Guinea.)

The gang, of four men, fired shots into the air as they rushed the security men, and clubbed one of them to the ground when he resisted. Passers-by were ordered to lie down on the ground. The men grabbed three bags containing the money, in used bank notes, and got away in a waiting car.

Nobody has yet been arrested or charge, so you might report the crime in the next morning's newspaper as follows:

**Armed gang steals K60,000**

An armed gang got away with K60,000 after a hold-up outside a city centre bank yesterday afternoon.

Four hooded men fired shots into the air and hit a security man over the head before grabbing the cash, which was in three leather bags.

The gang escaped in a waiting car, which was later found abandoned near the causeway to Tatana Island.

The injured security guard, Mr Peter Tom, was taken to Port Moresby General Hospital. He is said to be suffering from concussion and is in a satisfactory condition.

The hold-up happened at 2.45 pm yesterday as security men were carrying the money from Westpac Bank in Douglas Street, Port Moresby, to a waiting armoured car.

"It was all so unexpected," said Mr Hugh Leke, from Marshall Lagoon, who was walking past at the time of the robbery.

"One moment everything was normal and the next there were shots and everything was chaos. I saw some men - I think there were four of them - with hoods over their heads and guns in their hands and they were shouting at the security men and everyone.
"One of them was hitting a security man over the head, because he wouldn't let go of the bag of money he was holding.

"They told everyone to lie down in the road, so I did. It didn't seem a good idea to argue.

"After a few seconds, we heard a squeal of tyres and I looked up to see a car racing away. Lots of people then got up and went to help the injured guard."

Supt John Togula, of Boroko CID, said later: "We are determined to find this vicious and dangerous gang as soon as possible. We have found a car abandoned near the causeway to Tatana Island and we believe it is the car they made their getaway in.

"We would like the public to help us by telling us if they saw some men leaving a white Mazda 626 at that place at about 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon, and going to another vehicle."

The manager of Westpac's Douglas Street branch, Mr Bruce Large, said later that he was shocked by what had happened.

"We are very shocked, but we have every confidence in the police to find the men responsible," he said.

The arrest

Two days later, on Thursday, July 11, the police tell you that they have arrested someone after a car chase and shoot-out, in which three people were shot dead and two policemen wounded.

They give you full details of the chase and the gun battle, and the names of the dead men and the man they have arrested. They say they believe this was the gang responsible for the bank robbery.

You ask whether they expect to charge him soon, and they say that they do not expect to charge him for a day or two. The matter is therefore not sub judice. All the same, we must be careful not to say that this was the gang that robbed Westpac Bank, though we can say there is a connection, if we do it only by stating facts. In the next day's newspaper, therefore, you can run a report as follows:

**Three die in gun battle with police**

Three men were shot dead and two policemen wounded in a gun battle near Sogeri yesterday.

The three, plus a fourth man who is now in police custody, were in a car which sped away from a police road block at Moitaka.

When police gave chase, the occupants of the car opened fire with shotguns and a rifle, said Supt John Togula, of Boroko CID.

"My men suspected that these were dangerous armed men, and they gave chase," he said. "They willingly risked their own safety to protect the public.

"Even after shots were fired, they continued to give chase all the way to Sogeri, until the car left the road and hit a tree.

"The occupants of the car then got out and again opened fire on the police. Fire was returned, and three men were killed and two police officers received gunshot wounds."

The dead men were named as David Kapul, Wally Muruk and Arthur Kakaruk. No addresses are yet
available for the dead men, but it is believed that they all lived at Six Mile.

The wounded policemen are Corporal Jehosephat Garo, of Koki, and Constable William Jimi, of Waigani police barracks. Both men are attached to Boroko CID.

Cpl Garo is in a stable condition in Port Moresby General Hospital. He was shot in the abdomen and had an emergency operation last night to remove the bullet. Const Jimi is in a satisfactory condition with a wound in the thigh.

The man who is under arrest is Joe Mauswara, who also lives in Six Mile. He is under police guard at Port Moresby General Hospital, where he is recovering from injuries which he received in the car crash.

He was recovered unconscious from the driving seat and is believed to have been the driver of the car when it crashed.

Supt Togula is leading the investigation into an armed robbery outside Westpac Bank's Douglas Street branch in Port Moresby on Tuesday, in which K60,000 was stolen and a security guard injured.

The police have since been looking for the gang of four armed men responsible.

**The charges**

The next Monday, police tell you that Mauswara had recovered sufficiently from his injuries over the weekend to be questioned by them. He has now been charged with armed robbery in connection with the Westpac Bank hold-up, and with other lesser charges in connection with driving through the police road block and dangerous driving. Police say that he may face further charges.

The case is now *sub judice*. You can say nothing more about the details of the armed hold-up or the gun battle at Sogeri - that is for the courts to decide on. All you can report in Tuesday's newspaper is the following:

**Bank robbery: man charged**

A man has been charged with armed robbery in connection with the robbery of K60,000 outside a Port Moresby bank last Tuesday.

Joe Mauswara, aged 28, of Six Mile, who comes from Gulf Province, will appear before Boroko magistrates today.

Mauswara has also been charged with failing to comply with police instructions and with dangerous driving.

Supt John Togula, of Boroko CID, said that Mauswara may face more charges.

**The remand**

Next day, Mauswara appears in Boroko District Court. It is a legal requirement that the police cannot just put a person in jail without taking them before a magistrate for remand.

Police tell the magistrate that it will take them more time to complete their investigations and prepare the case against Mauswara. In the meantime, they want him held in custody. The magistrate agrees, and says they must come before the court again in two weeks' time, either to
present their case or to explain why they need more time.

In Wednesday's newspaper you can say:

**Bank robbery: man held**

A Gulf Province man was yesterday remanded in custody, charged with armed robbery of K60,000 outside Westpac Bank, Port Moresby, last Tuesday.

Joe Mauswara, aged 28, of Six Mile, was also charged with failing to comply with police instructions and dangerous driving.

The magistrate, Mrs Edna Sinob, remanded Mauswara in custody until July 30.

The police may require two or more such appearances before they are ready to present their case. Each one should be reported in the same way.

**The committal**

Finally, the police are ready to present the evidence which they have against Mauswara, and committal proceedings are held, at Boroko District Court. The lesser charges - of failure to comply with police instructions and dangerous driving - are dropped, but a new charge is brought against Mauswara. He is charged with conspiracy to murder.

Mauswara pleads not guilty to both charges.

Police bring witnesses who describe the hold-up, the switch of vehicles near the Tatana Island causeway, the arrival of Mauswara and his three friends (who were shot dead at Sogeri) at Six Mile with bags of money, the car chase and shoot-out at Sogeri, and the recovery of Mauswara's unconscious body from the car. Mauswara's lawyer says that they do not want to offer any defence at this time. The police also offer evidence that the way the car sped through the police road block, followed by shots, showed that the gang had discussed this beforehand, and that this constituted conspiracy to murder.

The magistrate decides that there is a case to answer on the charge of armed robbery, and sends Mauswara for trial at the National Court. She decides that there is no case to answer on the charge of conspiracy to murder and dismisses that charge.

Mauswara's lawyer applies for bail, on the grounds that his client is innocent until proved guilty and should not be kept in jail. Police say that Mauswara has been convicted eight previous times of armed robbery and should not be allowed out of custody. The magistrate agrees with them and refuses bail.

You may report the proceedings as follows, taking care not to give any details of Mauswara's previous convictions:

**Bank robbery: man sent for trial**

A 28-year-old man has been sent for trial at the National Court in connection with an armed robbery outside a Port Moresby bank in July.

Joseph Aaron Mauswara, an unemployed man from Gulf Province, who lives at Six Mile in the National Capital District, will face a charge of armed robbery.

He appeared yesterday before Boroko District Court, where he denied the charge.

He also denied a charge of conspiracy to murder. The magistrate, Mrs Edna Sinob, after hearing
evidence from six witnesses, ruled that there was no case to answer on the second charge. However, she sent Mauswara for trial at the National Court on the charge that he committed an armed robbery in Douglas Street, Port Moresby, on Tuesday, July 9.

The defence lawyer, Mr Alec Smart, said that he did not wish to present the defence case at this time.

The police prosecutor, Supt Reuben Paul said that he would be offering no evidence in relation to two other charges which had earlier been laid against Mauswara - failure to comply with police instructions and dangerous driving. Those charges were therefore dropped.

An application by Mr Smart for bail was rejected by Mrs Sinob.

**The trial**

Some weeks or perhaps months later, Mauswara's case will come before the National Court. His case may last for several days, but for the sake of this example we shall look at the reports of only three days of the trial.

The first day:

On the first day of the trial, the charge is read to the defendant and he pleads not guilty. The prosecution lawyer outlines the case which she will attempt to prove. The defence lawyer outlines the weaknesses which he will attempt to show exist in the prosecution's case, and the case for the defendant which he will attempt to prove. After all that, it is too late in the day to call any witnesses so the judge adjourns the case until the next day.

You may report the day's proceedings as follows:

**Court hears of orgy of violence**

The National Court heard yesterday of an "orgy of violence" on the streets of Port Moresby.

Prosecution lawyer Ms Therese Loloata told the court how four men had terrorised passers-by in Douglas Street, Port Moresby, on July 9 and brutally beaten a security guard, before getting away with K60,271 in cash.

"We shall show that this orgy of violence on the streets of our capital city was planned and carried out in part by the defendant," she said.

Before the court was Joseph Aaron Mauswara, aged 28, an unemployed man from Gulf Province but living at Six Mile in the National Capital District. He denied the charge of armed robbery.

The case is being heard by Mr Justice Bredman.

Ms Loloata told the court that she intended to call witnesses to prove that Mauswara was one of the four men involved in the armed hold-up, outside Westpac Bank.

She said he had driven a stolen Mazda 626 along the coast road to the Tatana Island causeway, where the gang had abandoned the car and driven away in a waiting Toyota Cressida. He was one of the same four men who had returned later that same day to Six Mile settlement, where they had publicly boasted of what they had done and hosted a big party, she added.

Ms Loloata told the court that Mauswara was one of the same four men who tried to avoid arrest by driving through a police road block and shooting at the police, although it was not suggested that
Mauswara himself had actually fired any shots at the police.

Mr Alec Smart, representing Mauswara, said that he would prove that his client was nowhere near Douglas Street at the time of the robbery, and he would also show that the prosecution's identification of Mauswara as one of the gang depended on one person's evidence.

"We shall show that this person's evidence is not reliable, because he has a grudge against the defendant," said Mr Smart. "We shall show that the police have been sadly deceived, and that the defendant is the victim of a terrible plot to have him punished for a crime which he did not commit."

The case continues.

The second day:

On the second day of the trial, the prosecution calls its first witnesses. The first is a Westpac Bank clerk, Mrs Aileen Kokoda. She gives an account of the robbery, which she saw from the door of the bank where she was standing at the time. She is cross-examined by the defence lawyer, who wants to know whether she could see the faces of any of the men who carried out the robbery. She says that they all wore masks and she could not see any faces.

The prosecution calls its second witness, Mr Kali Pukpuk, who was one of the security men involved. He also gives an account of the robbery, including evidence about what he heard the men saying to each other.

He says that one of them called another "Wally", and that he replied calling him "Joe". He is cross-examined by the defence lawyer, who wants to know whether he was frightened by the armed gang. Mr Pukpuk admits that he was.

After Mr Pukpuk has been cross-examined, it is too late in the day to begin with another witness, so the judge adjourns the hearing until next day.

Even though Mrs Kokoda gave her evidence before Mr Pukpuk, you consider that his evidence is more newsworthy, so you report the day's proceedings as follows:

I thought I was going to die, court told

A security guard told yesterday of the day he thought he was going to die.

Mr Kali Pukpuk, a guard with Strongpela Security, was giving evidence on the second day of the trial of Joseph Aaron Mauswara, at the National Court.

Mauswara, aged 28, an unemployed man from Gulf Province living at Six Mile in the National Capital District, has denied the charge of armed robbery outside Westpac Bank in Douglas Street, Port Moresby, on July 9.

Speaking in Pidgin, Mr Pukpuk told the court: "Four men with masks on their heads ran towards me as I came out of the bank, carrying two bags full of money.

"They were shooting guns and shouting. I thought I was going to die.

"One of them tried to grab the bags of money from me, but I just could not let go of them. He shouted to one of the other robbers `Shall I shoot him, Wally?' and the other fellow said `Just get the money, Joe'.

"Then I let go of the bags and the man called Joe grabbed them and shoved me to the ground."
Mr Pukpuk comes from Simbu Province and lives in Morata.

Under cross-examination, Mr Pukpuk admitted that he had been very frightened. But he rejected a suggestion by defence lawyer Mr Alec Smart that he was so frightened he could not see or hear properly.

"I was frightened," he said, "but I know I heard these fellows use the names Wally and Joe."

Earlier, a clerk who works at the Westpac Bank branch outside which the armed robbery took place also gave her account of the hold-up.

Mrs Aileen Kokoda, from Oro Province, who lives in Boroko, told the court that it was like a scene from a movie.

"There was gun shooting and a guard being hit," she said. "The gang told everybody to lie down, so everyone did. Even the people with nice clothes on just lay down in the dirt."

Mr Smart asked Mrs Kokoda whether she had seen the faces of any of the men involved. "No, sir," she replied. "They had masks over their heads."

The case is being heard by Mr Justice Bredman and the prosecution lawyer is Ms Therese Loloata.

The case continues.

The next-to-last day:

Over several more days of the trial, the prosecution lawyer calls all six witnesses, and each gives evidence and is cross-examined by the defence lawyer; and then the defence lawyer calls his witnesses, and each gives evidence and is cross-examined by the prosecution lawyer. Now it is all over.

The last defence witness has given evidence - a man referred to as John X, to protect his identity for his own safety. He lives in Six Mile and gives evidence about a long-running feud between Mauswara and the prosecution witness from Six Mile, who is also unnamed for his own safety. After a discussion between the judge and both lawyers, it is decided that John X's evidence will be heard in camera since it will otherwise reveal the identity of the prosecution witness.

After lunch the defence lawyer sums up his case, then the prosecution lawyer sums up her case. Because there is no jury, the judge announces that he will adjourn the hearing until next day at 11 am, when he will announce his verdict.

You may report the day's proceedings as follows:

Witness is tarnished, court told

The National Court was yesterday urged to think very carefully before convicting a man on the basis of the evidence of "a tarnished witness".

Defence lawyer Mr Alec Smart was summing up in the case of Joseph Aaron Mauswara, aged 28, an unemployed man from Gulf Province, who lives at Six Mile in the National Capital District.

Mauswara has denied the charge of armed robbery outside Westpac Bank in Douglas Street, Port Moresby, on July 9.

"The prosecution case hangs on a very slender thread," Mr Smart told the court. "Nobody denies that the armed robbery took place, but what is at issue is whether the defendant was one of the
men involved.

"The only evidence offered by the prosecution to support this claim is the word of a tarnished witness, a man who the court has heard had good reason to bear a grudge against the defendant.

"I urge the court to weigh the evidence very carefully and not to convict on such evidence."

Mr Smart had earlier called a witness, who was introduced as John X, of Six Mile. After legal discussion, it was agreed that he should give his evidence in camera - that is, in secret - because it may reveal the identity of a prosecution witness who gave evidence on Wednesday, but whose identity has also been kept secret.

After the open hearing resumed, Mr Justice Bredman said: "This witness has given evidence about a strained relationship between the unnamed prosecution witness and the defendant. The submission by the defence is that this is grounds for doubting the word of the witness.

"No further details of the evidence can be made public".

The prosecution lawyer, Ms Therese Loloata, in her summing up, called for the severest action to be taken against Mauswara.

"We have a case in which innocent people have been terrorised on the streets of our city, by a gang of four men including a `Wally' and a `Joe'," she said.

"We have four men, including a man called Wally and the defendant, called Joe, returning to Six Mile shortly afterwards to boast of the crime and to flash big money around.

"And we have the defendant driving armed thugs around Sogeri, flouting the law of the land and trying to kill police officers.

"It is clear that the defendant is one of the four men who carried out the brutal robbery in Port Moresby on July 9. I submit that the court has no choice but to find him guilty."

Mr Justice Bredman adjourned the case until 11 am today, when he will give his verdict.

The last day:

The last day of the trial begins with the judge giving his verdict; he finds Mauswara guilty.

Mauswara's previous convictions are given to the court. A list of eight previous convictions for armed robbery is read out, as well as earlier convictions for petty theft. He was last convicted on five counts of armed robbery three years earlier and sentenced to four years' jail. With remission, he was released from jail just two weeks before the Westpac Bank hold-up.

Then the judge makes some comments before passing sentence. He says that Mauswara is clearly a habitual criminal with no regard or respect for the rule of law. He says that Mauswara is violent and that society needs to be protected from him.

The judge sends Mauswara to jail for ten years with hard labour, which is the maximum sentence for such an offence.

The case is now finished and no longer sub judice. Your report of this final day's court proceedings will still have to be fair, accurate and without malice, in order to be protected by privilege; but you are no longer restricted from talking about the crime or the background to it.

In the next day's paper you should therefore have several different items. The first is a report of
the final day's proceedings, as follows:

Man raided bank two weeks after release from jail

A Gulf Province man was one of four armed men who snatched more than K60,000 outside a Port Moresby bank in July - just a fortnight after he was released from jail.

Yesterday the man - Joseph Aaron Mauswara, aged 28, living at Six Mile in the National Capital District - was sentenced to ten years in jail with hard labour.

Mr Justice Bredman told Mauswara at the end of his five-day trial in the National Court:

"You are clearly a habitual criminal with no regard or respect for the rule of law. You have already been sentenced to jail for similar crimes and you have not learned your lesson.

"You are also a violent man and society needs to be protected from you. I am therefore giving you the maximum punishment allowed by the law."

Mauswara and three other men held up security guards as they were leaving Westpac Bank in Douglas Street, Port Moresby, on July 9. They fired shots in the air and beat one security guard with the butt of a gun.

The other three men were shot dead during a gun battle with police near Sogeri two days later. They were David Kapul, aged 31, and Wally Muruk, aged 22, both from Western Province; and Arthur Kakaruk, aged 18, from Gulf Province. They all lived at Six Mile, in the National Capital District.

Mauswara was driving the car in which the gang were attempting to escape from the police at the time of the shoot-out. He was injured when the car left the road and hit a tree.

After yesterday's hearing, Mauswara was taken straight to Bomana Jail to begin his sentence.

In addition to the report of the proceedings - which includes as much of the original crime as you like, since it is all now established as fact - you can now publish any background which you want.

For example, the policeman who was shot in the abdomen, Cpl Garo, may have had to leave the police force as an invalid. During the many weeks of the proceedings, you could have interviewed him about how he feels. Would he do the same if he had his time again? Take a photograph of him. All this material can now be published.

What about the security man who was beaten? Is he still working as a security guard? Does he have sleepless nights, thinking about the day he was nearly killed? You can interview him and publish his story the morning after the trial ends, too.

What about Joe Mauswara? What kind of man is he? Where did he grow up and what was he like as a child? During the proceedings, you or a colleague could have gone to his village and talked to his people, or talk to the people where he has lived. Was he married? If so, perhaps his wife will talk to you.

The day after the trial has ended, your readers will be interested to know this kind of background information. It will help them to understand what turns a man into the kind of violent criminal which Mauswara has become.

Of course, you do not usually carry this amount of background for every court case - only for big crimes, or for crimes involving famous people. But you do need to cover every crime and court case which you consider worth covering in the way outlined here.
Finally, to review what you've read about reporting court and legal issues, here is a diagram by Papua New Guinean cartoonist Bob Browne showing the process from beginning to end.

For a simple colour-coded chart showing how the laws on court reporting interact in two common criminal cases, click [here](#).
**TO SUMMARISE:**

Courts are usually open to the public; journalists are free to report what goes on there.

Reports are protected against defamation, as long as they are:

- Fair
- Accurate
- Without malice

To ensure that defendants have a fair trial, there are some restrictions on court reporters:

- You should not discuss the background to a case, or comment on a case, while it is **sub judice**
- You may not be able to report committal proceedings in full
- You cannot identify children involved in court cases without the court’s permission
- You may not be able to report what happens in divorce cases
- You cannot report any hearing that is **in camera**

Make court reports lively and interesting for the reader or listener.

When somebody is found guilty, base the intro on the crime, not the verdict; if the sentence is very unusual, you may base the intro on that.
Chapter 67: Privilege

In this chapter, we look at the way in which many reports are protected from legal action for defamation. We see what conditions are necessary for a report to have this protection.

What is privilege?

As we saw in Chapter 63: Introduction to the law, the law exists to protect the right of people to live their lives without harassment or interference by other people. That often means that one person's freedom has to be limited in one area so that another person's freedom can be protected in another area.

For instance, unless you have been arrested and put in prison, you are free to travel around town in your car, if you own one. But that freedom is limited in many ways, in the interests of other people's safety.

In the first place, you may only drive that car if you have a driving licence, and to get that you have to prove that you know how to drive a car safely. Then you may only drive within the speed limit and only on one side of the road, unless you are overtaking. If a red traffic light is showing, you are not free to continue with your journey - you must wait until a green light shows in its place.

Sometimes, though, it is acceptable for people to break any or all of those rules. If an ambulance was rushing a sick person to hospital, and every second was precious in the race to save the person's life, then the ambulance driver may drive faster than the speed limit, drive down the wrong side of the road if it is clear, and drive through red lights. He will normally have a siren or bell sounding, to warn other drivers that he is driving in this way, and will take great care not to cause an accident.

This shows that there are times when rules may be set aside, in the interests of a greater good. In the case of the ambulance, it is important that seriously ill people should be taken to hospital as quickly as possible - more important than the traffic regulations. So, in those circumstances, the ambulance driver is allowed to go outside the rules without being prosecuted.

Privilege is rather like that. It is the opportunity for people (including journalists) to say or write things which they may not normally say or write, in the interests of a greater good.

Courts and parliament

The two main areas where you will come across privilege are in reporting the proceedings of courts and parliament. In both cases, it would not be possible to carry out the job if the people involved were unable to speak openly and fearlessly.

As we saw in Chapters 64 to 66 on court reporting, witnesses and others involved in court cases may need to say things about the defendant which are damaging to his reputation. But as you will see in Chapter 69, the law of defamation prevents people saying untrue things about other people which damage their reputations.

It would be impossible for the courts to operate if a witness who gave evidence for the prosecution could be sued for defamation if, at the end of the trial, the defendant is acquitted. Witnesses must be free to speak what they believe to be the truth, even if it later turns out that they were wrong.

Similarly, Members of Parliament and other elected representatives of the people can only do their job if they are free to debate issues openly. The country cannot be properly governed by people
who are muzzled.

So it is that all these people are protected by privilege. Nobody can be sued for defamation as a result of anything they say as part of court proceedings or proceedings of parliament.

The good news for journalists is that the law also extends privilege to newspaper, radio and television reports of courts and parliament, so long as they meet a few important conditions.

**Absolute and qualified privilege**

There are two types of privilege. They offer slightly different kinds of protection, and the conditions which reports need to meet are slightly different for the two types. They are called *absolute privilege* and *qualified privilege*.

As far as people taking part in court proceedings and parliament are concerned, they are all covered by absolute privilege.

As far as the journalist is concerned, reports of court cases are usually covered by absolute privilege (there is one exception, which we shall deal with below); reports of parliament are covered by qualified privilege.

**Absolute privilege**

Absolute privilege is a complete defence against any action for defamation. It does not matter if the words said were the truth or a lie, or whether they damage anybody's reputation. It does not matter whether the person speaking them was motivated by concern for the public good or by the desire to hurt the person against whom they spoke.

In order to be protected by absolute privilege, a report of court proceedings must meet three conditions. It must be:

- Fair
- Accurate
- Published contemporaneously

We shall look in detail below at what these mean.

**Qualified privilege**

Qualified privilege generally offers the same protection to the journalist as absolute privilege, but there is an extra condition which your report has to meet. In order to be protected by qualified privilege, your report has to be not only fair and accurate, it also has to be published *without malice*.

That means that your reason for publishing the report must be concern for the general public good. If you publish in detail on page one a report of scathing remarks made in parliament against a rival newspaper, then you will be open to the accusation that you were malicious. If a judge accepts that, then your report will no longer be protected by privilege, and you will need to defend it against an action for defamation in other ways. These are discussed in detail in *Chapter 69*.

Several kinds of report have qualified privilege, so long as they are published without malice:

- Fair and accurate reports of parliament. This includes reports of the contents of official parliamentary papers and reports, as well as debates in the chamber
- Fair and accurate reports of court cases which are not published contemporaneously
- Fair and accurate reports of public inquiries
• Fair and accurate reports of meetings of local authorities, trustees or boards, if what they are discussing is a matter of public concern
• Fair and accurate reports of public meetings, if what they are discussing is a matter of public concern

In all the last three cases your report will only be covered by privilege if what is being discussed is a matter of public concern. For example, if a board of trustees meets to discuss two items - whether to withdraw its investment in a company with North Korean connections, and whether the chairman's secretary can have an extra week's holiday to look after her sick mother - then you have to decide whether they are matters of public concern.

It is clear that the first item is, so any report you publish will be protected by qualified privilege. The second item about the secretary's leave is clearly not a matter of public concern, so you must be careful in your report not to include any defamatory material, even if such things are said at the meeting.

**Conditions for absolute privilege**

In order to be covered by the protection of absolute privilege, we have already seen that a court report must be fair, accurate and published contemporaneously. Let us now consider what each of these means in practice.

**Fair**

A court report is fair if it presents both sides of the case roughly equally. This does not mean that you have to report every word that was said, but it does mean that you cannot report the whole of the prosecution case and just a tiny bit of the defence - or the other way round.

**Accurate**

Reporters must not make mistakes. What a witness or board member says may be quoted, but it must be an accurate quote. Minor mistakes will not matter but if you make any significant error, your report will not be protected by privilege. Court reporters need good shorthand.

**Published contemporaneously**

This means "in the next issue of the newspaper or the next news bulletin". A fair and accurate court report which is published contemporaneously is protected by absolute privilege.

However, even if the report is published later - whether it is two issues of the paper later or two years later - it can still be protected by qualified privilege. As we saw above, that means that it is privileged as long as publication was not motivated by malice.

For instance, a court case which finished late on Thursday afternoon may not have been written up in time to be included in Friday morning's paper. Perhaps the paper is not published on Saturdays and Sundays, and perhaps the following Monday there was a big news story and lots of weekend sport to fit into just a few pages. As a result, the report of the court case does not appear until Tuesday morning.

This report has not been published contemporaneously, so it does not have the protection of absolute privilege. However, under normal circumstances the qualified privilege would offer just as good protection to the newspaper, since there is no malice involved in its late publication.

Now let us consider a very different situation. Imagine that a man is standing for election to parliament, and you know that he appeared in court two years earlier charged with illegally possessing a firearm. He was acquitted (found not guilty), but during the trial some very damaging
things were said against him.

So, on polling day, your newspaper publishes a report of that court case, highlighting the bad things which were said against him. The only reason for doing such a thing can be that you want to stop this man winning the election. This would be clearly malicious and you would not be able to defend yourself against an action for defamation by claiming that the report was privileged.

**Conditions for qualified privilege**

We have already seen that the main conditions for a report to be protected by qualified privilege are that it is fair, accurate and without malice. There are two important tests for indicating whether there was malice: whether there has been a demonstration of good faith and whether the newspaper, radio or television station has allowed the right of reply.

**Good faith**

Very often, the protection of qualified privilege will depend on whether or not the report was published in good faith for the information of the public.

That means the newspaper, radio or television station has no bad feeling towards the person who is being defamed, and is reporting the news in its usual way.

For example, imagine that a public meeting has been called to discuss the way in which a headmaster is running his school, and some very harsh things are said about him at the meeting. The headmaster chooses not to attend the meeting, but you do. You may report everything that is said, as long as you have no personal grudge against the headmaster and the newspaper, radio or television station has no grudge against him. The meeting must also be reported in the way that you usually report such public meetings.

Your private view of the headmaster is your own business, but it must be clear that the purpose of your report is to inform the public of what was said at the meeting, not to damage the headmaster's reputation.

If that headmaster expelled you when you were at school, you should ask the editor to send someone else to cover the meeting; otherwise you could later be accused of having a grudge against the man and acting maliciously.

**Right of reply**

One way in which a newspaper, radio or television station can show that the original report was published in good faith is to allow the person defamed the right of reply.

That headmaster, after reading your report, might ask to be allowed to write a letter for publication, stating his side of the case. If you refuse, or if you accept his letter but do not bother to publish it, you will demonstrate that you lack good faith.

All the same, you do not need to let him write as long a letter as he likes. Generally speaking, you should let him write a letter which is about as long as the report which he is complaining about. If the original report was 350 words long, and he produces a 2,000-word letter, he must be politely but firmly told either to cut it himself or to accept that you will cut it. He has the right of reply, but not the right to take over the entire newspaper.
TO SUMMARISE:

Privilege is a way of permitting people in certain circumstances to defame other people, without any danger of being sued.

Qualified privilege is usually as good a protection as absolute privilege.

You must take care that you publish all reports in good faith and allow reasonable right of reply.
Chapter 68: Contempt

In this chapter, we see the ways in which the courts protect their dignity and their independence. We see the ways in which this may cause difficulties for journalists, and how these difficulties can be avoided.

What is contempt?

As we saw in Chapters 64 to 66 on court reporting, in democracies the courts decide what is true and what is not, who is in the right and who is in the wrong.

When they have decided, they usually make a decision which will put matters right. They may order a person to stop doing something which is wrong; they may order a person to pay compensation to somebody he has wronged; they may punish a person who has broken the law by fining him or sending him to prison.

Court proceedings would be a waste of time if nobody needed to do what the court told them, or if the court had no power to enforce its orders.

Contempt of court is disregarding the court's orders, or in any way interfering with the way the court does its job. Most courts take this very seriously, and have great power to deal with offenders.

There are two types of contempt - civil contempt and criminal contempt. Of the two, criminal contempt is the one which is most likely to concern the working journalist, so let us consider that first.

Criminal contempt

As we have seen, the courts can only operate effectively if they are able to enforce their will. That is the main purpose of the law relating to civil contempt. However, in order to operate properly, the courts also need to be free from outside interference and to maintain their dignity. That, too, is protected by criminal contempt.

It is the business of the legislature to pass laws, but it is the business of the courts to administer them; when members of a government try to interfere in court proceedings or to influence court judgments, they are likely to be reminded sternly that they are interfering. If they persist, they may well find themselves in contempt of court, even if they are government ministers. Nobody is above the law.

Similarly, the courts will protect themselves from interference by people attempting to bribe or threaten anyone connected with a case. They will also protect themselves from interference by journalists, and we shall look in detail in a moment at exactly what journalists may and may not write during a court case.

Courts also guard their dignity. This is not because judges consider themselves to be special people, but because they see themselves as representatives of the law itself. It is the law which must be respected by all citizens, and in order to ensure that respect, the courts insist on maintaining dignity. Courts are usually large and imposing buildings with national emblems above the bench where the judges or magistrates sit; judges often wear robes and wigs and people bow to them in court. All of these things represent the great stature and dignity of courts, which in turn are meant to encourage people to respect and obey them.

Both these things - freedom from interference and maintenance of dignity - are protected by the
law relating to criminal contempt. The following things are prohibited:

Outrages on judges in court

It is criminal contempt to assault or manhandle a judge, or to throw eggs or fruits at them.

Insolence to the court

It is criminal contempt to persist in being noisy in court, or to keep interrupting the proceedings, or to refuse to answer questions which have been properly put. Even something as simple as an onlooker – or journalist - reading a newspaper in court could be regarded by a judge as insolence.

Interference with witnesses or officers of the court

Officers of the court are the judge or magistrate, the clerk, lawyers, translators, jurors (if any) and anyone else involved in hearing the case. Interference generally means threats or bribes intended to influence the way in which the person does their job - either offering money in return for the desired verdict, or threatening violence if the unwanted verdict is returned.

Any publication which offends the dignity of the court

Judges are not above criticism, but there are limits to how extreme that criticism can be. For example, it would be criminal contempt if a newspaper, radio or television report suggested that judges were habitually drunk in court, or that they took bribes.

Any publication which prejudices the course of justice

A report of a court case which gives details of the defendant's previous criminal convictions, before the end of the trial, would be criminal contempt. This is because it may prejudice the judge, magistrate or jury against the defendant, if there are many previous convictions. This would reduce the chances of a fair trial. Previous convictions (often called antecedents or priors) may not be revealed until after the verdict has been reached. They are then considered by the court to help it to decide on an appropriate punishment.

Civil contempt

The authority of the courts is protected by the law relating to civil contempt. There are three types of civil contempt. These are:

Wilful disobedience of court orders

Courts may make many kinds of orders. They may issue an order that a person must do something (an order of mandamus), such as return a child who has been declared a ward of court. They may issue an order that a person must not do something (an injunction), such as not walk on a neighbouring clan's land. Once an order has been made, people must obey it. If they wilfully disobey it, they will be in contempt of court. (To “wilfully” disobey means to do it deliberately.)

Failure to comply with court judgments

At the end of a divorce hearing, the judge may award custody of the children to one of the parents. If a child is staying with its father, but the judge grants custody to the mother, then the father must hand the child over to the mother. If he does not do so, he will be in contempt of court.

Disobedience to a subpoena
If the court wants a particular person to attend court to give evidence, but knows that the person does not want to do so, it can subpoena that person. A subpoena is an order to attend court and give evidence, and it must be obeyed. If the person fails to attend court as ordered, even though the court has met any necessary expenses, the person will be in contempt of court.

**Penalties**

For a criminal contempt, you may be fined or jailed for a fixed period of time.

For a civil contempt, you may be jailed for as long as the judge wishes, generally until you have *purged your contempt*. This usually means, in practice, until you have apologised sincerely to the court and have agreed in future to abide by the court's orders.

If the contempt results from your refusal as a journalist to obey a court order to identify a confidential source of information, that contempt can be purged either by obeying the order or by coming to a circumstance where the judge feels the order is no longer necessary. For more on this, see Chapter 60: Sources and confidentiality.

**Risks for journalists**

As far as a working journalist is concerned, criminal contempt is the main danger to be avoided. You are unlikely to wilfully disobey a court order, fail to comply with a court judgment or disobey a subpoena - at any rate, not in the course of your profession.

In contrast, there is always a real danger that, in reporting and commenting on the business of the courts, you may inadvertently commit a criminal contempt. The four main danger areas are dealt with in detail later. First, though, let us consider who is responsible if a report published in a newspaper is deemed to be in contempt. It is not just the reporter who wrote it. In fact, in many countries, the following are all responsible in law:

- Owner
- Publisher
- Editor
- Reporter
- Printer

**Four main dangers**

The four main areas where a working journalist is likely to run the risk of committing contempt are the following:

**Scandalising the court**

The courts rightly protect themselves against anything which will undermine their dignity or interfere with their independence. However, this does not mean that they cannot be criticised.

If a court makes decisions which outrage public opinion - such as a rapist being jailed for six months while a bicycle thief is jailed for three years - then it is the duty of the media to provide an outlet for that outrage. Bad decisions can and should be criticised in the media.

However, great care must always be taken in the way in which the courts' decisions are criticised. Anything written or broadcast which is likely to lower the authority of the court system as a whole or bring it into public derision and contempt may be held to scandalise the court.
For example, you may criticise a judgment on the grounds that it is inconsistent with other judgments; or that it is out of touch with the public mood regarding the crime in question. That kind of criticism, strongly but fairly argued, should not be held to scandalise the court. However, the suggestion that a judge deliberately made an unjust decision, or that he was biased, or drunk, or incapable of carrying out his job, would be held to scandalise the court.

You may discuss the issue, but you may not attack the person.

Interfering with the course of justice

We saw above that threatening or bribing witnesses or officers of the court is contempt. You are unlikely to interfere with the course of justice in this way, but there is another way which is a real danger to be avoided.

When a big crime has been committed, journalists want to interview anyone who saw it happen, in order to be able to report the story. That is perfectly all right. The problem arises later, because those people may also be the witnesses in the court case.

As soon as a person has been charged, or is about to be charged, in connection with the crime, no potential witness should be approached for an interview. The reason for this is that witnesses may later change their evidence in court to fit in with what they have told reporters. Only after they have given evidence and been cross examined should you contemplate interviewing them for any article or program to be published or broadcast after the trial has ended.

Publishing matter likely to prejudice a fair trial

Several kinds of publication while a case is sub judice may prejudice a fair trial. One has already been mentioned - publishing details of the defendant's previous convictions.

Another is publication of details of the background of the case. Whenever there is a big trial, journalists gather together details of the defendant's past life and other background information, ready to publish them at the end of the trial. Once the trial is over, and is no longer sub judice, then all this material can be published. However, if any of it is published during the trial it may be held to prejudice a fair trial.

Care must also be taken regarding a murder case. Until the case is over, you cannot refer to the crime as a "murder". The only established fact is that a person has been killed, not that he has been murdered. The court may decide that the killing was manslaughter, or justifiable homicide, neither of which is murder.

You may refer to an "alleged murder", but only if somebody has actually been charged with murder. Even then, to state as a fact that there has been a murder could be held to prejudice a fair trial. It is safe to refer to the "killing" and "the dead man"; only if the court finds the defendant guilty of murder can you refer to "the murder victim".

It is also important not to report anything about an accused person while their case is sub judice - apart from things said in the charge or during the trial - which could have a bearing on the case.

An example of this was provided in England in 1949, where the editor of a national newspaper was jailed for three months and fined 10,000 pounds for a report published after a man had been arrested and charged with the murder of a woman. The newspaper report did not name the man, but it said of an unnamed man in custody on a murder charge: "So far five murders have been attributed to him." The report named the victims and described the way the murders had been committed. There was little doubt about the identity of the unnamed man in custody. The editor was jailed and fined, even though what he published later proved to be true - the man later confessed to nine similar murders. The fact was that, at the time when the report was published, it could have prejudiced the man's fair trial. It was therefore contempt of court.
Of course, criminal courts in England have juries, who are much more likely than judges to be influenced by what they read in the newspapers, hear on the radio or see on television.

Generally speaking, countries which do not have a jury system may be far more tolerant of media reports than countries which do have juries. If there is no jury, then what is written or broadcast is not so likely to prejudice a fair trial, since the judge will be more able to ignore it.

Nevertheless, even in countries without juries, there are limits to what will be tolerated and care should be taken not to interfere with the proper course of justice.

Refusing to name a source of information

As we have already seen, anyone who refuses to answer questions properly put by a court of law will be in contempt of court. The same rules usually apply in commissions of inquiry established by governments. The rules apply to journalists as much as to any other members of society. This can lead journalists into an ethical dilemma.

Journalists can only do their job if people tell them things. Sometimes, people will tell you things in confidence. This may be because they know of bad things which are happening, which ought to be made public, but they are afraid of losing their job or suffering in some other way if they openly make the facts public.

This is not a rare occurrence - in countries where the press is used to reveal corruption and other kinds of malpractice in government, business and other areas of life, confidential sources of information are the life blood of the media.

However, people will only tell you such secrets if they feel sure that you will never reveal who gave you the information. It is therefore vital that journalists never reveal their sources of information.

However, a court or commission of inquiry may sometimes wish to know who gave certain information to the press. It may subpoena a reporter to appear and it may then ask for the source of the information. As far as the law is concerned, the reporter must answer if it is "necessary in the interests of justice". As far as journalists are concerned, their professional ethics must take priority over the demands of the law, and journalists in many countries regularly refuse to reveal their sources of information, even if this means that they are sent to jail. This ethical question is looked at in detail in Chapter 60: Sources and confidentiality.

The law does recognise that certain people have professional ethics which prevent them revealing information they have gained in confidence - for example, priests are generally not expected to reveal things they have been told in the confessional, and doctors are not usually expected to reveal confidential information about their patients - but in most countries the law does not recognise the journalist as having a similar professional demand. Journalists in many countries feel that their law should be changed in this respect.

However, unless journalists have a special legal status in this respect in your country, the situation is quite clear. If you refuse to name your source of information, when asked to do so by a court or a commission of inquiry, you will be in contempt of court and must expect to be sent to jail.

The Cojuangco Case

In one celebrated Australian case in 1988, journalist Peter Hastings was held in contempt for refusing to name two people who gave him information on the suspect dealings of a Philippines businessman Eduardo Cojuangco who had extensive business interests in New South Wales.

Hasting's article started: "In Indonesia and Thailand, graft and corruption, often on a large scale, are part of the scenery - a form of political and economic overhead. In the Philippines they have been elevated to an art form. One of the leading local US banks maintains that of the Philippines' $US26 billion foreign debt, the
President and close 'cronies' like coconut king Eduardo Cojuangco, and sugar baron Roberto Benedicto, not to mention the First Lady, have totally squandered $US9 billion of it."

Cojuangco prepared to sue Hasting's paper, the Sydney Morning Herald, for defamation and the businessman's lawyers asked a judge to order Hastings to reveal who gave him crucial information. Hastings refused and was found in contempt. The matter was resolved when Hastings' lawyers told the judge they would not rely on the defence of qualified privilege to support evidence from the unnamed source in any defamation trial. The judge removed the contempt finding and Cojuangco won the defamation case. [The High Court decision can be read at: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/high_ct/165clr346.html]

Pictures and sound

It is not only the written or spoken word which can lead a journalist into contempt. Pictures and sound recordings can also cause problems.

In many countries, photographs, drawings and sound recordings may not be made in the precincts of the court, nor may such pictures or recordings be published or broadcast. It should be noted that photographs includes television and film as well as still photographs.

The precincts of the court are not just the inside of the court room, but may include the whole of the court building and even the road outside, if the court house is included in the picture. The reason which is usually given for this is that such practices will be likely to encourage witnesses and defendants to perform for the media rather than to concentrate on the real business in hand.

Some countries do permit photography, video and sound recordings in court, but traditionally most countries which have adopted or inherited the English legal system do not. However, drawings have often been allowed in many places, and even in England now it is becoming common for sound recordings of court proceedings to be permitted.

It is up to the journalists in each country to ask the courts for permission to take photographs and to make sound recordings in court. If the judge or magistrate grants permission, then there will be no problem. However, if photographs are taken or electronic recordings made without the court's permission, the journalists involved may well be held to be in contempt of court.

In recent years, some countries - even England and Wales - have softened their rules against electronic recording in court, especially where the recording is only of the judge delivering a judgment. Many countries which now allow some recording of judgments still ban recording of the trials themselves. Others, such as New Zealand, allow judges to make their own decisions on whether to allow media to record and broadcast cases before them. In New Zealand, the media must apply to the individual judge in advance for permission and the judge can allow all or only parts of the proceedings to be recorded and broadcast.

As a journalist, it is your responsibility to know the laws of your country on electronic recording and broadcast of court proceedings. Ask the court registrar or clerk of the court for advice on what is permitted and how procedures work.

There is another way, too, in which photographs can lead a newspaper or television station into contempt. If they publish a photograph of a man who is wanted by the police in connection with a crime, and if identification is likely to be an issue at the trial, then the newspaper or television station may be held to be in contempt.

The reason for this is clear. If a witness is asked at the trial to identify the man who committed the crime, the witness may point at the defendant and say: "That's him!" The defence lawyer may then argue that the witness recognises the man not from the crime itself, but from the photographs which were published in the newspapers and shown on the television screens.

Publishing the photograph actually interferes with the course of justice, and is therefore contempt.
If the police ask a newspaper to publish a photograph of a wanted man, the newspaper should always ask first whether identification is likely to be an issue at the man's trial. If the police say no, then it should be safe to publish the photograph.

The media use technical methods to show images without revealing the identity of an accused person – or a child in court proceedings. In newspapers they may ink a bar across their face, blur the photograph or show only an artist’s sketch without clear features. Television often shows film of people with their faces electronically pixelated (broken up into pixels) to blur their features.

**Appeals**

Strictly speaking, all proceedings are *sub judice* until the end of appeal hearings, if any, or at least until the time allowed for an appeal has lapsed. For a long time, it was considered that no comment should be made on any case until this time was over.

In practice, this is extraordinarily difficult. The length of time which is allowed for an appeal to be lodged means that the case has faded from the public mind long before any comment can be made. In practice, too, convicted people have found that they can avoid comment by lodging an appeal and then quietly withdrawing it weeks later, hoping that the press will not notice. It has often worked.

For these reasons, it has come to be normal for cases to be subjected to comment even if an appeal is still to be heard. Even in countries which have a jury system, appeals are usually heard only by senior judges, who are not likely to be influenced by what they read, see or hear in the media. Responsible comment is therefore usually considered acceptable as soon as the trial has ended, whether or not there is going to be an appeal.

Indeed, in 1968 the English Attorney-General told parliament that "the press is free to comment responsibly on the verdicts and sentences of criminal courts, even where an appeal is pending."

The crucial word, however, is "responsibly". A comment in one English newspaper that "if the sentences are not reduced on appeal ... there ought to be more demonstrations" was held to be in contempt, because the Lord Chief Justice said it went "well beyond the limit of responsible comment". However, plenty of other newspapers in England have commented on verdicts and sentences, but without suggesting or inciting street demonstrations, and have not been in contempt.

The situation may not be the same in every country, however, and you should take great care to check on the views of your own courts.

**Military courts**

Members of the armed forces can be tried by military courts, sometimes called *courts martial*. (A person tried by one of these courts is sometimes said to be *court-martialled*.) It is important to note that convictions and sentences in a court martial are not usually valid until they have been confirmed - usually by the commanding officer.

Any press report of court martial proceedings which have ended in a conviction should therefore carry the sentence: "The court's findings and sentences are subject to confirmation."

The proceedings remain *sub judice* until the decision of the confirming authority has been announced. After that, comment on the verdict and sentence are permitted, even though there may still be an appeal.

**Defence against contempt**

Generally speaking, there is not much that you can say in your defence when you are hauled up
before the judge for contempt, unless you can prove that it was not you who said or wrote the words which were contemptuous.

However, there is one important exception to this - one vital defence against one type of contempt, which all journalists should know.

We have already seen that it is contempt to publish any details of the background of a case once it is *sub judice*. That means that, once a person has been charged with a crime, or more accurately when a person is about to be charged, nothing more can be said about the crime itself, other than certain established facts, such as that a person died or that goods went missing.

Journalists need to be very careful, therefore, when reporting a crime, since a report which is safe while nobody has been charged may be contemptuous as soon as charges are imminent.

It is the journalist’s responsibility to ask the police whether anybody has been charged. It is then the responsibility of the police to tell journalists the answer. If a newspaper, radio or television station reports details of a crime, after someone has been charged, they will be in contempt unless they can prove that *they did not know, and had no reason to suspect, that proceedings were pending or imminent*.

For example, if you have made every effort to find out from the police whether anybody has been arrested or charged with a murder, and the police cannot give the information, you should go ahead and publish the full story of the crime.

If it later turns out that a man had already been charged with the murder, and that the report is likely to prejudice his fair trial, it will be a defence against contempt that you did not know and had no reason to suspect that proceedings were pending, in that you had tried to find out and had not been given the information which you sought. Note, though, that you must prove that you did not know. It is vital that you keep an accurate note of who you contacted, and at what time, together with an accurate note of what was said; you can then produce your notebook in court as evidence.

Of course, if the newspaper, radio or television station had used the same report without making any effort to find out whether anyone had been charged, they would undoubtedly be guilty of contempt.

**Contempt of parliament**

In countries which have a Westminster-style system of parliamentary government, the parliament is also protected by laws of contempt, just as the courts are, and for much the same reasons.

Criticism which tends to undermine the authority of parliament, or to ridicule the institution of parliament or to discredit it, or anything which would interfere with the functioning of parliament, is contempt.

For example, in 1947 an English newspaper alleged that some MPs were drunk in parliament; that was held to be contempt of parliament. In 1956, another English newspaper published an MP’s private telephone number and suggested that anyone who disagreed with his views should phone him and tell him so; this was held to be contempt of parliament, as it was an improper attempt to deter the MP from doing his duty. In 1987, Papua New Guinea’s Electoral Commissioner said that people who were criticising an educational video which he had commissioned were doing so because they wanted a crooked election; this was held to be contempt of parliament, because many of those criticising him were MPs, and his remarks reflected upon their honour.

Normally, criticism of individual MPs should be safe from contempt, as long as it does not bring the institution of parliament into disrepute. The extent to which this is permitted will naturally vary from one society to another. Robust criticism of leaders which is acceptable in Melanesia or Europe may be quite unacceptable in Polynesia or Africa.
In England, where this legislation originated, the present position was clearly stated in 1965, by an MP who was opposing another MP’s motion of complaint about newspaper criticism. He said: "If it were passed, it would be regarded as an attempt by parliament to interfere with freedom of comment in the press, on television, on the radio and on the public platform on the actions of Members of Parliament who, by seeking and accepting membership of the house, have laid themselves open to comment, criticism, ridicule, satire, whether in good or bad taste, and ruthless and relentless comment. I think this is the kind of comment upon which the free functioning of democracy completely depends."

**TO SUMMARISE:**

There are two types of contempt of court:

- Criminal contempt, by which courts protect their independence and dignity
- Civil contempt, by which courts assert their authority

Journalists run four main risks of committing a criminal contempt:

- Scandalising the court
- Interfering with the course of justice
- Publishing matter likely to prejudice a fair trial
- Refusing to name a source of information
- Unauthorised photographs and sound recordings may be contemptuous

It is a defence against publishing prejudicial matter while a case is *sub judicethat you did not know, and had no reason to suspect, that proceedings were pending or imminent*
Chapter 69: Defamation - what you cannot do

In this chapter and the next we consider the main legal danger to journalists: defamation. In this chapter we look at what defamation is and what most defamation laws say you must not do. In the next chapter we consider the various defences which you might be able to use if you are sued for defamation; and we see how defamation is punished.

Words are very powerful. Journalists use them to inform, entertain and educate their readers and listeners. Words can be used to expose faults or abuses in society and to identify people who are to blame.

However, used wrongly or unwisely, they can do harm. Words can misinform the public and they can hurt people with false accusations. At one stroke words can destroy a reputation which someone has spent a lifetime building. So people must be protected from the wrongful use of words.

Most countries do this with the help of laws, the most important of which are laws of defamation.

There is no need to fear the laws of defamation if you take the time to understand them and then take care over what you write. Laws of defamation apply to everyone in society and they exist to protect people from abuse. In democratic societies they are not there to stop journalists doing their job.

They should not be a problem if you do your job properly by taking care over how you gather information, how you check that it is true and how you write accurately, sticking to facts.

**What is defamation?**

Very simply, defamation is to spread bad reports about someone which could do them harm.

Of course, the laws of defamation say more than that, but it is a good place to start. The verb is to defame and the words used are said to be defamatory. You can defame someone if you write or say something about them which spoils their good reputation, which makes people want to avoid them or which hurts them in their work or their profession.

Laws of defamation vary from society to society, even those based on English common law. (For more on common law, see Chapter 63 Introduction to the law.) This is especially so on the issue of truth. In common law, a matter normally has to be false to be defamatory. However, some systems have passed laws (statutes) that truth alone is not a complete defence. And even in common law systems it is the responsibility of the person making the accusation to prove it is true; it is not the responsibility of the victim to prove it is false. This is an important distinction for journalists and we will speak more of it later in this chapter and in the following chapter.

If someone complains to the court that you have defamed them, they are called the plaintiff. Because defamation is usually a civil wrong, when people take court action, they are said to sue for defamation.

Before the mass media became so important, defamation was usually done by word of mouth, often by rumour or gossip. Today, many cases of defamation relate to the media.

To defame someone, journalists do not have to make up false things themselves. You can defame a person by repeating words spoken by someone else, for example an interviewee. It is no defence to claim that you were only quoting someone else. If you write something defamatory, you could be taken to court, along with your editor, your publisher and printer or your broadcasting
authority, the person who said the words in the first place ... even the newspaper seller.

As already mentioned, one of the problems with describing how defamation laws can affect you is that they differ from country to country. After reading this chapter and the next, you will need to do some research of your own, by asking local lawyers for advice.

Although all lawyers should know something about defamation, it has become such a specialist area of the law that some lawyers are expert in it, while others are not. Find an expert to ask. Your news organisation may have a special lawyer who advises on matters such as defamation.

Libel and slander

Before we move on, a word about *libel* and *slander*. These are words for different kinds of defamation. Years ago, the difference between libel and slander was that libel was the written word, while slander was the spoken word.

With the development of the press, libel became the most widespread form of defamation. When broadcasting was introduced, most legal systems decided to treat radio and television like the press and apply the laws of libel to them, even though their words are spoken. For the purposes of these chapters, we will use only the single term defamation.

A definition of defamation

Your country may have laws protecting freedom of speech and publication. These may be part of your Constitution. There will probably also be laws of defamation to protect people from false accusations. In most Commonwealth countries, the defamation laws are based on English law. Those countries which gained independence after 1962 usually follow the rules laid down in the English Defamation Act of 1962. The British Defamation Act was updated in 1996 and since 1962 many countries have passed their own defamation laws.

Although some defamation laws are clear in theory, you can only see how they work in practice by looking at court cases. In many developing countries, very few defamation cases have been taken to court so, for general guidance on how laws on defamation are applied, you may have to look at court decisions in other countries which have a similar legal system to your own. Although English decisions are not binding in independent countries, they may provide guidance for courts in your country on how to judge allegations of defamation.

One thing you should always remember - if there is any fear in your mind that you might be committing defamation, ask for professional legal advice before publishing. Most news organisations have lawyers they can call on for advice.

One problem with any laws on defamation is that they do not tell you what you may do; they lay down in broad terms what you may not do.

While the laws of defamation even in common law systems vary from country to country, a basic definition can be found in the British Defamation Act of 1962 which says defamation is:

*The publication of any false imputation concerning a person, or a member of his family, whether living or dead, by which (a) the reputation of that person is likely to be injured or (b) he is likely to be injured in his profession or trade or (c) other persons are likely to be induced to shun, avoid, ridicule or despise him.*

*Publication of defamatory matter can be by (a) spoken words or audible sound or (b) words intended to be read by sight or touch or (c) signs, signals, gestures or visible representations, and must be done to a person other than the person defamed.*

This is rather a complicated definition, so we shall split it into easy parts and speak about each part
in more detail. There are three main parts:

First, there is "any false imputation ... by which (a) the reputation of that person is likely to be injured or (b) he is likely to be injured in his profession or trade or (c) other persons are likely to be induced to shun, avoid, ridicule or despise him."

In simple English, this means the words that were used, and their effect.

Second, there is "concerning a person, or a member of his family, whether living or dead."

In simple terms, this covers the identity of the person defamed.

Third, there is "Publication of defamatory matter can be by (a) spoken words or audible sound or (b) words intended to be read by sight or touch or (c) signs, signals, gestures or visible representations, and must be done to a person other than the person defamed."

This is usually shortened to publication, though it includes broadcasting.

If a person thinks that you have defamed them and takes you to court, they have to prove that all three of these things have happened.

Let us look at them one by one:

**The words**

"Any false imputation ..."

An imputation means suggesting something bad or dishonest about someone. In most cases of defamation, this will be done using words although, as we shall see later, it is possible to defame someone by other methods, such as cartoons. For the moment, we will stick to words.

You can suggest something directly - by stating it as a fact - or indirectly, either by innuendo or by irony. Innuendo is a special meaning behind ordinary words. Words which seem innocent used in one way could have a special meaning in another.

For example, you might say a man "spent a year living in Bomana." To people outside Papua New Guinea, this might seem innocent. But people from Papua New Guinea know that the country's main prison is at Bomana, so the innuendo is that the man was a prisoner.

Irony is using words to imply the opposite of what they appear to say, as in the following example about Mr Hevi.

Here are two statements; one is a direct imputation, the other indirect. Either could be defamatory:

**DIRECT:**
Police Minister Mr Grissim Hevi has acted dishonestly while in office.

**INDIRECT:**
The Police Ministry is an office for honest men. Mr Grissim Hevi is obviously in the wrong post.

It is also possible to impute something in a joking manner. Making a joke of an accusation does not prevent it being defamatory. This statement, if false, is just as defamatory as the two above:
If prizes were being given for honesty in office, Police Minister Mr Grissim Hevi would not be a main contender.

As mentioned earlier, in most English-based legal systems, the words are defamatory only if the imputation is false, but it is not the job of the injured person to prove that the statement is false. It is the job of the person who made the statement to prove that what was stated or implied was true.

It is not good enough for you as a journalist to say in court: "But I know that what I wrote about Mr Hevi is true." You have to prove it. Unless you can, the court assumes that Mr Hevi is innocent.

It is a foundation of English criminal law, that a person is innocent until proven guilty. In a defamation case, it is the journalist who has to prove the truth of the statement, and therefore the guilt of the plaintiff.

Although the imputation is normally done through the spoken or written word, you can also injure a person through a cartoon, a gesture or even a cleverly composed picture.

If your paper uses a cartoon depicting Mr Hevi secretly stuffing lots of money into his back pocket while looking guilty, the imputation is that he is a crook. That could be defamatory.

If your television newsreader finishes a statement from Mr Hevi denying any misconduct, then looks up to the ceiling in disbelief, that too could be defamatory, implying that the newsreader does not believe Mr Hevi's denials.

"(a) The reputation of that person is likely to be injured ..."

The law is there to protect a person's reputation in the community or society. A reputation is the general opinions of his personality and character shared by people in his community or society.

The law is not there to protect the reputation that he would like to have. The courts will judge what kind of reputation the plaintiff actually has, and whether it has been damaged. Although courts will not try to make a person seem better than he really is, it is possible to defame someone who already has a bad reputation.

For example, you may write a story about a man who has previously been convicted of assault. Your new story alleges that he has now stolen money from a church. If this new allegation is false (or you cannot prove it to be true) he could successfully sue for defamation, arguing that the little bit of good reputation he had left has now been damaged.

A false statement is not defamatory unless it discredits the person to whom it refers. To describe a man as "honest" may not be true, but it is difficult to imagine a court deciding that the word had damaged his reputation.

On a similar theme, the reputation which the law tries to defend has to be one which is held by "right-thinking members of society generally". It is not easy to define what a right-thinking member of society is. It is someone who usually obeys the rules and laws laid down by your society and who would agree with the majority of people about what is good and what is bad. Try to imagine an aunt or an uncle you admire; they are probably a "right-thinking member of society".

This definition is important because it is quite easy to say bad things about a person which might improve his reputation among certain people. If you called someone "unfeeling", it might actually improve his reputation in a criminal gang or an army unit, but it would hurt his reputation among right-thinking members of society.

The judge or jury will put themselves in the position of right-thinking members of society generally
and to decide the effect the words would have on them.

You must, therefore, be extremely careful in your use of words. Ask yourself what they would mean to right-thinking members of society generally.

"(b) He is likely to be injured in his profession or trade ..."

The law not only tries to protect a person's good name or reputation, it also tries to protect their livelihood against damage by false claims. If, because of a false statement, a shopkeeper loses customers, an accountant loses clients or a policeman loses his job, they can sue for defamation.

In fact, the law does not say that the plaintiff must show actual proof of loss of earnings. It is enough that the false statement could have led to a fall in business or the plaintiff losing his job.

This does not mean that a journalist should avoid criticising the way in which people do their job; far from it. It is a journalist's duty to expose faults in any area. However, you must be careful exactly how you describe a person's professional faults.

It is always safest to stick to specific claims and not to generalise about a person's skills or professional conduct. In the following example, the first version is probably safe, the second is probably not:

**RIGHT:**
More than 30 sailors protested outside the Hunglo Shipping offices, claiming that the company's ships were overcrowded and unsafe.

**WRONG:**
More than 30 protesting sailors claim that shipowners Ron and Wesley Hunglo are trying to kill them in overcrowded and unsafe ships.

"(c) Other persons are likely to be induced to shun, avoid, ridicule or despise him ..."

Where part (a) above deals with a person's reputation, and part (b) deals with his ability to make a living, this section deals with the damage that can be done by changing people's personal behaviour towards the plaintiff. To *shun* means to keep away from someone; to *ridicule* means to make fun of someone.

Of course, if a person's reputation (either personal or professional) is damaged, then people will tend to avoid or shun them, either on a personal or a business level.

If a person's reputation was injured by a false statement but he was unaware of it, you might argue that no damage had been done. However, if the plaintiff can prove that, because of what you have written about him, people show their low opinion by avoiding him, refusing to answer him or laughing at him, he will have a much stronger case in court.

In this case, the plaintiff only has to show that some people avoid, shun, ridicule or despise him because of what you wrote. He does not have to prove that everybody reacts in these ways.

In fact, the law does not even demand solid proof that people are avoiding or ridiculing him at all. All it usually demands is that, because of what you wrote, some people are *likely* to do it. Once again, the judge or jury will put themselves in the place of right-thinking members of society and decide whether they would be likely to avoid or shun the plaintiff.

For example, there is no social shame about the way people can catch leprosy (as there is in some countries to AIDS or venereal disease), but people will still shun lepers. If you falsely state that someone has leprosy, you may not damage his reputation, but you will almost certainly affect the
way people behave towards him.

To make fun of a person can be as dangerous as to accuse him of some wrong-doing. Here there is particular danger for the cartoonist. The cartoonist who shows a public figure acting as a criminal is in danger, and so is the editor who publishes his work.

Although many public figures who are made fun of in cartoons choose to ignore them, there are times when they will feel angry enough to sue for defamation.

As an added complication, you have to take into account changing standards. Words which might have been defamatory at one time may later become acceptable, and vice versa. Until the late Twentieth Century, the word “gay” usually meant bright and lively and was used as a compliment. Today it is more commonly understood to mean homosexual.

In some countries homosexuality is still illegal and therefore the word "gay" there has negative connotations. Even in countries where homosexuality is legal and widely accepted, if you falsely describe someone as being "gay" (i.e. a homosexual), they could get angry and sue for defamation. When a case goes to court, the judge or jury will not care whether the word once meant "bright". They will judge it on its current use and imputation.

In July 2008, a British businessman won a defamation case and £22,000 in damages at London's High Court after false claims about him being gay and a liar were posted on the Facebook social
networking website.

**Identity**

"A person ..."

The plaintiff must be able to prove that the words identify him as the person defamed. It is not necessary that he should have been specifically named. If he can show the court that a reasonable person would take the words to refer to him, he will probably have a good case.

It is wrong to think that you will be safe by making generalisations. Sometimes you increase the risk because, instead of aiming your words at one person, you are aiming them at a whole group of people.

For example, the statement: "I know of at least one senior member of cabinet who has made money by pushing contracts to his friends", is clearly defamatory of some cabinet member. If your allegations are true, the minister concerned may not try to sue you for defamation, but his cabinet colleagues could, arguing that people now believe that they are the guilty one.

Once you are sure of your facts, it is safer to be specific by naming the person. Once you lose accuracy and fairness in your story, you ruin any defence against a possible claim of defamation.

Although we usually think of "person" as an individual, it is possible to defame a group. Although the law varies from country to country, generally any group which has a legal identity - such as a company, a council or a trade union - can sue for defamation if you have harmed their business. (Under Australian media law, this is only true for non-profit organisations and companies employing 10 or more people.) Loose associations of people, such as people who meet regularly but casually, are not usually able to sue for defamation.

" ... or a member of his family whether living or dead ...

It is usual to defame people by writing or broadcasting about things that they have allegedly said or done themselves. If, for example, you falsely accuse the Rev Milo Milord of having had sex with prostitutes, you have defamed him by injuring his reputation.

However, with occasional exceptions, common law usually holds that a dead person cannot take legal action, nor can living relatives on his behalf. If a person is dead, the law assumes that no further harm can be done to them. So you can say what you like about them without the need to prove your statements.

However, there is a small problem. Even though the Rev Milord is now dead, you may be able to harm the reputation of his widow, children or other living relatives by what you write about him. In this case, the living relatives can sue for defamation on the grounds that they themselves have been injured.

The Rev Milord's son, Marcus, himself a church minister, could sue for defamation on the grounds that his own reputation has been damaged by what you wrote about his dead father. People may stop coming to his church or may avoid him in the street.

Let us be clear, though: Marcus Milord cannot take action on his father's behalf to clear his father's name; Marcus would take action because he thinks what you said about his father causes him (Marcus) harm. He would do it to clear his own name.

**Publication**

"Publication ... to a person other than the person defamed."
To be successful in a claim for defamation, the plaintiff must prove publication. Publication in legal terms means that the words or pictures must have been heard or seen by a third person. The first person is the one talking or writing (you), the second person is the person being talked or written about (the plaintiff), the third person is anyone else who may hear or read the offending matter.

There is no civil defamation if the words, however bad or untrue, are spoken or written only to the person about whom they are made.

The plaintiff must prove that the imputation (words, gestures or pictures) was communicated to at least one other person. As the law states: "Publication ... must be done to a person other than the person defamed."

In the case of newspapers, there is no difficulty in proving this; the contents of the paper are published to everyone who receives a copy. In the case of radio or television, a tape or transcript of the program is evidence of publication. Some broadcasters may try to deny that they ever said the words complained of, in the hope that the plaintiff will not have a transcript or tape of the program. Be warned: a judge will probably order the broadcaster to get a transcript or tape if the case ever comes to court.

"(a) By spoken words or audible sounds ..."

It is easy to see how words can be defamatory. But it is also possible to defame someone with a grunt or other noise. For example, a radio newsreader might read out a denial from someone, yet end it with a sound which suggests that he doesn't believe them:

Police Minister Mr Grissim Hevi today denied that he had been corrupt while in office ... uhm?

"(b) Words intended to be read by sight or touch ..."

This applies to print journalists and also to television when captions or parts of text are shown on the screen. It also applies to Braille, a language for blind people which they read by running their fingertips over raised symbols on a page.

"(c) Signs, signals, gestures or visible representations ..."

As we have already mentioned, it is possible to defame someone in a drawing or cartoon, or by pulling a face or making a gesture. If you point your finger at your head making a circular movement, in many societies this suggests that the person you are referring to is mad, that they have a "screw loose" in their brain. Such a gesture could be defamatory.

**A case to answer**

The plaintiff has a good case if he can prove that:

1. the words were defamatory
2. they referred to him and
3. they were published to a third party.

The plaintiff does not have to prove that he has suffered actual loss. It is enough to show that the words complained of are capable of causing him loss.
**TO SUMMARISE:**

Defamation is to spread bad reports about someone which could cause them harm.

If the plaintiff can prove that the words had a defamatory meaning, identified him and were published, that is defamation.
Chapter 70: Defamation - what you CAN do

This is the second of two chapters on the main legal danger to journalists: defamation. In the last chapter we looked at what defamation is and what most defamation laws say you must not do. In this chapter we consider the various defences which you might be able to use if you are sued for defamation; and we see how defamation is punished.

Defences against defamation

If you have worked through the previous Chapter 69: Defamation - what you cannot do, it may seem that the laws of defamation are heavily against the journalist. You might be wondering at this moment just what you can say legally which is critical of a person or group. Don't worry. There are several defences which you can use to keep out of court or, if you are taken to court, to keep you from losing the case.

We will discuss these defences now, not so that you can prepare for court, but so that you can understand under what circumstances you can say something critical of someone and not be taken to court.

Truth

Truth (which is also called justification) is probably the most common reason why journalists can get away with writing bad things about people. This is the defence that the words complained about are true.

In many countries with either common law or defamation acts, if you can show that the words were true, you do not need any other defence. However, in some other countries, truth is only a defence when used with another defence, such as public interest (see below). You must find out how the defence of justification or truth works in your country.

If you claim that your words were true, your defence will not fail just because there are some errors elsewhere in the story. However, the specific words complained about must be accurate for the defence of justification.

The problem for journalists often comes in trying to prove the truth of things they write. Witnesses may die or be unwilling to appear in court in your defence, especially if they gave you the information in confidence, off the record. Also, if a case takes a long time to come to court, memories will not be reliable.

The danger in trying to use the defence of justification is that, if you are not successful, the judge or jury may decide that you have made matters worse by not admitting your mistake straight away. The longer you support a defamatory statement, the worse will be the punishment if it is found to be untrue.

Constitutions

If someone has been convicted or cleared by a court of law, that is accepted as proof of his guilt or innocence on that particular charge or charges. For example, if you state that "Elias Olman is a thief", you will probably be safe if Olman has been convicted of more than one case of theft. However, one conviction does not necessarily make a man a thief. In the case of one offence, it is safer to be specific and say: "Elias Olman was convicted of theft in 1999".

A word of warning here: some countries have laws which say that the media cannot mention a person's convictions after a certain number of years have passed following sentencing. The
Constitutions are then said to be *spent*. The length of time before a person's convictions are spent usually depends on the seriousness of the crime. A shoplifting conviction might be spent after two years, a robbery conviction might not be spent for many years. Convictions for murder or treason may never be spent. You should check whether your country has such laws and what limits they put on publishing a person's previous convictions.

**Fair comment**

In countries where there is freedom of speech and expression, it is accepted that people have the right to make fair comments about things. Journalists often rely on the defence of fair comment.

In this case, you do not need to prove the truth of your comment. In some cases this is not possible, especially if it is an opinion rather than a fact. You only need to convince the judge or jury that your comments were your honestly-held opinion, and that this opinion was a reasonable one, based on the facts available to you.

Your words might be harsh or exaggerated, but you only have to satisfy the judge or jury that it was a comment that a fair-minded man or woman might have made on the same facts.

The defence of fair comment is most often used by people analysing some issue or event. This can range from political or economic analysis to reviews of plays, films, books or music.

The comment does not have to be a provable fact, but it must be based on provable facts. For example, a restaurant reviewer might describe the service as "poor" - a word which means different things to different people. It is an opinion, not a fact, so the reviewer cannot use the defence of truth for this comment. However, if the reviewer also wrote that the waiters took half-an-hour to take the order then another hour to fetch the meal, which was the wrong order anyway, these are provable facts. From these facts, any reasonable person would also describe the service as "poor".

**Public interest**

In some countries, the defence of fair comment (and sometimes the defence of truth) is often tied to one condition - that the topic you are writing about is a matter of public interest. This means that the subject is one in which the public has a reasonable interest - in other words, a right to know.

This right to know includes matters which are in the public arena, but it does not cover matters which are the purely private concerns of an individual. For example, you can comment on the way a politician was elected, how he does his job or how he treats his staff. But the courts have ruled that the way he treats his wife in the privacy of their home is not in the public arena. (You can, of course, report that he beats his wife, but you must use another defence, such as truth, against any possible action for defamation.)

A word of warning: in some countries, the law states that fair comment can be used as a defence only on "matters in the public interest". This means that the public must also benefit from knowing your comment. This is very difficult to prove and therefore very limiting to journalists. You should check the exact wording of your country's defamation laws.

**Malice**

To use the defence of fair comment, you must show that publication was made "in good faith, without ill-will".

This idea of ill-will is usually referred to in law as *malice*, and includes any dishonest or improper motive. For example, if you publish a critical comment to get revenge on someone you dislike, that might be seen as malice. If the court decides that you acted with malice, you will lose your
Letters to the editor

Many people express their personal opinions on public issues in letters to the editor columns. The same rules apply to comments from readers as to any news story, feature article, comment column or review.

In letters to the editor, the newspaper is often at the mercy of the letter writers, as there is no way of telling whether or not their comments are made with malice. If you have the slightest reason to suspect malice, it is best not to use the letter at all, or to remove the dangerous phrases.

It was a letter to the editor which resulted in one of the few successful claims for defamation in a Papua New Guinea court in the early years of independence.

A boutique owner was awarded $6,000 damages after a paper published a letter making reference to her shop. It read:

I walked into the shop one day last week and the most odious, revolting creature greeted me, but it was with sarcastic criticism from behind the counter. When I realised I was trying to be fed, I realised that the creature was the owner itself.

This was a clear case of defamation. Although the paper did publish a brief apology three weeks later, the judge said it should have published a full apology immediately if it had wanted to make the damages less. As it was, the paper was fortunate that the boutique owner did not ask for more damages, as these could have been very large. It is interesting to note that the letter was published by a junior reporter who was left in charge while both the editor and editor-in-chief were absent.

Privilege

The law recognises that there are times when there has to be complete freedom of speech without any risk of claims for defamation. The two main examples are in parliaments and courts.

For example, courts could not operate if witnesses were afraid of giving evidence in case they were sued for defamation. They must be allowed to speak absolutely freely. This protection from the law is called privilege.

Although English common law does not protect freedom of speech in other situations, many countries have made their own laws to extend the protection of privilege. In some countries, privilege also covers such events as public meetings, local councils, tribunals, commissions of inquiry, even official documents kept as public records, such as land titles.

The importance of privilege to journalists is that you too are protected in what you write about such meetings, as long as your report is fair and accurate. Some defamation laws also say that your report must be published contemporaneously, which means "as soon as possible after the event".

Your report does not have to be a record of every word spoken in the meeting or in court. Your story can be a summary of what went on or what was said. Neither will you lose the defence of privilege if there are some minor errors, although the main parts (including any quotes) must be accurate.

Defamation laws usually judge fairness and accuracy from the viewpoint of your ordinary readers or listeners. One way of looking at fairness and accuracy is to ask: "Am I being fair and accurate to my audience?" If a court decides that you are not, you will lose the defence of privilege. (For more
Unintentional defamation

It is possible to defame someone without knowing that you are doing it. Although journalists are supposed to check their facts and know their subjects well, they cannot know everything. Even if you have researched your story properly, checked all the facts and taken care with the writing, you may still defame someone without knowing or intending it.

In such a situation, you might be able to use the defence of unintentional defamation (sometimes called innocent publication).

The most common use of this defence is when you publish some quite innocent words which take on a different, defamatory meaning because of special circumstances which you were not aware of at the time of writing.

For example, in a story about film star Mr X, you might mention that he is married. At the same time, photographs of Mr X are published showing Mr X "with his girlfriend Miss Y". Without you knowing it, Mr X had just got a divorce. Mr X claims that your story makes people think he is committing adultery with Miss Y, when in fact he is free to date anyone after his divorce. You might be able to use the defence of unintentional defamation if you can prove that you took every reasonable precaution to make sure your story was accurate.

It is also possible to defame someone you did not know exists. The classic English case was that of Artemus Jones. A journalist wrote an article about a factual event but invented a character he called "Artemus Jones", to add human interest. The journalist probably chose that name because it was so unusual. Unfortunately, there was someone with this name in real life, a London lawyer, and he sued the paper for a lot of money claiming that his friends had made fun of him believing that the article had been about him.

There is always this danger, so a journalist should always be extra careful in inventing fictional names or pseudonyms for people who do not want their real name used. Remember, there are hundreds of thousands of people in the world called John Smith or Hussein Mohammed.

To use the defence of unintentional defamation, you must also try to correct your mistake immediately by:

offering to publish a suitable correction and apology and

taking action to tell people to whom copies of your story have been distributed that the words are alleged to be defamatory. This usually means telling newsagents to stop selling that issue of your newspaper or magazine.

Because publishing a correction and apology is admitting that you did defame the person concerned, you must always get advice from your organisation's lawyer before doing it.

The plaintiff agreed to publication

You cannot defame someone if they have given their consent for you to publish the defamatory material. Consent usually means that they said: "Yes, you can publish those words." This law stops people tricking journalists into publishing defamatory material so they can later sue.

However, you may also have a defence if, having been told exactly what was to be published, the plaintiff made a statement explaining his side, and that statement was included in your report. A court might accept this as agreeing to publication. A reply such as "No comment" certainly would not be seen as giving consent.
**The matter has already been judged**

It is a principle of common law that courts will not hear a second case based on the same complaint against the same defendant. If you have been cleared already, the plaintiff cannot have a second try using the same imputation. However, if you repeat the words again in issues or broadcasts after court proceedings have started, this would be a separate publication and could result in another action.

**The plaintiff has died**

As we mentioned in Chapter 69, an action for defamation is a personal action. Just as there can be no defamation of the dead, so an action begun by a plaintiff cannot be continued by his children or family if he dies before the case comes to court. The action dies with him.

However, remember that you can defame a person by publishing defamatory matter about a member of his family, whether living or dead.

There are a few jurisdictions in which it is defamatory to "blacken the memory of one who is dead", but these are relatively rare and usually apply to defaming a dead ruler. Check the law in your country or state.

In more than a dozen European countries there are laws against denying the Holocaust (the mass murder of millions of Jews by the Nazis and their allies in World War II). While many of these laws refer to "defaming the dead", Holocaust denial legislation is often more similar to the laws against vilification of members of a racial or religious group than defamation. You can find out more on vilification, especially in the Australian context, [here](#).

**The statute of limitations has expired**

Many countries have a law which sets a limit on how long a person can delay before starting legal action for defamation. This is called a Statute of Limitations on Defamation. It is normally set as a number of years from the date of last publication of the material.

If a case for defamation is not started before the end of this period, then it cannot be brought at all. However, the full case does not have to be heard within that period. Most laws require only that the first complaint is taken to a court in that time.

For example, if the Statute of Limitations on Defamation for your country is five years, the plaintiff has to start court action within five years of publication. The court may take longer than five years to hear the case in full.

**A correction and apology have been made**

This is not, strictly speaking, a defence. In fact, publication of an apology is an admission that a mistake has been made and that it was defamatory. However, if a judge or jury later finds that the matter was defamatory, the fact that your organisation quickly apologised and corrected the mistake will count in your favour.

Extreme care should be taken in writing a correction and apology. It is possible, when correcting one defamatory statement, to make another. For example, to say that allegations contained in a speech by Mr Alfa about Mr Beta were untrue could be calling Mr Alfa a liar. Get a lawyer to draft the correction, or at least to look at what you write.

Never try to get out of your own error without referring it to your editor. You may have been approached directly by the person making a complaint and try to hide the matter. Or you may try
to write what you think is a correction (without an apology) in a follow-up story.

Such actions are highly dangerous. They will only make the situation worse and annoy the person concerned. If there is a complaint, you must immediately tell your editor so that he or she can deal with the matter.

In fact, you must be very careful about everything you say to someone who complains that a story about them (or their client) was defamatory. You must not say anything to them which will make it difficult for your lawyers to defend you later. Even a simple sentence on the telephone such as "Yes, I think we made a mistake" could destroy your defence in court. It is better to say only that you will "investigate their complaint".

In any conversation with (or letter to) a complainant, you should make it clear that what you say or write is "without prejudice"; that means without pre-judging the outcome of any legal action.

**How is defamation punished?**

Defamation is usually a civil offence, although it can be a criminal matter under special circumstances.

**Civil defamation**

Most complaints of defamation are dealt with under civil law. That means that cases go to a civil court and are punished by awarding money (called damages) against the person found to have committed the offence, usually called the defendant. If someone takes you to court for defamation, they will be the plaintiff, you will be the defendant.

In civil defamation, the principle is the same as for someone who has been physically injured as a result of someone else's actions, either through carelessness or a planned attack. The injured person may take the other person (or people) to court. If successful, the injured person will be awarded a sum of money as compensation. This money will be paid by the person who did the damage.

The judge or jury will decide how much harm has been done and express that in the amount of damages they award.

Assessing damages for defamation is not an easy job for a judge or jury. In many countries, civil courts deal with a large number of cases involving claims for physical injury, so judges and juries get a lot of guidance on how much to award. They have lots of examples to follow in deciding how much to award for the loss of a working man's leg or a schoolgirl's life. Defamation cases are much rarer, so there are fewer examples to judge by.

Also, if a man's physical injuries mean that he will never work again, the court can estimate how much he could have earned over a lifetime and award enough money to compensate for the rest of his life. It is a lot harder to judge how badly harmed a person's reputation has been and how lasting that harm might be.

**Damages**

There are several kinds of damages a court can award, either separately or together.

There are **general** or **compensatory damages**, which a court may award for a person's loss of reputation, shame or hurt feelings. Under common law, once the court has found that he has been defamed, the plaintiff does not have to prove that actual harm has been done.

General damages do not have to be large sums of money. If a judge or jury finds that you have defamed the plaintiff but that no real harm has been done, the plaintiff may be...
awarded nominal damages. These are usually expressed in the smallest coin of your country, so a court may award the plaintiff one dollar, for example.

Nominal damages may also be awarded if the court feels that you have been only slightly at fault or that the plaintiff was in some way responsible for the defamation in the first place.

**Special damages** compensate for any loss of business or earnings the plaintiff may have suffered as a result of the defamation. These could also include any money the plaintiff has spent as a result of the defamation, for example in sending letters to clients denying the allegations.

**Aggravated damages** can be awarded if the court thinks that the defamation was deliberate, possibly out of ill-will or any other improper motive (usually referred to as malice, which we discussed earlier). For example, if you knew that what you were publishing was false and defamatory, but went ahead with the story to stir up a scandal and boost newspaper sales, the court would probably award aggravated damages against you. They may also award aggravated damages if the defamation was said in a particularly nasty way.

**Punitive or exemplary damages**, which may sometimes be awarded if the defamation is so extreme that the court feels the need to punish you or warn other journalists against similar conduct.

Damages are usually large in the case of media organisations because the courts think that they can pay more for their mistakes than individuals can.

As in any court case, the judge or jury may also award costs against you if you lose (or against the plaintiff if they lose), or simply say that each side should pay their own costs of the case. In legal systems where lawyers are highly paid, costs can be very expensive.

**Criminal defamation**

So far we have looked at defamation as a civil matter, with the courts awarding monetary damages against the publisher. Defamation can also be a criminal offence, which means that those found guilty could be fined or sent to prison or both. This is much less common than civil defamation.

A charge of criminal defamation can be brought against you if the words, pictures or gestures you use provoke riots, mob violence or other breaches of the public peace. For this reason, the prosecution does not have to prove publication to a third party. It is enough that the person you are referring to hears the words (or sees the gestures) and reacts violently. However, unlike civil defamation, the prosecution will have to prove that the words complained of were malicious. In civil defamation the words may be malicious, but in criminal defamation they must be.

In the specific case of the media, criminal defamation charges are usually brought against a journalist or publisher accused of using the power of the media for some illegal or improper purpose, such as revenge or blackmail.

There are some safeguards for publishers, printers and newspaper sellers under both civil and criminal defamation laws. It is a defence for a proprietor or publisher to prove that the matter complained of was put in without his knowledge and without negligence on his part. Newspaper sellers can also often defend themselves on the grounds that they did not know the content of the newspaper - they cannot be expected to know everything which is in every paper or magazine on their shelves.

**Investigative reporting**

So far, we have mainly been talking about defamation in day-to-day reporting. This usually happens when mistakes have been made in either fact or judgment.
However, there are times when journalists risk defamation because they believe that they cannot do their duty otherwise. This happens in the case of investigative or in-depth reporting, when you try to expose activities which are against the interests of the public. This could be exposing mismanagement, corruption or the abuse of public trust. (For more details see Chapters 39 to 41 on investigative reporting.)

Although the laws do not usually favour journalists over any other members of society, this role of the media as a watchdog has been recognised by the courts. That does not mean that journalists can ignore the laws of defamation just because they are doing a public service. However, judges will take such acts of public service into account in defamation cases. Beyond that, each editor must decide whether to risk defamation in the public interest.

Silencing or SLAPP writs

This is a small but important area of the laws on defamation. A writ is a legal order from a judge telling somebody to do something or to stop doing something. Silencing writs (officially a kind of injunction) are often used by people to stop public debate on an issue which would have a bad affect on their interests.

Silencing writs usually work like this: The plaintiff may ask the court for a writ alleging defamation after the first story about him has appeared. He will also ask the court to issue an injunction naming you and ordering you to stop further publication on the issue, otherwise you may be in contempt of court. Having silenced you, the plaintiff usually does not push the defamation claim through the courts.

Often they are called a form of SLAPP writ, which means something like “Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation”. There are several explanations of what SLAPP stands for but there is general agreement that they are writs which are used, often by powerful companies or individuals, to frighten opponents with the threat of very expensive legal action.

Fortunately for the media, the Court of Appeal in England has decided that injunctions should not be used to stop debate on important issues. So a silencing writ does not halt the publication of any further criticism, it merely puts the newspaper or broadcaster at greater risk of being sued for defamation if it does repeat the criticism.

To summarise:

Defamation is to spread bad reports about someone which could cause them harm

If the plaintiff can prove that the words had a defamatory meaning, identified him and were published, that is defamation

The main defences against defamation are truth, fair comment and privilege

To use the defence of truth, you must prove that the imputation was true

A fair comment must be reasonable, based on the facts available to you

If you are motivated by malice or any other improper motive, you can be charged with criminal defamation
Chapter 71: Blasphemy, obscenity and sedition

In this chapter we look at three criminal libels - blasphemy, obscenity and sedition. We discuss what they are and the dangers for journalists.

In the previous two chapters we looked at a form of libel called defamation. In this chapter we will discuss three more areas of the law concerned with the use of words or pictures. These are the offences of blasphemy, obscenity and sedition.

Criminal libels

Blasphemy is an attack on God, obscenity is an attack on moral values and sedition is an attack on the state. All three are called criminal libels, which means that cases are taken through the criminal court system, usually by a state prosecutor.

As with defamation, blasphemy, obscenity and sedition are based on a mixture of English common law and the laws of individual countries. It is important, therefore, that you know any laws relating to blasphemy, obscenity and sedition which are in force in your country.

The major difference between defamation and these three criminal libels is that journalists accused of blasphemy, obscenity or sedition cannot use such defences as truth, fair comment or privilege. Even if you fairly and accurately report words spoken in a court or Parliament, if a court thinks those words are blasphemous, obscene or seditious you will be found guilty of an offence.

Criminal courts sometimes have to listen to evidence of an intimate nature, especially in sexual offences. If such evidence is obscene (within the definition given below) it cannot be published or broadcast, even though reporters were allowed to remain in court while it was being given. The same rule applies to blasphemous or seditious statements made at public meetings.

Blasphemy

Blasphemy is an attack on God or religion. In English common law, matter is said to be blasphemous if it:

"denies the truth of the Christian religion or of the Bible or the Book of Common Prayer, or the existence of God."

Countries with a state religion other than Christianity usually have their own definitions of blasphemy.

Centuries ago in Europe, blasphemy was a very serious crime, and many people were executed for saying things critical of the state religion. However, over the centuries the situation has changed. In most modern democratic countries, the laws of blasphemy are not used very often, if at all. Today under common law, the prosecution of anyone for blasphemy depends more on how a thing is said rather than on what is said. Blasphemous words are punishable:

"for their manner, for their violence, or ribaldry or, more fully stated, for their tendency to endanger the peace, to deprave public morality generally, to shake the fabric of society and to be a cause of civil strife."

In short, if you say things about religion in such a manner that people become so angry they break the law, then you could be prosecuted for blasphemy. Blasphemy used to be dangerous because it could - and did - lead to civil strife and threatened the stability of the state.
Such a reaction is less likely in modern democratic countries. Words would only be blasphemous today if they were used in such a strong way that they were likely to shock or outrage the feelings of most Christians in a community.

You must be aware of the strength of religious beliefs in your country and act accordingly. It is a good idea to look through case law in your nearest available law library, to see whether there have been prosecutions for blasphemy, and under what circumstances.

**Obscenity**

Societies have always had problems defining obscenity. Although it is defined as anything which offends people's decency or modesty, obscenity is usually limited to sex or what people might regard as foul language. The problem is that material which offends some people (such as a photograph of the sex act) does not offend others. And material which is acceptable in one situation (such as a picture of the sex act in a medical textbook) is not acceptable elsewhere (such as the same picture in a family newspaper).

The legal definition does not give us much help. English common law says that obscenity is words, pictures or actions which are likely to "deprave and corrupt" those likely to see or hear them.

Many countries have obscenity laws, but even modern laws often give little guidance on what makes a publication obscene, except that it tends to corrupt morals.

With many laws, it is possible to see what they mean by observing how they are used in practice. That means looking at court cases in which they are used. Unfortunately (or fortunately, perhaps), obscenity laws are not used very often in most countries, so case law does not give much guidance.

The best advice we can give is to avoid publishing any words or pictures, particularly of a sexual nature, which you know will offend the majority of your community. Even swear words can be obscene in certain situations and not in others. Swear words which people use without thinking, on the street or in their workplace, can be extremely offensive when printed in a newspaper or broadcast into their homes.

Although we said earlier that the usual defences such as truth, fair comment and privilege do not apply in criminal libels, there is a defence against obscenity if you could prove that the words or pictures had literary or artistic merit. However, literary or artistic merit is almost as hard to define as obscenity itself. You would need to call experts, such as a professor of literature, to prove literary merit in court.

The most famous obscenity trial in English legal history involved the D.H. Lawrence novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, in which there were a number of swear words. A jury decided that, because the novel was a work of literary merit, the words were not obscene.

In some criminal codes, public benefit is also a defence, although it would have to be proved in court that the words or pictures actually benefited the public in some way. You might be able to argue, for example, that a description of sex was educational in its context, perhaps in a medical textbook.

Journalists are at greatest risk when they report on prosecutions for sexual offences. The court may have to hear details of a very intimate or shocking nature. These details cannot be repeated in a news report if there is any question of them being obscene. The defence of privilege does not apply in such cases.

The question of obscenity arises most often in pictures, videos and films, under the general heading of pornography. This will seldom concern the working journalist.

The question of obscenity is very closely allied with good and bad taste. Your question as a
A journalist should not only be "Is this legal?" You should also ask yourself "Is this going to offend my readers, listeners or viewers unnecessarily?" If it is, perhaps you should think about leaving it out. (See Chapter 61: Taste and bad taste.)

The danger is that any error in judgment will be seen by people who may have a definite view of what is and what is not obscene. Unlike defamation, anyone can start a prosecution for obscenity if they are offended by what you publish.

**Sedition**

Sedition is words or actions designed to cause people to act unconstitutionally. It is a good test of any democratic society to see where it draws the line between honest political disagreements and sedition.

Today, laws on sedition often have more to do with promoting racial and social harmony than with protecting the state. Sedition is often defined as the intention to promote feelings of ill-will or hatred between different races, classes or religious groups within the country.

Sedition is not determined so much by the meaning of words as by the way they are presented. The law will not usually act against a genuinely held opinion, as long as it is expressed in moderate language.

In democratic societies, the law usually recognises that it is all right to question decisions by the Head of State, government or parliament as long as this is done in good faith with a view to correcting errors or defects. Political comment, even in strong terms, is acceptable, as long as it is not done with the intention of attempting to overthrow the government or legal system by unlawful means.

In democracies, you can write that your country would be better off under a different government, but you cannot advise your readers or listeners to burn ballot boxes or to intimidate voters.

Although based on common law, many countries now have their own statutes on sedition in their criminal codes. You should find out what these are in your country.

Remember, too, that although your country may be governed by a parliament and operate in the English legal system, the way the laws on sedition are applied depends largely on the political system. Some governments allow less public criticism than others.

For information on the sedition laws in a number of countries, see the Appendix at the end of Chapter 72.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

In many free-press democracies the laws of criminal libel are seldom used.

As a journalist you should also consider matters of taste in matters which might be blasphemous or obscene.

You cannot use defences of truth, fair comment or privilege in cases of blasphemy, obscenity or sedition.
Chapter 72: Security and anti-terrorism laws

In this chapter we look at a number of laws about national security, snooping and anti-terrorism. We examine the way such laws have developed in recent years and how they can affect the work of journalists.

The current ‘war against terror’ has had several major effects on journalists, one being an increase in the number and severity of laws on national security issues.

Many democracies have implemented laws specifically to fight terrorism. Some of them are explicitly titled ‘anti-terrorism’, some are branded as ‘patriotic’ while others are more subtle amendments to existing criminal codes.

However they are described, almost all impact to some degree on the work of journalists.

Although domestic terrorism has existed for centuries, most of the current anti-terrorism laws have flourished in the years since the renewal of international terrorism in the late 1990s which reached a symbolic peak with the events of 11 September 2001 in America.

Before the latest spate of laws, many countries already had laws attempting to combat the overthrow of governments, attacks on citizens by political, religious or ethnic militants or invasion by other nations.

We will first look at some of the more ‘traditional’ security-related laws then some modern anti-terrorism laws.

Sedition laws

Sedition laws are discussed as criminal libels in Chapter 71. In some countries they are still actively used by governments to suppress dissent, though in many free-speech democracies they have a poor history and are seldom used.

Typically, the more benign - and seldom used - sedition laws make a distinction between talk about changing government (the free speech aspect) and practical actions which might lead to the overthrow of a government (the criminal element). In such societies, sedition laws say citizens can be vehement about political change but they must not do anything to achieve it by illegal means, such as a coup or rebellion.

For information on the sedition laws in a number of countries, see the Appendix at the end of this chapter.

Official secrecy laws

Many countries have official secrets legislation to stop their citizens from passing to foreign governments secret information which could damage the country.

This could be information about their armed forces and armaments - especially nuclear - or weapons research, such as biological warfare. It could also include intelligence gathering at home or spying overseas. It could even cover matters such as emergency plans in the case of a war, where the government will seek safety or how it will feed the nation.

The problem with most official secrecy laws - and with many modern anti-terrorism laws - is that citizens are not told what the secret is that is being protected. This may seem like an obvious requirement, but it can cause problems for journalists in two main areas: you may inadvertently
report something covered by office secrecy legislation and you cannot serve your duty as the Fourth Estate by exposing wrong-doing if it is protected by secrecy laws.

One way some societies tried to find a balance between the citizen’s right to know and government’s need to protect national security was through systems such as D-notices.

The D-notice system in countries such as Britain and Australia is basically an agreement between the Department of Defence and the media that they will not broadcast or publish material which could threaten national security. It is an advisory system and not binding on the media, though most do comply with it.

Once upon a time D-notices were issued quite frequently whenever governments suspected a journalist was getting close to revealing an important secret. In recent years it has changed to give more general guidance on the types of issues which should not be published. In Australia today it has fallen into disuse.

Some countries have also enacted specific laws to protect single aspects of national security. It is your duty as a journalist to find out what laws apply in your country.

For example, in Australia the ASIO Act prevents citizens – including journalists – from revealing the identity of any employee of the Australian Security Intelligence Agency without written permission from the agency’s Director General. ASIO is the intelligence organisation set up to protect Australia from foreign threats, including spies and terrorists. There is a similar law to protect the identities or agents or staff working for the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS).

**Electronic interception**

Many countries have specific laws prohibiting ordinary citizens - including journalists - from intercepting private messages and using them. These laws are often called electronic interception laws but are more commonly known as eavesdropping, wire-tapping or bugging laws.

These laws usually make it an offence to secretly listen in on another person’s conversation, whether over a conventional wired network such as landline phones or over wireless networks, such as mobile phones or cell phones. Some laws also cover communications by mail, fax or email, either within the main Act or in separate legislation. In some countries, such as the United States and Canada, it is also illegal to make, sell or trade in electronic secret surveillance devices or software without legal approval.

The same laws usually also make it unlawful to communicate to a third party any information obtained through secret interception. This includes publication or broadcasting such information by journalists.

There are usually exceptions to these laws, for example for security agencies or under a court order, but in most democracies a judge or magistrate will require a valid reason before giving permission. In recent years, governments in some hitherto open democracies have sought - and in some cases taken - powers to allow their police or intelligence services to tap people’s calls or bug their conversations without asking a court.

As mentioned earlier, as with many security-related laws, citizens may not be aware of the powers government agencies have or how they use them. And there is an added danger for journalists in that your own conversations might be tapped or bugged by police or intelligence services, especially if you are investigating some corrupt or dishonest behaviour.

In one of the most famous stories of investigative journalism - the Washington Post’s Watergate reports - journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein often had to use public telephones or meet contacts in underground car parks to minimise the danger of their office or home phones being tapped or their conversations being bugged by the authorities.
In the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, and following bombings in Europe and South-East Asia, many governments around the world introduced strict anti-terrorism laws.

Although many lawyers and civil liberties organisations argued that existing criminal laws were sufficient to deal with the new wave of terrorism, many governments felt their security services needed new and increased powers so they could take action in secret, without the kind of public scrutiny which might alert the terrorists.

In the general atmosphere of fear - created partly by terrorist attacks and partly by the new laws themselves - many of the basic principles of human rights, constitutional and statutory safeguards and common law were suspended. For example, laws restricting electronic interception were overridden so police and intelligence agencies could eavesdrop on private conversations and tap into personal communications without needing a warrant.

In many countries, the common law protection offered by habeas corpus for hundreds of years were reduced or suspended so that security forces could detain suspects in secret for interrogation for longer and longer periods. In some countries laws were introduced or changed to prevent an arrested person's family from knowing what had happened to them.

Provisions protecting freedom of speech - either constitutional or implied - were either reduced or suspended altogether so that in countries such as Australia it became an offence for a journalist even to report that certain people had been arrested under the new anti-terrorism laws.

Some common features of anti-terrorism laws or amendments to criminal codes which might affect journalists in different countries include:

- Restrictions on what journalists can write or broadcast on actual or potential acts of terrorism;
- Restrictions on information available to journalists about terrorism, investigations or prosecutions;
- Restrictions on how journalists themselves can obtain information about or from terrorists or suspected terrorists;
- Restrictions on traditional protections for journalists' sources and, in some cases, making it an offence to withhold any information from police or security forces;
- Restrictions on freedom of movement for journalists doing their work by giving police new powers to detain people or prevent access.

As time passed - and security forces in many democracies claimed success in preventing terrorist attacks - some judges began to implement a more measured approach to interpreting the new laws where they could. In some countries this was seen as the judiciary performing its traditional role of balancing the excesses of executive governments.

The effects of new anti-terrorism laws on journalists have varied from country to country, as have the reactions of the media within each nation. In some countries the media have been all but silenced in their reporting of terrorism and anti-terrorist actions. In other countries some media organisations have enthusiastically supported stricter government controls over them while others have spoken out against them.

As with most laws that can affect the media, as a journalist you should know when you are out of your depth and seek advice from more senior colleagues or lawyers employed or retained by your organisation. Considering that in many countries the penalties for breaking security laws can be very severe, it is important that you understand the dangers and make thoughtful decisions.

**TO SUMMARISE:**

Anti-terrorism laws

In the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, and following bombings in Europe and South-East Asia, many governments around the world introduced strict anti-terrorism laws.

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**TO SUMMARISE:**
National security and anti-terrorism laws affect all citizens but there is often secrecy about how they are applied. This can make the work of journalists difficult and dangerous.

In many free speech democracies, sedition laws are falling into disuse, but in many they are being replaced by specific laws on national security and terrorism. It is your task as a journalist to know what laws apply in your country.

In many countries it is illegal to tap into, eavesdrop on or bug private conversations and also to use any information obtained.

Many new security and anti-terrorism laws override some traditional freedoms - such as *habeas corpus* - which journalists have taken for granted. You may need to rethink your attitude to many other laws in these new circumstances.

**APPENDIX**

The following table of information on sedition laws in a number of countries has been reproduced from a research paper *In Good Faith : Sedition Law in Australia* by the Library of the Parliament of Australia. Some of the information may be out-of-date, so should be checked before use. For more on sedition, anti-terrorism and other security laws in Australia, go to this [extra chapter](#) in The News Manual.

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<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>TNM notes: The oral or written publication of words with a seditious intention, and an agreement to further a seditious intention by doing any act, have always been common law offences. Attempts to codify sedition, treason and allied offences have not yet been implemented.</td>
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Chapter 73: Copyright

In this chapter we look at a specialist area of law which anyone who works with words should know. This is the area of copyright.

What is copyright?
Many countries have special copyright laws to protect the words written by one person from being used by another person without consent. This protection is called copyright because it gives the person who wrote the words the exclusive right to copy them or say who else may use them. Copyright can also apply to other things which are created, such as music, sound recordings, photographs, films, paintings or other works of art, but for the purposes of this chapter, we will talk mainly about words.

The words in ‘The News Manual’ are protected by copyright. As the authors, we have the right to copy the words in further editions or in other publications, but anyone else who wants to reproduce this work will have to ask us for permission and perhaps pay a fee (called royalties). That permission or fee only entitles the person to use it under certain circumstances which have to be specified, such as when including one of these chapters in their own book.

Similarly the drawings in this book are protected by copyright: only the artist has the right to copy the pictures in further editions or in other publications.

Copyright is automatic
In most countries which have copyright laws, authors do not have to do anything to register their copyright. The law says the copyright exists from the moment the words are written. However, copyright does not cover ideas until they have been put in some permanent form as the result of some effort, skill or experience. For example, much of the advice we give in this book comes from ideas which are commonly talked about by journalists throughout the world. We do not have the copyright on those ideas. But we do have copyright on the way they are expressed here. If someone else writes those ideas down in a different way, that is legitimate; if they copy any of our sentences word-for-word - or very nearly word-for-word - they will infringe our copyright and we can take legal action against them for it.

Copying without permission
Some journalists believe that they can copy the words published by other journalists without permission. This is not so. Although copyright does not cover news itself, it usually covers the way the news is written. This means that you can write about a car crash, for example, then another newspaper can write about the same car crash in its own way. But if it copies your words sentence-by-sentence, it will infringe your copyright. The courts will decide whether it has copied your work or just written a very similar story.

The law demands that one newspaper, radio or television station cannot copy another writer’s work unless they make substantial changes. Simply rearranging the paragraphs is not enough to avoid copyright.

Courts have decided that copyright can even include advertisements, racing programs and sporting fixture lists. However, it only covers these things in the original form. You do not have to ask for copyright if you substantially change the way the information is presented.

Some journalists also believe that you can avoid copyright laws by acknowledging where you got the original words from. This is usually not enough. Most laws demand that you must first ask
permission from the original writer before you copy their work.

You must also be aware of the copyright on pictures, both still and moving. You must get permission from the owner of the pictures (usually a newspaper, television station or picture agency, occasionally an individual) before you can copy them for your audience.

Fair dealing

There are, however, circumstances in which you can use other people’s work without permission or paying them royalties. Under the fair dealing provisions of most copyright laws you may use other people's work if you only use short parts of it and you tell your readers or listeners where the original came from (called attribution). In some countries you are also expected to have made “substantial changes” through your own effort.

For example, you can report on somebody else's work - such as another newspaper's story - without seeking permission. You might, for example, write a story reporting that the other newspaper claims that the Minister for Housing is about to be dismissed. You cannot use the other newspaper's whole story word-for-word, but you can report what they have said if you also name that newspaper.

Reviews

Reviews are another special case. The law usually allows a reviewer to quote short passages of the work under review - such as a book - as long as they clearly acknowledge the title of the work and the name of the author.

However, this exemption does not cover other documents copied for news stories or feature articles. It especially does not cover documents which have been leaked to the media without the owner's permission. Because the owner did not know that they were being leaked, they could not give permission. If you quote extensively from a leaked document, you could be infringing the owner's copyright, and could be sued.

Most documents which are given to reporters by their rightful owners can be safely copied. These usually consist of press releases, official reports and transcripts of proceedings. But you should ask for legal advice before reprinting any document you have some across by any other means.

Be careful too of using music in radio or television news reports or documentaries, perhaps to illustrate a story, for example using Abba's "Money, money, money" to introduce a finance story. While it is generally acceptable to use short excerpts of music when reviewing it, most record companies strictly enforce the copyright laws where their own product is concerned.

As a journalist, your work will be protected by any copyright law in force in your country. However, you may not own the copyright personally. Many laws state that, if you are paid to produce an article by someone else, the person who paid you owns the copyright. Your newspaper, radio or television station will probably own the copyright of any work you produce in their time.

Duration of copyright

In many countries, copyright on a work continues from the moment it is produced until 50 or 70 years after the death of the author, depending on which country the copyright exists in. After the expiry of that period the work is in what is called “the public domain” and can be used freely. For example, in Australia, if the author has died less than 70 years ago, you must ask their literary heirs for permission. After 70 years, the copyright ceases to exist and you are free to copy the words. Copyright on radio and television programs lasts for 50 years from the date of first broadcast.

Copyright may also be bought and sold during that period of coverage. For example, the American
singer Michael Jackson bought the publishing rights to most of the early Beatles songs of John Lennon and Paul McCartney. These rights then became the property of a joint venture between Jackson and Sony. Now any time that one of those early Lennon-McCartney song is played on a radio station, some of the royalties have to be paid to Michael Jackson.

**International copyright**

Finally, copyright can extend from one country into another, if both countries have signed an international copyright convention. There are several such conventions in existence. The most common is called the Berne Convention. You should check if your country has signed any of them. If it has, you are not allowed to copy the work of foreign authors or photographers without permission. The symbol © usually shows that work is protected by an international copyright convention, if it accompanies details of who owns the copyright.
Afterword
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If you have read all 73 chapters of The News Manual Online, we congratulate you! We hope you have enjoyed reading it all, and we hope that you have learned some new things.

The next stage is for you to put these new things into practice. It is not enough to learn new ideas in your head: you have to demonstrate the new ideas in your actions. You must be ready to do things differently, to change and to improve.

If you have read the whole book, and if you live in a developing country, you will have noticed that it is culturally biased. We apologise for this.

The authors were both English by birth and upbringing. That is our culture. That is where we learned to be journalists. While it is true that we have lived and worked in many different countries and are aware of their different needs, that is our experience, not yours.

As you continue to use The News Manual Online, therefore, you will need to sort out the content of what we are saying from the cultural setting in which we say it. The things we have to say are like a liquid, and our culture is the like the cup which holds that liquid. You must pour the liquid out of our cultural cup and into your own.

This is the challenge facing journalists in developed and developing countries. You may wish to look at how things are done in other countries, in order to improve the standard of journalism in your own country. But you do not necessarily want to adopt other countries' style of journalism.

A good example of this is in the pace of broadcasting. In most Western countries, news and current affairs on radio and television has to maintain a fast pace. Each item is kept short, people speak quickly and no long silences are allowed. If the pace drops, it is considered to be bad broadcast journalism.

In most Pacific islands, though, the pace of life generally is more relaxed. If the radio news in these countries was presented at the pace of an American commercial radio station, it might seem strange to the listeners. In this case, the difference is not in standards, but in style.

Unfortunately, the difference between standards and style will not always be so easy to see. "That is our cultural style" can be a way of saying "I can't be bothered to do it better". But there is also a real danger that, in an attempt to do things better, you may adopt ways which are inappropriate for your society.

It may not be an easy process to work out a style of journalism with high professional standards which is appropriate for your society. It may not be easy, but it is a job which you must do yourself. Nobody from outside your country, your society, your culture can do it for you.

Do not be afraid of making mistakes as you develop this appropriate style. You will have to make some. Accept people's criticism graciously, and think about what they have to say. If their criticism is justified, apologise and change the way you do things in future. If it is not justified, explain to them why not, and have the courage to continue doing what you believe to be right.

This is the essence of good journalism in any society. It is the desire to serve the community, fairly and honestly, by providing the information which they want and need.

We believe that it comes down to six golden rules. If you can live by them, you will be a good journalist.
GOLDEN RULES:

Be a professional person; this means:

- Understand why journalism is important
- Learn and understand the knowledge and skills which you need
- Learn and understand the ethics of journalism
- Conduct yourself at all times in a proper way
- Be humble, and remember that you are only a channel through which information flows

Be aware of the world around you; this means:

- Read newspapers and magazines, from overseas as well as from your own country
- Listen to radio and watch television, especially news, current affairs and documentaries
- Read books
- Talk to educated and informed people.

For every story you report, ask the key question: "How will this affect my readers' or listeners' lives?"

Make sure you understand a story before you try to report it; do not pass on your own confusion to your readers or listeners; remember to visualise the whole story in detail.

When you are interviewing anybody, be polite but persistent.

When you are writing a story, KISS (Keep It Short and Simple).