

MCM104

INTRODUCTION TO NEWS WRITING



Course video is available on our app

Course code: MCM 104

Course title: Introduction to News Writing

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 1 Foundations of News and Reporting

Series Outline

Part 1 (1.1): Understanding News

- 1.1.1 Definitions of News
- 1.1.2 Historical Perspectives on News
- 1.1.3 The Role of News in Society

Part 2 (1.2): Elements and Values of News

- 1.2.1 News Values and Virtues
- 1.2.2 Key Elements: Timeliness, Proximity, Impact
- 1.2.3 Human Interest and Novelty

Part 3 (1.3): The Reporter and News Writing

- 1.3.1 Qualities of a Good News Writer
- 1.3.2 Ethical and Legal Considerations
- 1.3.3 Identifying and Developing News Stories

Introduction

News is central to how societies communicate, share information, and make sense of events around them. Every day, people rely on news to stay informed about politics, economics, culture, and community life. For a journalist, understanding the foundations of news is essential, because it shapes the way stories are identified, written, and presented to the public. This Series sets the stage for your journey into news writing by helping you grasp what news truly is, why it matters, and how it is reported.

The aim of this Series is to equip you with the fundamental knowledge and skills needed to define news, recognise its essential elements, and appreciate the role of the reporter in shaping accurate and ethical reporting.

We shall commence this Series by exploring the meaning of news, its historical development, and its role in society. Next, we will examine the elements and values that make a story newsworthy, including timeliness, proximity, impact, and human interest. Finally, we will wrap up by focusing on the qualities of a good reporter, ethical and legal considerations, and the practical process of identifying and developing news stories.



Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 1.1 define news and explain its historical development and societal role,

SLO 1.2 analyse the elements and values that determine newsworthiness,

SLO 1.3 evaluate the qualities of a good news writer and apply ethical and legal considerations in reporting,

SLO 1.4 demonstrate how to identify and develop news stories for publication.

1.1 Understanding News

1.1.1 Definitions of news

The term **news** refers to information about recent events or developments that are of interest to the public. News is characterised by its immediacy, relevance, and ability to inform or influence audiences. It is not simply any information, but rather content that meets specific criteria of timeliness, significance, and public interest.



DEFINITION OF NEWS

Journalism Fundamentals



Key Attributes of Newsworthy Information



Figure 1.1 Definition of news in context

Short description: A simple diagram showing “news” at the centre, connected to timeliness, relevance, and public interest.

Fill in the blank: News is defined as information about _____ events or developments that are of interest to the public.

1.1.2 Historical perspectives on news

Historically, **news** has evolved from oral traditions and handwritten bulletins to printed newspapers, radio broadcasts, television reports, and now digital platforms. Each stage of



development reflects changes in technology and society, but the core purpose of news has remained the same: to inform people about events that affect their lives.

EVOLUTION OF NEWS MEDIA

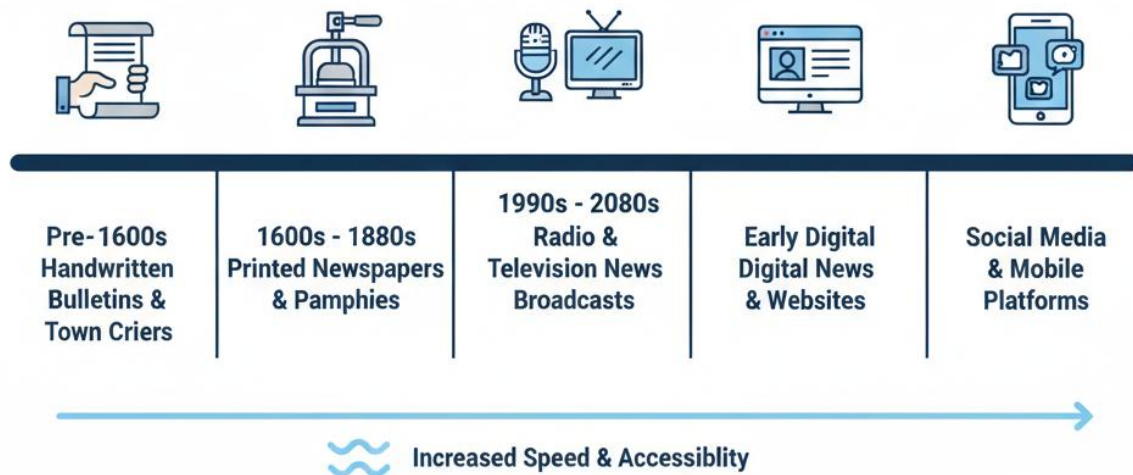


Plate 1.1 Historical evolution of news media

An image showing progression from handwritten bulletins to newspapers, radio, television, and digital platforms.

Fill in the blank: The evolution of news has moved from oral traditions and handwritten bulletins to _____ platforms.

1.1.3 The role of news in society



The role of **news** is to inform, educate, and sometimes entertain the public. It provides citizens with the knowledge they need to make decisions, participate in civic life, and understand their environment. News also acts as a watchdog, holding institutions accountable and ensuring transparency in governance.

Function	Description
Inform	Provides timely, accurate, and relevant data about local, national, and global events to help citizens make daily decisions.
Educate	Goes beyond the "what" to explain the "why" and "how," providing context, historical background, and complex analysis.
Entertain	Offers human-interest stories, features, sports, and cultural news that engage the audience's emotions and provide leisure.
Watchdog	Acts as a check on power by investigating and exposing corruption, injustice, or inefficiency in government and private institutions.

Box 1.1 Functions of news in society

A single-column table listing functions such as informing, educating, entertaining, and acting as a watchdog.

Fill in the blank: One of the key roles of news is to act as a _____, holding institutions accountable.

Pilot questions 1.1

Which three qualities best define news?

What is one major difference between historical and modern news dissemination?

Identify one function of news in society.

Why is timeliness considered an essential element of news?

What role does news play in ensuring transparency?

1.2 Elements and Values of News

1.2.1 News values and virtues

News values are the criteria that determine whether an event or issue is newsworthy. These include timeliness, significance, proximity, prominence, human interest, and novelty. **Virtues of**



news refer to qualities such as accuracy, fairness, and balance, which ensure that reporting maintains credibility and trust.

News Values (What makes it news?)	Journalism Virtues (How should it be reported?)
Timeliness: Events happening right now or in the immediate past.	Accuracy: Verifying facts and ensuring the truth is presented correctly.
Proximity: Events that happen close to the home or interests of the audience.	Objectivity: Maintaining a neutral distance and avoiding personal bias.
Impact/Consequence: How many people are affected and how seriously?	Integrity: Acting with honor and resisting pressure from outside interests.
Prominence: Stories involving well-known people, places, or brands.	Accountability: Taking responsibility for errors and correcting them publicly.
Conflict: Struggles between people, nations, or opposing ideas.	Fairness/Balance: Representing multiple perspectives and diverse voices.
Novelty: The unusual, the bizarre, or the "first" of its kind.	Independence: Staying free from the influence of advertisers or politicians.

Box 1.2 Key news values and virtues

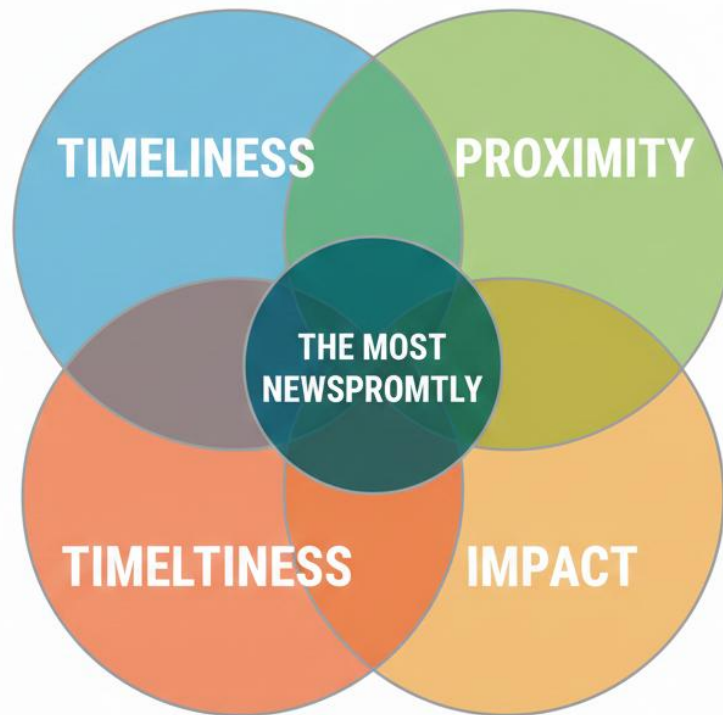
A single-column table listing values (timeliness, significance, proximity, prominence, human interest, novelty) and virtues (accuracy, fairness, balance).

Fill in the blank: One of the most important virtues of news is _____, which ensures credibility and trust.

1.2.2 Key elements: timeliness, proximity, impact

Timeliness means that news must be current and relevant to the moment. **Proximity** refers to the closeness of an event to the audience, either geographically or emotionally. **Impact** measures how strongly an event affects people's lives, decisions, or emotions.





KEY ELEMENTS OF NEWS VALUE



Figure 1.2 Key elements of news

A diagram showing timeliness, proximity, and impact as three overlapping circles.

Fill in the blank: News that affects people's lives directly is said to have strong _____.

1.2.3 Human interest and novelty

Human interest stories appeal to emotions, often highlighting personal experiences, struggles, or achievements. **Novelty** refers to unusual or unexpected events that capture attention because they break routine. Together, these elements add depth and variety to news coverage.





HUMAN INTEREST: Sharing Unique Stories

Plate 1.2 Human interest and novelty in news

An image showing a journalist interviewing a person about a unique or emotional story.

Fill in the blank: A story about an unusual event that breaks routine is considered _____.

Pilot questions 1.2

What is one difference between news values and virtues?

Which element of news refers to closeness to the audience?

Identify one virtue that ensures credibility in reporting.



What type of story appeals directly to emotions?

Why is novelty important in news coverage?

1.3 The Reporter and News Writing

1.3.1 Qualities of a good news writer

A good news writer must possess qualities such as clarity, accuracy, curiosity, and impartiality.

Clarity ensures that the story is easy to read and understand. **Accuracy** means that facts are verified and reported correctly. **Curiosity** drives the reporter to ask questions and seek deeper insights. **Impartiality** ensures fairness and balance in reporting.

Fill in the blank: A reporter who ensures facts are verified and reported correctly demonstrates _____.

1.3.2 Ethical and legal considerations

Reporters must adhere to **ethics**, which are principles guiding fairness, honesty, and respect for privacy. They must also comply with **legal considerations**, such as avoiding libel, respecting copyright, and protecting sources. These safeguards maintain public trust and protect both the journalist and the audience.

Category	Consideration	Description
Ethical	Accuracy & Fact-Checking	The obligation to verify all information before publication to ensure it is true and contextualized.
Ethical	Independence	Avoiding conflicts of interest, such as accepting gifts or reporting on a company where the journalist has a financial stake.
Ethical	Minimizing Harm	Balancing the public's right to know against the potential harm to private individuals, victims, or minors.
Ethical	Accountability	Taking responsibility for mistakes by issuing clear and prominent corrections or retractions.
Legal	Defamation (Libel/Slander)	The legal risk of publishing false statements that damage a person's reputation.



Category	Consideration	Description
Legal	Privacy Rights	Avoiding the intrusion into a person's private life or the public disclosure of private, embarrassing facts without a "newsworthy" justification.
Legal	Copyright & Fair Use	Ensuring that photos, videos, or long excerpts of text from other creators are used legally or under "Fair Use" guidelines.
Legal	Shield Laws	Understanding the legal protections (or lack thereof) regarding a journalist's right to protect the identity of confidential sources.

Box 1.3 Ethical and legal considerations in news writing

A single-column table listing ethics (fairness, honesty, privacy) and legal considerations (libel, copyright, source protection)."

Fill in the blank: Publishing false information that damages someone's reputation is known as _____.

1.3.3 Identifying and developing news stories

Reporters must learn to **identify news stories** by recognising events that meet news values. They then **develop stories** by gathering facts, interviewing sources, and structuring the information into a coherent narrative. Campus and community beats provide opportunities for practice, allowing learners to report on events within their immediate environment.



THE NEWS STORY DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

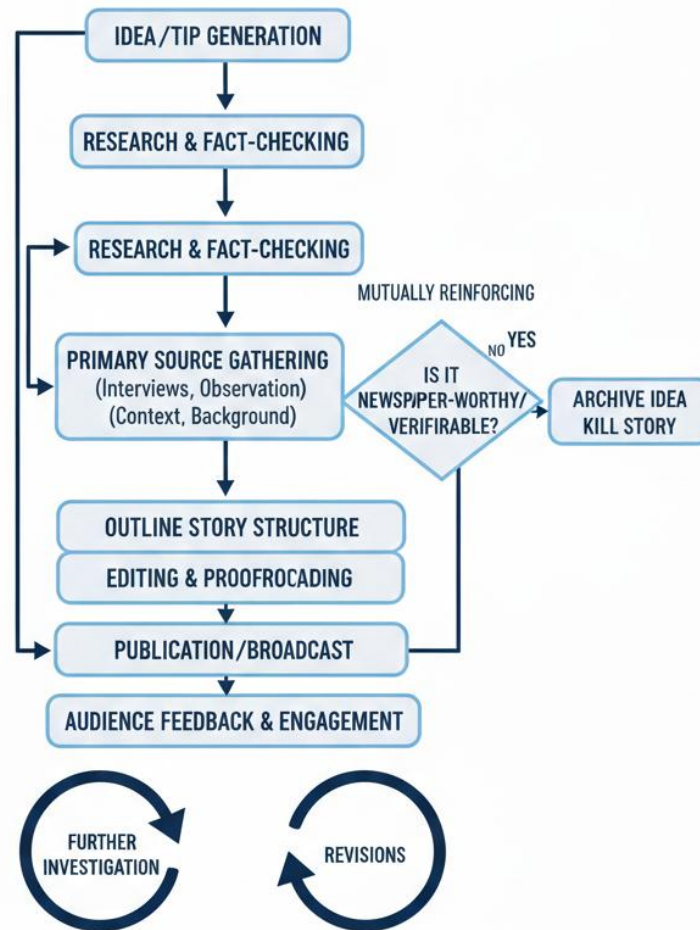


Figure 1.3 Process of developing a news story
A flowchart showing steps: identify → gather facts → interview → structure → publish.

Fill in the blank: The process of gathering facts and interviewing sources to create a coherent narrative is called _____.

Pilot questions 1.3

Which quality ensures that a news story is easy to read and understand?

What is libel in journalism?



Why is impartiality important for a reporter?

What is the first step in developing a news story?

Identify one ethical principle that guides fair reporting.

Series Summary

This Series has introduced you to the foundations of news and reporting, highlighting why news matters and how it shapes society. We began by examining the definition of news, its historical development, and its enduring role in informing and guiding public life. We then explored the elements and values that determine newsworthiness, including timeliness, proximity, impact, human interest, and novelty, alongside the virtues of accuracy, fairness, and balance. Finally, we focused on the qualities of a good reporter, the ethical and legal considerations that safeguard credibility, and the practical process of identifying and developing publishable stories.

By engaging with these topics, you should now be able to define news and explain its role in society, analyse the elements and values that make a story newsworthy, evaluate the qualities of a good news writer while applying ethical and legal principles, and demonstrate how to identify and develop stories for publication. These outcomes directly align with the Series Learning Outcomes, ensuring that you are well prepared to move forward in your study of news writing.

Glossary of Terms

Accuracy: The quality of reporting facts correctly and without distortion.

Ethics: Principles guiding fairness, honesty, and respect for privacy in journalism.

Human interest: A type of story that appeals to emotions by highlighting personal experiences or achievements.

Impact: The degree to which an event affects people's lives, decisions, or emotions.

Impartiality: The quality of being fair and balanced, avoiding bias in reporting.

Libel: Publishing false information that damages someone's reputation.

News: Information about recent events or developments that are of interest to the public.

News values: Criteria that determine whether an event or issue is newsworthy, such as timeliness, proximity, and significance.

Novelty: The quality of being unusual or unexpected, which makes a story attention-grabbing.

Proximity: The closeness of an event to the audience, either geographically or emotionally.

Reporter: A person who gathers, writes, and presents news stories for publication or broadcast.

Timeliness: The quality of news being current and relevant to the moment.



Virtues of news: Qualities such as accuracy, fairness, and balance that ensure credibility in reporting.

Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective questions

Which of the following is NOT a news value: timeliness, proximity, novelty, or imagination? (Linked to SLO 1.2)

News that appeals directly to emotions is best described as: human interest, impact, timeliness, or prominence? (Linked to SLO 1.2)

Publishing false information that damages someone's reputation is called: libel, novelty, proximity, or impartiality? (Linked to SLO 1.3)

Short-answer questions

4. Define news and explain why timeliness is considered an essential element. (Linked to SLO 1.1 and SLO 1.2)

5. Identify two qualities of a good news writer and explain why they are important. (Linked to SLO 1.3)

6. What role does news play in ensuring transparency in society? (Linked to SLO 1.1)

Long-answer questions

7. Analyse the historical evolution of news from oral traditions to digital platforms, and discuss how these changes have influenced the way people consume information today. (Linked to SLO 1.1)

8. Evaluate the ethical and legal considerations that a reporter must observe when developing a news story, and explain how these considerations protect both the journalist and the public. (Linked to SLO 1.3)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 1]

Objective questions

Imagination.

Human interest.

Libel.

Short-answer questions

4. News is information about recent events or developments of public interest. Timeliness is essential because audiences expect news to be current and relevant.

5. Clarity ensures stories are easy to read, while accuracy guarantees facts are correct. Both are vital for credibility.

6. News acts as a watchdog, holding institutions accountable and ensuring transparency in governance.



Long-answer questions

7. Basic response: News evolved from oral traditions and handwritten bulletins to newspapers, radio, television, and digital platforms. Each stage improved speed and reach.

Value-added response: Beyond faster dissemination, digital platforms have transformed news consumption by enabling interactivity, personalisation, and global access, while also raising challenges such as misinformation and information overload.

Basic response: Reporters must respect ethics such as fairness and honesty, and legal rules such as avoiding libel and respecting copyright. These protect credibility and public trust.

Value-added response: In addition, ethical and legal safeguards protect vulnerable sources, ensure accountability in governance, and maintain the integrity of journalism in an era of rapid information sharing.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 1]

Answers to Pilot Questions 1.1

Timeliness, relevance, public interest.

Modern news dissemination uses digital platforms.

Informing, educating, entertaining, watchdog role.

Because audiences expect current information.

By holding institutions accountable.

Answers to Pilot Questions 1.2

Values determine newsworthiness, virtues ensure credibility.

Proximity.

Accuracy.

Human interest.

It captures attention by breaking routine.

Answers to Pilot Questions 1.3

Clarity.

Publishing false information that damages reputation.

It ensures fairness and balance.

Identifying newsworthy events.

Fairness.

References and Attributions [Series 1]

General references



Course content adapted from *MCM 104: Introduction to News Writing* curriculum outline.

Definitions and explanations of news values and virtues based on standard journalism texts and open educational resources (OERs).

Illustrations

Figure 1.1 Definition of news in context: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a conceptual diagram showing news at the centre with arrows pointing to timeliness, relevance, and public interest.”

Plate 1.1 Historical evolution of news media: AI-generated using the prompt “Generate a timeline-style illustration showing evolution of news media from handwritten bulletins to digital platforms.”

Box 1.1 Functions of news in society: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a simple table listing functions of news: inform, educate, entertain, watchdog.”

Box 1.2 Key news values and virtues: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a simple table listing news values and virtues side by side.”

Figure 1.2 Key elements of news: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a Venn diagram showing timeliness, proximity, and impact as overlapping elements of news.”

Plate 1.2 Human interest and novelty in news: AI-generated using the prompt “Generate an illustration of a journalist interviewing someone about a human interest story.”

Box 1.3 Ethical and legal considerations in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing ethical and legal considerations in journalism.”

Figure 1.3 Process of developing a news story: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a flowchart showing the process of developing a news story.”

Suggested OER search strings for sourcing illustrations

“diagram definition of news journalism OER”

“history of news media evolution OER image”

“functions of news journalism OER table”

“news values and virtues journalism OER table”

“elements of news timeliness proximity impact OER diagram”

“human interest novelty journalism OER image”

“journalism ethics and legal considerations OER table”

“news story development process journalism OER diagram”

Referencing style

All references and attributions have been presented in a clear institutional style, consistent with academic practice. AI-generated illustrations are noted with their prompts, while OER search strings are provided for sourcing equivalent open-access materials.



Course code: MCM 104

Course title: Introduction to News Writing

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 2 Elements and Values of News Writing

Series Outline

Part 1 (2.1): Identifying Elements of News Writing

- 2.1.1 Clarity and accuracy in reporting
- 2.1.2 Structure and coherence in news writing

Part 2 (2.2): News Values and Their Application

- 2.2.1 Timeliness and proximity
- 2.2.2 Impact, prominence, and human interest
- 2.2.3 Novelty and relevance

Part 3 (2.3): Virtues of Effective News Writing

- 2.3.1 Fairness and balance
- 2.3.2 Ethical responsibility in news writing
- 2.3.3 Credibility and trustworthiness

Introduction

In the last Series, we explored the foundations of news and reporting, focusing on what news is, its historical development, and the role of the reporter in shaping stories. Building on that knowledge, this Series turns to the elements and values that make news writing effective and credible. These elements are the building blocks of journalism, and understanding them will help you recognise why certain stories are chosen, how they are written, and what makes them resonate with audiences.

The aim of this Series is to enable you to identify the essential elements of news writing, analyse the values that determine newsworthiness, and evaluate the virtues that ensure credibility and trust in reporting.

We shall commence this Series by examining the elements of news writing, such as clarity, accuracy, and coherence. Next, we will explore the values of news, including timeliness, proximity, impact, prominence, human interest, and novelty, and consider how they apply in practice. Finally, we will wrap up by discussing the virtues of effective news writing, such as fairness, balance, ethical responsibility, and credibility, which are crucial for maintaining public trust.



Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 2.1 define and explain the key elements of news writing, including clarity, accuracy, and coherence,

SLO 2.2 analyse the major news values such as timeliness, proximity, impact, prominence, human interest, and novelty,

SLO 2.3 evaluate the virtues of effective news writing, including fairness, balance, and credibility,

SLO 2.4 apply ethical responsibility in news writing to maintain trust and accountability.

2.1 Identifying Elements of News Writing

2.1.1 Clarity and accuracy in reporting

Clarity refers to the quality of writing that makes a news story easy to read and understand. A clear report avoids jargon, uses simple language, and presents information in a logical order.

Accuracy means that facts are verified and reported correctly, without distortion or omission.

Together, clarity and accuracy ensure that readers receive reliable information that they can trust.



CREDIBLE REPORTING

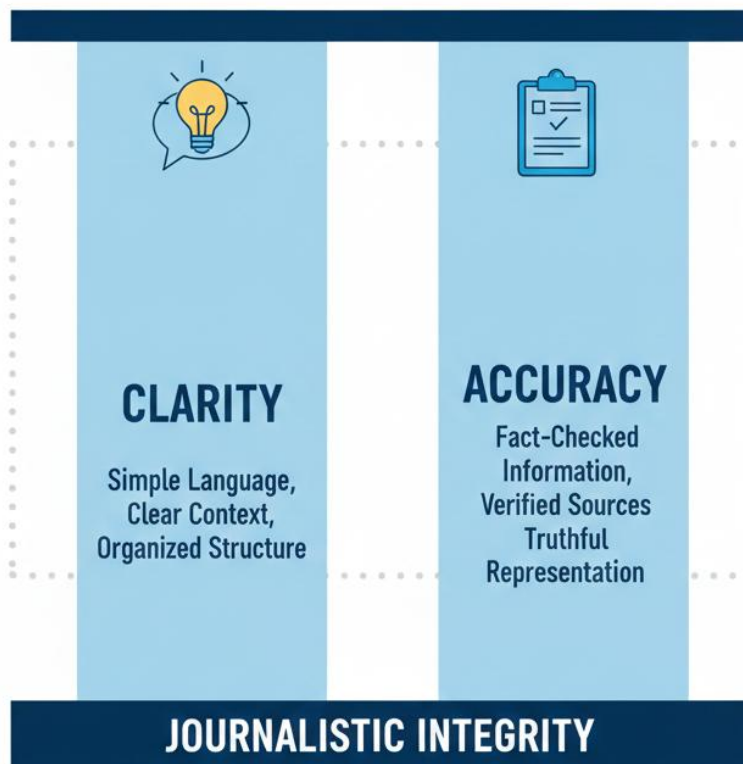


Figure 2.1 Clarity and accuracy in news writing
A diagram showing clarity and accuracy as two pillars supporting credible reporting.

Fill in the blank: A report that presents information in a logical order and avoids jargon demonstrates _____.

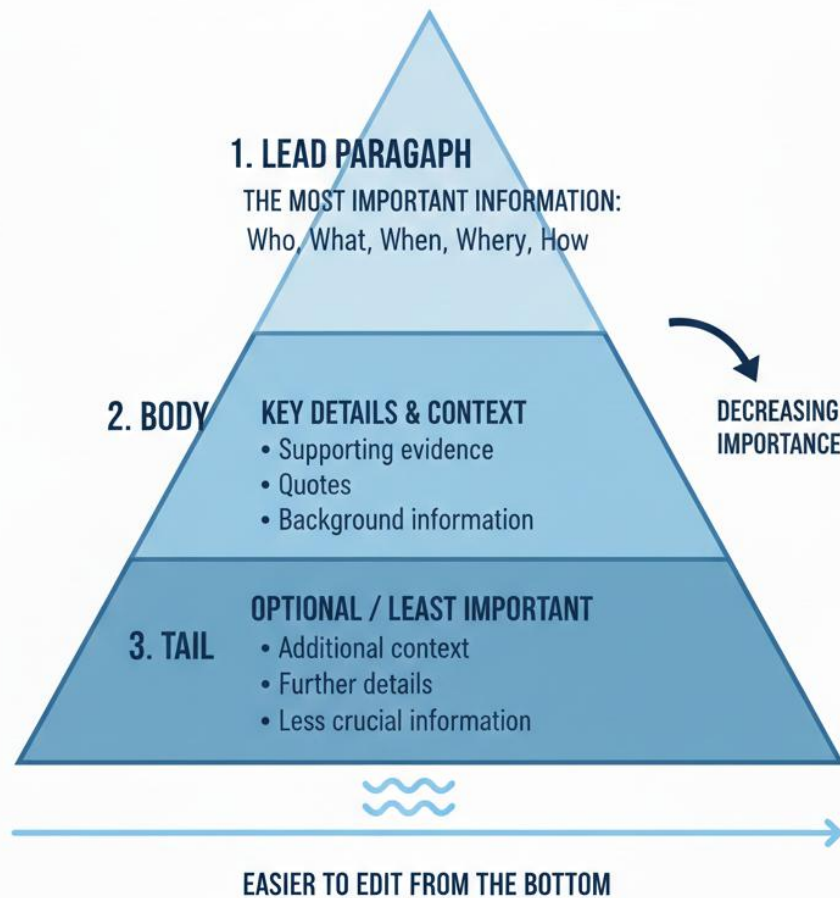
2.1.2 Structure and coherence in news writing

Structure refers to the organisation of a news story, often following the inverted pyramid style, where the most important information comes first, followed by supporting details. **Coherence** means that the story flows smoothly, with ideas connected logically and transitions that guide the



reader from one point to the next. A well-structured and coherent story helps readers grasp the main points quickly and understand the context.

THE INVERTED PYRAMID: NEWS WRITING STRUCTURE



Box 2.1 Structure and coherence in news writing

A single-column table outlining inverted pyramid structure: headline → lead → body → background.

Fill in the blank: The inverted pyramid style places the most important information at the _____ of the story.



Pilot questions 2.1

Which two qualities ensure that a news story is both reliable and easy to understand?

What does accuracy in reporting mean?

Which writing style places the most important information first?

Why is coherence important in news writing?

Identify one way clarity can be achieved in reporting.

2.2 News Values and Their Application

2.2.1 Timeliness and proximity

Timeliness refers to the importance of reporting events as soon as they occur, since audiences expect news to be current and relevant. **Proximity** means that events closer to the audience, either geographically or emotionally, are more likely to be considered newsworthy. Together, timeliness and proximity ensure that news connects directly with the interests of its readers.



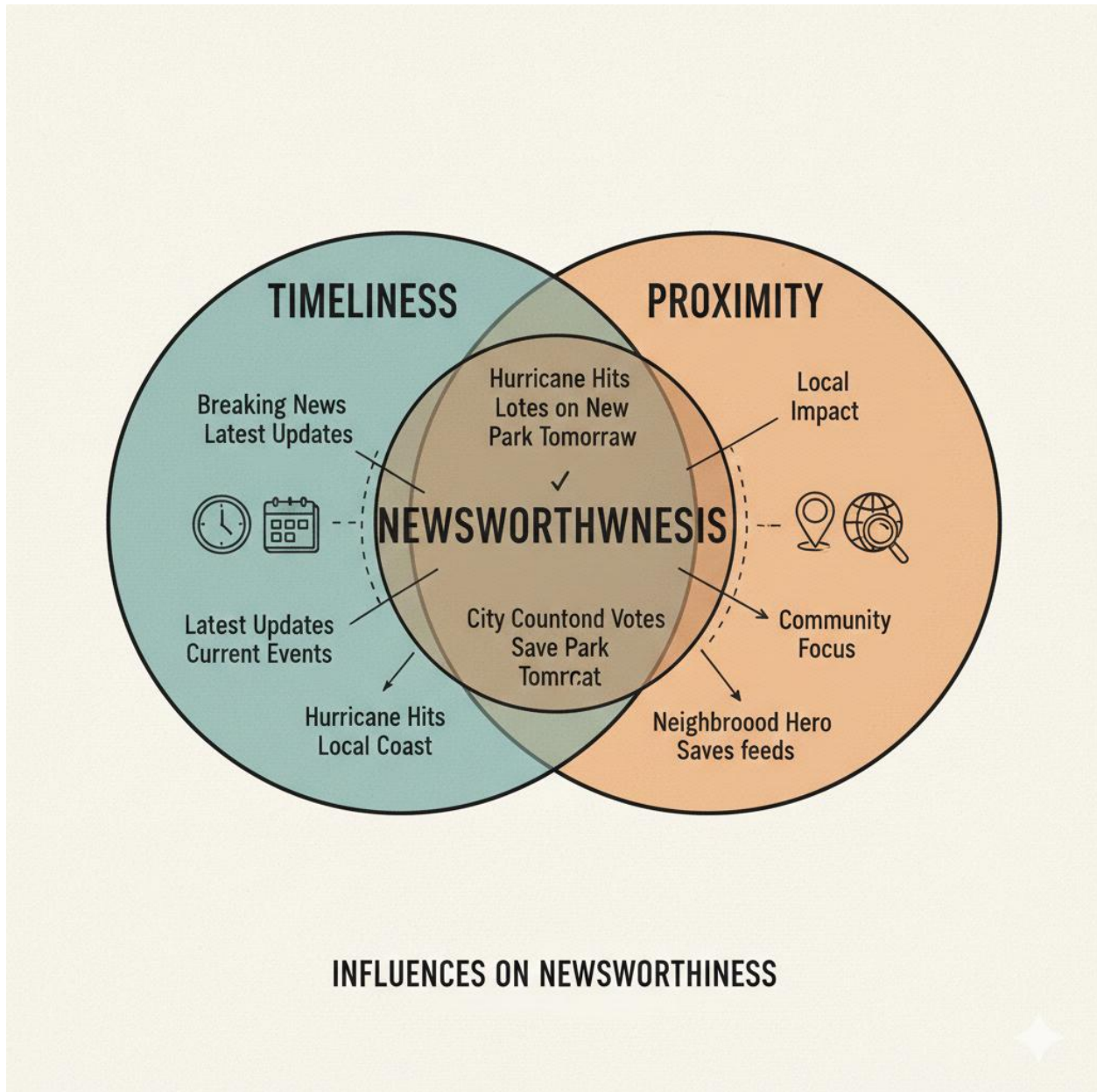


Figure 2.2 Timeliness and proximity in news
A diagram showing timeliness and proximity as two overlapping circles, highlighting their combined influence on newsworthiness.

Fill in the blank: News that occurs close to the audience geographically or emotionally demonstrates _____.

2.2.2 Impact, prominence, and human interest

Impact measures how strongly an event affects people's lives, decisions, or emotions.

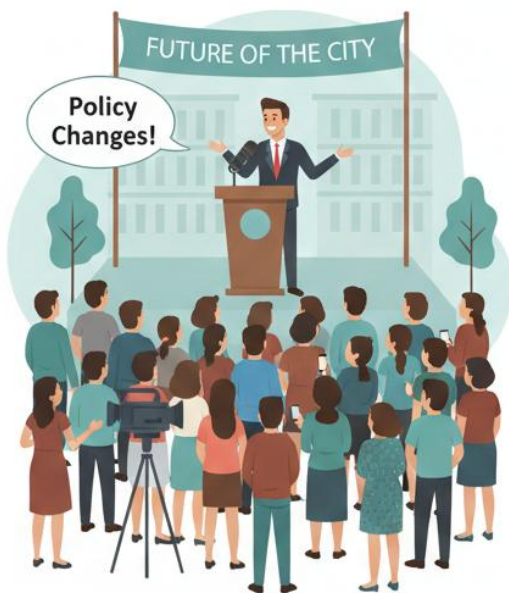
Prominence refers to the importance of individuals or institutions involved in the story, such as



celebrities or government officials. **Human interest** stories appeal to emotions, often highlighting personal experiences, struggles, or achievements. These values ensure that news resonates with audiences on multiple levels.

JOURNALISM: IMPACT & HUMAN INTEREST

IMPACT & PROMINENCE



HUMAN INTEREST



Plate 2.1 Examples of impact, prominence, and human interest
An image showing a prominent figure addressing a crowd, alongside a human interest story of a local hero.

Fill in the blank: A story about a celebrity or government official demonstrates _____ in news values.



2.2.3 Novelty and relevance

Novelty refers to unusual or unexpected events that capture attention because they break routine.

Relevance means that the story connects directly to the concerns or interests of the audience.

Both novelty and relevance add depth to news coverage, ensuring that stories are not only informative but also engaging.

News Value	Definition	Example
Novelty	Focuses on the unusual, bizarre, or "first-of-its-kind" events. It is the "Man Bites Dog" phenomenon—something that deviates from the expected norm.	A story about a local resident who trains their pet goldfish to play soccer or the first successful landing of a private spacecraft on an asteroid.
Relevance	Measures how much a story affects the reader's life, finances, or well-being. It answers the reader's question: " <i>Why should I care?</i> "	A report on a new city tax hike that will increase monthly rent for local residents or a health alert regarding a local water contamination issue.

Box 2.2 Novelty and relevance in news writing

Short description: A single-column table listing novelty (unexpected events) and relevance (connection to audience interests).

Fill in the blank: A story that connects directly to the concerns of the audience demonstrates _____.

Pilot questions 2.2

Which two values ensure that news connects directly with the interests of readers?

What does prominence in news refer to?

Identify one type of story that appeals directly to emotions.

Why is novelty important in news coverage?

What does impact measure in news reporting?



2.3 Virtues of Effective News Writing

2.3.1 Fairness and balance

Fairness means giving all sides of a story equal opportunity to be heard. **Balance** ensures that coverage is not biased towards one perspective. These virtues protect the integrity of journalism and help audiences trust the information presented.

Fill in the blank: A report that gives all sides equal opportunity to be heard demonstrates _____.

2.3.2 Ethical responsibility in news writing

Ethical responsibility refers to the duty of journalists to act honestly, respect privacy, and avoid harm. Ethical reporting ensures that stories are not only accurate but also respectful of individuals and communities.

Responsibility	Practical Application	Why It Matters
Verification	Cross-referencing claims with documents, public records, and multiple eyewitnesses.	Prevents the spread of misinformation and "fake news."
Duty to the Truth	Reporting facts accurately even when they contradict the journalist's personal beliefs or the outlet's stance.	Builds and maintains public trust in the media as a neutral observer.
Protection of Sources	Honoring "off-the-record" agreements and protecting the identity of vulnerable whistleblowers.	Ensures people feel safe coming forward with information of public interest.
Right of Reply	Giving individuals or organizations accused of wrongdoing a meaningful opportunity to respond before publication.	Ensures fairness and prevents one-sided character assassinations.
Distinguishing Fact from Opinion	Clearly labeling commentary, analysis, and sponsored content so they are not confused with "hard" news.	Helps the audience understand the intent behind the information they consume.



Responsibility	Practical Application	Why It Matters
Correcting the Record	Issuing clear, prominent corrections when an error is discovered, rather than just deleting the mistake.	Demonstrates accountability and a commitment to the historical record.
Public Interest Focus	Prioritizing stories that impact the community's well-being over "clickbait" or sensationalism.	Fulfills the "Fourth Estate" role of journalism in a healthy democracy.

Box 2.3 Ethical responsibilities in news writing

A single-column table listing ethical responsibilities such as honesty, respect for privacy, and avoidance of harm.

Fill in the blank: Respecting privacy and avoiding harm are examples of _____ in journalism.

2.3.3 Credibility and trustworthiness

Credibility means that audiences believe the information presented, while **trustworthiness** refers to the consistent reliability of the journalist and the news organisation. These virtues are built over time through accurate, fair, and ethical reporting.



TRUSTWORTHY JOURNALISM

Outcomes of Principled Reporting

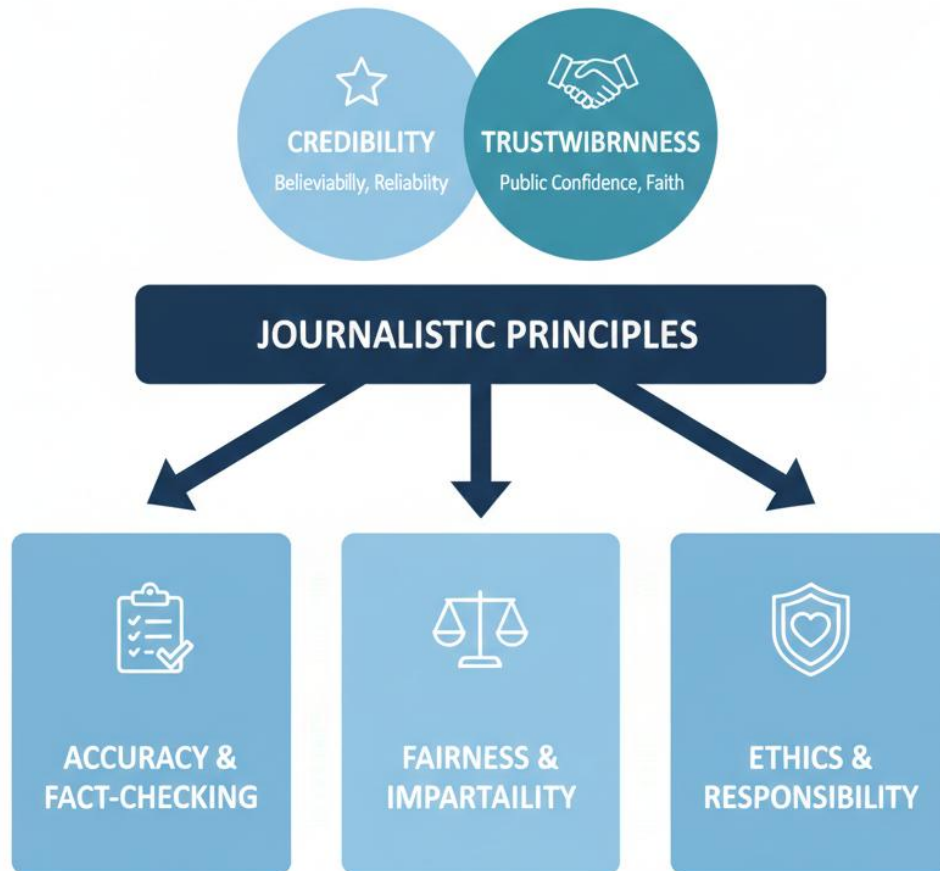


Figure 2.3 Credibility and trustworthiness in journalism

Short description: A diagram showing credibility and trustworthiness as outcomes of accuracy, fairness, and ethics.

Fill in the blank: Consistent reliability of a journalist or news organisation demonstrates _____.

Pilot questions 2.3

What does fairness in reporting mean?

Identify one ethical responsibility of journalists.



Which two virtues ensure audiences believe and rely on news?

Why is balance important in news writing?

How is credibility built over time?

Series Summary

This Series has focused on the elements and values that make news writing effective and credible. We began by identifying the essential elements of news writing, such as clarity, accuracy, structure, and coherence, which ensure that stories are reliable and easy to follow. Then we examined the values that determine newsworthiness, including timeliness, proximity, impact, prominence, human interest, novelty, and relevance, and considered how they shape the selection and presentation of stories. Finally, we explored the virtues of effective news writing, such as fairness, balance, ethical responsibility, credibility, and trustworthiness, which safeguard the integrity of journalism.

By engaging with these topics, you should now be able to define and explain the elements of news writing, analyse the values that determine newsworthiness, evaluate the virtues that sustain credibility, and apply ethical responsibility in your reporting. These outcomes directly align with the Series Learning Outcomes, ensuring that you are well prepared to apply these principles in practical news writing tasks.

Glossary of Terms

Accuracy: The quality of reporting facts correctly and without distortion.

Balance: Ensuring that coverage is not biased towards one perspective.

Clarity: Writing that is easy to read and understand, avoiding jargon and confusion.

Coherence: Logical flow of ideas in a news story, with smooth transitions between points.

Credibility: The quality that makes audiences believe the information presented.

Ethical responsibility: The duty of journalists to act honestly, respect privacy, and avoid harm.

Fairness: Giving all sides of a story equal opportunity to be heard.

Human interest: Stories that appeal to emotions by highlighting personal experiences or achievements.

Impact: The degree to which an event affects people's lives, decisions, or emotions.

Novelty: The quality of being unusual or unexpected, which makes a story attention-grabbing.

Prominence: The importance of individuals or institutions involved in a story, such as celebrities or officials.

Proximity: The closeness of an event to the audience, either geographically or emotionally.



Relevance: The connection of a story to the concerns or interests of the audience.

Structure: The organisation of a news story, often following the inverted pyramid style.

Timeliness: The quality of news being current and reported promptly.

Trustworthiness: The consistent reliability of a journalist or news organisation.

Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective questions

Which two qualities ensure that a news story is both reliable and easy to follow: clarity and accuracy, novelty and relevance, prominence and impact, or fairness and balance? (Linked to SLO 2.1)

Which news value refers to the closeness of an event to the audience: timeliness, proximity, impact, or novelty? (Linked to SLO 2.2)

Which virtue ensures that audiences believe the information presented: clarity, credibility, novelty, or timeliness? (Linked to SLO 2.3)

Short-answer questions

4. Define clarity in news writing and explain why it is important. (Linked to SLO 2.1)
5. Identify two news values and describe how they influence the selection of stories. (Linked to SLO 2.2)
6. What does ethical responsibility in journalism mean, and why is it necessary? (Linked to SLO 2.4)

Long-answer questions

7. Analyse the role of timeliness and proximity in shaping audience interest in news stories. (Linked to SLO 2.2)
8. Evaluate how fairness, balance, and credibility contribute to effective news writing, and explain how these virtues safeguard public trust. (Linked to SLO 2.3)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 2]

Objective questions

Clarity and accuracy.

Proximity.

Credibility.

Short-answer questions

4. Clarity means writing that is easy to read and understand. It is important because it ensures readers grasp the story without confusion.
5. Timeliness ensures stories are current, while impact measures how strongly events affect people's lives. Both influence which stories are selected for publication.
6. Ethical responsibility means acting honestly, respecting privacy, and avoiding harm. It is necessary to maintain trust and accountability in journalism.



Long-answer questions

7. **Basic response:** Timeliness ensures that audiences receive current information, while proximity makes stories more relevant by connecting them to local or personal concerns.

Value-added response: Beyond these basics, timeliness and proximity also influence editorial decisions, with digital platforms amplifying immediacy and localised reporting strengthening community engagement.

Basic response: Fairness gives all sides equal opportunity, balance prevents bias, and credibility ensures audiences believe the information. Together, they make news writing effective.

Value-added response: These virtues also safeguard public trust by promoting transparency, protecting democratic values, and reinforcing journalism's role as a watchdog in society.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 2]

Answers to Pilot Questions 2.1

Clarity and accuracy.

Accuracy means facts are verified and reported correctly.

The inverted pyramid style.

It ensures the story flows logically.

By avoiding jargon and using simple language.

Answers to Pilot Questions 2.2

Timeliness and proximity.

The importance of individuals or institutions in a story.

Human interest.

It captures attention by breaking routine.

How strongly an event affects people's lives.

Answers to Pilot Questions 2.3

Giving all sides equal opportunity to be heard.

Honesty, respect for privacy, or avoidance of harm.

Credibility and trustworthiness.

It prevents bias in reporting.

Through consistent accuracy, fairness, and ethical reporting.

References and Attributions [Series 2]

General references



Course content adapted from *MCM 104: Introduction to News Writing* curriculum outline.

Definitions and explanations of elements, values, and virtues of news writing based on standard journalism texts and open educational resources (OERs).

Illustrations

Figure 2.1 Clarity and accuracy in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing clarity and accuracy as two pillars supporting credible reporting.”

Box 2.1 Structure and coherence in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table outlining the inverted pyramid structure of news writing.”

Figure 2.2 Timeliness and proximity in news: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing timeliness and proximity as overlapping circles influencing newsworthiness.”

Plate 2.1 Examples of impact, prominence, and human interest: AI-generated using the prompt “Generate an illustration showing a prominent figure addressing a crowd and a journalist covering a human interest story.”

Box 2.2 Novelty and relevance in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing novelty and relevance as news values with examples.”

Box 2.3 Ethical responsibilities in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing ethical responsibilities in journalism.”

Figure 2.3 Credibility and trustworthiness in journalism: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing credibility and trustworthiness as outcomes of accuracy, fairness, and ethics in journalism.”

Suggested OER search strings for sourcing illustrations

“clarity and accuracy journalism OER diagram”

“inverted pyramid structure journalism OER table”

“timeliness proximity news values OER diagram”

“impact prominence human interest journalism OER image”

“novelty relevance news values journalism OER table”

“ethical responsibilities journalism OER table”

“credibility trustworthiness journalism OER diagram”

Referencing style

All references and attributions have been presented in a clear institutional style, consistent with academic practice. AI-generated illustrations are noted with their prompts, while OER search strings are provided for sourcing equivalent open-access materials.



Course code: MCM 104

Course title: Introduction to News Writing

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 3 Qualities and Roles of the News Writer

Series Outline

Part 1 (3.1): Essential Qualities of a News Writer

- 3.1.1 Clarity and precision
- 3.1.2 Curiosity and persistence
- 3.1.3 Impartiality and fairness

Part 2 (3.2): Ethical and Professional Responsibilities

- 3.2.1 Honesty and accountability
- 3.2.2 Respect for privacy and sensitivity
- 3.2.3 Avoidance of bias and distortion

Part 3 (3.3): Roles of the News Writer in Society

- 3.3.1 Informing and educating the public
- 3.3.2 Acting as a watchdog
- 3.3.3 Shaping public opinion responsibly

Introduction

In the previous Series, we examined the elements and values that make news writing effective and credible. Building on that foundation, this Series focuses on the qualities and roles of the news writer, highlighting the personal attributes and professional responsibilities that distinguish effective journalists. Understanding these qualities is essential, because the credibility of news often depends on the integrity and skill of the person who writes it.

The aim of this Series is to help you identify the essential qualities of a good news writer, evaluate the ethical and professional responsibilities that guide journalism, and explain the roles that news writers play in society.

We shall commence this Series by exploring the qualities that make a news writer effective, such as clarity, curiosity, and fairness. Next, we will examine the ethical and professional responsibilities that safeguard credibility, including honesty, accountability, and respect for privacy. Finally, we will conclude by discussing the roles of the news writer in society, focusing on informing the public, acting as a watchdog, and shaping opinion responsibly.



Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 3.1 describe the essential qualities of a good news writer, including clarity, curiosity, and fairness,

SLO 3.2 evaluate the ethical and professional responsibilities of news writers, such as honesty, accountability, and respect for privacy,

SLO 3.3 explain the roles of news writers in society, including informing the public, acting as watchdogs, and shaping opinion responsibly.

3.1 Essential Qualities of a News Writer

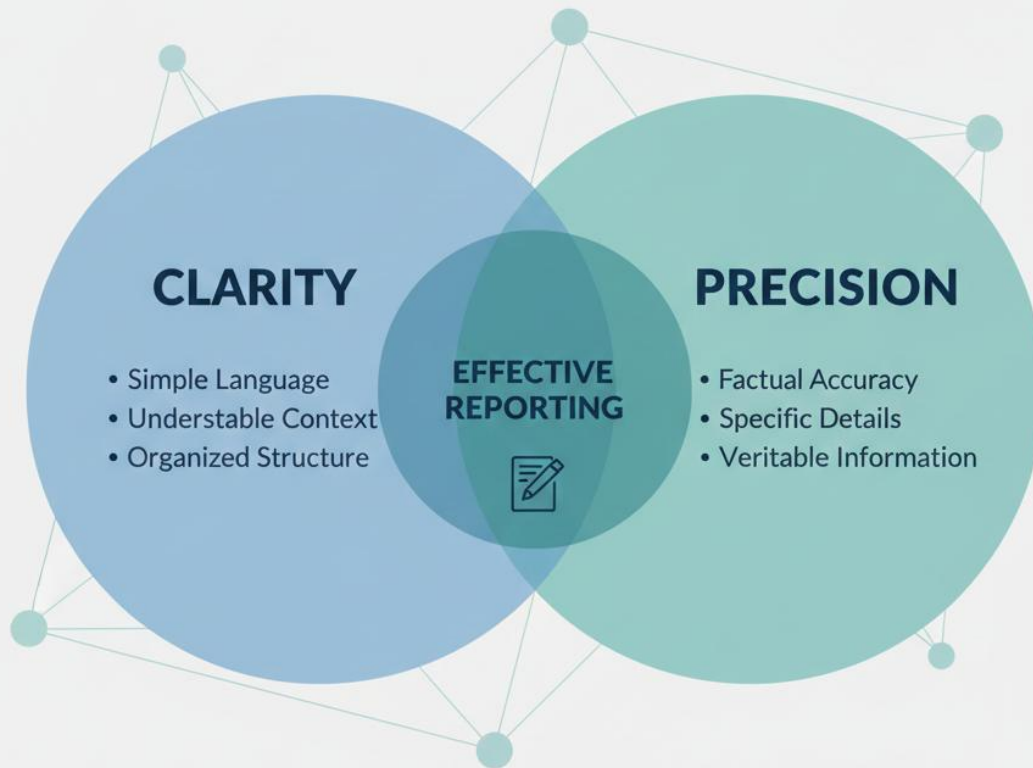
3.1.1 Clarity and precision

Clarity means presenting information in a way that is easy to read and understand, avoiding jargon or unnecessary complexity. **Precision** refers to the careful choice of words and details to ensure that the meaning is exact and unambiguous. Together, clarity and precision help readers grasp the story quickly and accurately.



EFFECTIVE JOURNALISM

Clarity & Precision in Reporting



Impactful Communication



Figure 3.1 Clarity and precision in news writing

Short description: A diagram showing clarity and precision as two intersecting circles contributing to effective reporting.

Fill in the blank: Choosing words carefully to ensure exact meaning demonstrates _____.

3.1.2 Curiosity and persistence

Curiosity drives a news writer to ask questions, seek deeper insights, and explore angles that others might overlook. **Persistence** ensures that the journalist continues to investigate until the



facts are uncovered, even when obstacles arise. These qualities are essential for uncovering hidden truths and producing thorough reporting.



Plate 3.1 Curiosity and persistence in journalism

Short description: An image showing a journalist interviewing a source and taking notes persistently.

Fill in the blank: A journalist who continues to investigate despite obstacles demonstrates _____.

3.1.3 Impartiality and fairness



Impartiality means reporting without bias, presenting facts objectively. **Fairness** ensures that all sides of a story are given equal opportunity to be heard. These qualities protect the credibility of journalism and help audiences trust the information presented.

Principle	Definition
Impartiality	The practice of reporting without bias, prejudice, or personal connection, ensuring the journalist does not take a side in a conflict.
Fairness	The commitment to giving all parties a chance to respond to allegations and presenting diverse viewpoints in a balanced, honest context.

Box 3.1 Impartiality and fairness in news writing

Short description: A single-column table listing impartiality (objective reporting) and fairness (equal opportunity for all sides).

Fill in the blank: Reporting without bias and presenting facts objectively demonstrates _____.

Pilot questions 3.1

What two qualities ensure that a news story is easy to understand and exact in meaning?

Which quality drives a journalist to ask deeper questions?

What does persistence in journalism mean?

Why is impartiality important in reporting?

How does fairness protect the credibility of journalism?

3.2 Ethical and Professional Responsibilities

3.2.1 Honesty and accountability

Honesty means presenting facts truthfully without distortion, while **accountability** refers to a journalist's responsibility to stand by their work and correct errors when they occur. These qualities ensure that journalism remains credible and trustworthy.





Figure 3.2 Honesty and accountability in journalism
Short description: A diagram showing honesty and accountability as two pillars supporting journalistic integrity.

Fill in the blank: Correcting errors when they occur demonstrates _____ in journalism.

3.2.2 Respect for privacy and sensitivity

Respect for privacy means protecting individuals from unnecessary exposure, while **sensitivity** requires careful handling of stories that involve trauma, grief, or vulnerable groups. These responsibilities ensure that journalism does not cause harm while informing the public.





Plate 3.2 Respect for privacy and sensitivity in reporting

Short description: An image showing a journalist interviewing a source respectfully, maintaining sensitivity.

Fill in the blank: Protecting individuals from unnecessary exposure demonstrates respect for _____.

3.2.3 Avoidance of bias and distortion



Bias occurs when reporting favours one side or perspective unfairly. **Distortion** means altering facts or presenting them misleadingly. Avoiding bias and distortion is essential for maintaining fairness and accuracy in journalism.

Term	Definition	Example in Reporting
Selection / Omission Bias	Choosing to include only certain facts or stories while ignoring others that might provide a different perspective.	A report on a new law that only interviews people who support it, ignoring those it negatively affects.
Placement Bias	Giving a story or a specific viewpoint prominent "front-page" positioning while burying counter-arguments at the end.	Putting a sensationalist headline on the cover but placing the debunking evidence on page 10.
Framing Bias	Using specific words or "angles" to influence how an audience perceives a story.	Describing a group as "freedom fighters" in one outlet but "insurgents" in another.
Source Bias	Relying exclusively on sources that share a specific agenda (e.g., only government officials or only corporate lobbyists).	A story about environmental policy that only quotes executives from oil companies.
Sensationalism (Distortion)	Exaggerating or over-hyping a story to provoke public excitement or fear at the expense of accuracy.	Using "clickbait" headlines like "The End is Near!" for a minor scientific adjustment.
Contextual Distortion	Taking a quote or a photo out of its original setting to change its meaning.	Printing a politician saying "I hate taxes" while omitting the next sentence: "...that hurt the middle class."
False Equivalency	Presenting two sides of an issue as equally valid when one side is backed by overwhelming evidence and the other is not.	Giving equal airtime to a climate scientist and a conspiracy theorist as if their claims have equal weight.

Box 3.2 Avoidance of bias and distortion

Short description: A single-column table listing bias (favouring one side unfairly) and distortion (altering facts or presenting them misleadingly).



Fill in the blank: Altering facts or presenting them misleadingly is known as _____.

Pilot questions 3.2

What two qualities ensure journalism remains credible and trustworthy?

What does respect for privacy mean in reporting?

Why is sensitivity important in journalism?

What is bias in reporting?

How does distortion affect credibility?

3.3 Roles of the News Writer in Society

3.3.1 Informing and educating the public

One of the primary roles of a news writer is to **inform** the public about current events and **educate** them on issues that affect society. This role ensures that citizens have the knowledge they need to make decisions and participate in civic life.

Fill in the blank: Providing citizens with knowledge about current events demonstrates the role of _____.

3.3.2 Acting as a watchdog

The **watchdog role** means holding institutions, governments, and individuals accountable by exposing wrongdoing or negligence. This role strengthens democracy and ensures transparency in governance.





Figure 3.3 The watchdog role of journalism
Short description: A diagram showing journalism as a watchdog monitoring government, institutions, and society.

Fill in the blank: Exposing wrongdoing or negligence demonstrates the _____ role of journalism.

3.3.3 Shaping public opinion responsibly



News writers also influence how people think about issues by framing stories and highlighting certain perspectives. **Responsible shaping of opinion** means presenting facts fairly and avoiding manipulation, so that audiences can form informed views.

RESPONSIBLE PRACTICES FOR SHAPING PUBLIC OPINION

PRACTICE	SHORT DEFINITION
1. FACT-BASED REPORTING	Adhering strictly to verified facts, avoiding speculation.
2. TRANSPARENCY	Disclosing sources, conflicts of interest, and methodologies.
4. DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES	Presenting a range of viewpoints on complex issues.
5. CONTEXTUALIZATION	Presenting a range to help viewers understand issues.
4. ETHICAL GUIDELINES	Providing background to help audiences understand the significance of events.
6. CORRECTIONS & RETRACTIONS	Following codes of conduct that prioritize accuracy, fairness and minimizing harm.
	Promptly correcting errors to maintain credibility



Box 3.3 Shaping public opinion responsibly

Short description: A single-column table listing responsible practices such as presenting facts fairly and avoiding manipulation.

Fill in the blank: Presenting facts fairly and avoiding manipulation demonstrates responsible _____ of public opinion.



Pilot questions 3.3

What is the primary role of a news writer in society?

What does the watchdog role of journalism involve?

How does journalism strengthen democracy?

Why must public opinion be shaped responsibly?

Identify one way news writers educate the public.

Series Summary

This Series has highlighted the qualities and roles that define effective news writers. We began by examining essential personal attributes such as clarity, precision, curiosity, persistence, impartiality, and fairness, which ensure that stories are both accurate and trustworthy. We then explored the ethical and professional responsibilities of journalists, including honesty, accountability, respect for privacy, sensitivity, and the avoidance of bias and distortion. Finally, we considered the broader roles of news writers in society, focusing on informing and educating the public, acting as watchdogs, and shaping public opinion responsibly.

By engaging with these topics, you should now be able to describe the qualities of a good news writer, evaluate the ethical and professional responsibilities that safeguard credibility, and explain the roles of journalists in society. These outcomes directly align with the Series Learning Outcomes, preparing you to apply these principles in your own reporting practice.

Glossary of Terms

Accountability: The responsibility of journalists to stand by their work and correct errors when necessary.

Bias: Reporting that unfairly favours one side or perspective.

Clarity: Writing that is easy to read and understand, avoiding jargon and confusion.

Credibility: The quality that makes audiences believe the information presented.

Distortion: Altering facts or presenting them misleadingly.

Fairness: Giving all sides of a story equal opportunity to be heard.

Honesty: Presenting facts truthfully without distortion.

Impartiality: Reporting facts objectively without bias.

Persistence: Continuing to investigate until the facts are uncovered, even when obstacles arise.

Precision: Choosing words and details carefully to ensure exact meaning.

Privacy: Protecting individuals from unnecessary exposure in reporting.



Sensitivity: Handling stories involving trauma, grief, or vulnerable groups with care.

Watchdog role: The responsibility of journalism to hold institutions accountable by exposing wrongdoing or negligence.

Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective questions

Which two qualities ensure that a news story is both easy to understand and exact in meaning: clarity and precision, curiosity and persistence, impartiality and fairness, or honesty and accountability? (Linked to SLO 3.1)

Which ethical responsibility requires journalists to correct errors when they occur: honesty, accountability, sensitivity, or fairness? (Linked to SLO 3.2)

Which role of the news writer involves holding institutions accountable: informing the public, watchdog role, shaping opinion, or educating society? (Linked to SLO 3.3)

Short-answer questions

4. Define impartiality in journalism and explain why it is important. (Linked to SLO 3.1)
5. Identify two ethical responsibilities of journalists and describe how they safeguard credibility. (Linked to SLO 3.2)
6. What does the watchdog role of journalism mean, and why is it vital in society? (Linked to SLO 3.3)

Long-answer questions

7. Analyse how curiosity and persistence contribute to effective reporting, giving examples of how they help uncover hidden truths. (Linked to SLO 3.1)
8. Evaluate the roles of news writers in society, focusing on informing the public, acting as watchdogs, and shaping opinion responsibly. (Linked to SLO 3.3)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 3]

Objective questions

Clarity and precision.

Accountability.

Watchdog role.

Short-answer questions

4. Impartiality means reporting facts objectively without bias. It is important because it ensures fairness and builds trust with audiences.
5. Honesty ensures facts are presented truthfully, while respect for privacy protects individuals from harm. Both safeguard credibility by maintaining integrity in reporting.
6. The watchdog role means exposing wrongdoing or negligence by institutions. It is vital because it strengthens democracy and ensures transparency.

Long-answer questions

7. **Basic response:** Curiosity drives journalists to ask deeper questions, while persistence ensures



they continue investigating despite obstacles. Together, they help uncover facts that might otherwise remain hidden.

Value-added response: Beyond these basics, curiosity and persistence also foster investigative journalism, enabling reporters to challenge powerful institutions, uncover corruption, and provide the public with information that promotes accountability.

Basic response: News writers inform and educate the public, act as watchdogs to hold institutions accountable, and shape opinion responsibly by presenting facts fairly.

Value-added response: These roles also contribute to civic engagement, strengthen democratic processes, and influence societal values. Responsible opinion-shaping ensures that journalism empowers audiences rather than manipulates them.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 3]

Answers to Pilot Questions 3.1

Clarity and precision.

Curiosity.

Continuing to investigate until facts are uncovered.

It ensures facts are reported objectively.

By giving all sides equal opportunity to be heard.

Answers to Pilot Questions 3.2

Honesty and accountability.

Protecting individuals from unnecessary exposure.

It prevents harm when reporting sensitive issues.

Favouring one side unfairly.

It undermines accuracy and trust.

Answers to Pilot Questions 3.3

Informing and educating the public.

Exposing wrongdoing or negligence.

By ensuring transparency and accountability.

To avoid manipulation and ensure informed views.

By explaining issues that affect society.

References and Attributions [Series 3]

General references



Course content adapted from *MCM 104: Introduction to News Writing* curriculum outline.

Definitions and explanations of qualities, responsibilities, and roles of news writers based on standard journalism texts and open educational resources (OERs).

Illustrations

Figure 3.1 Clarity and precision in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing clarity and precision as intersecting circles contributing to effective reporting.”

Plate 3.1 Curiosity and persistence in journalism: AI-generated using the prompt “Generate an illustration of a journalist interviewing a source and persistently taking notes.”

Box 3.1 Impartiality and fairness in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing impartiality and fairness in journalism with short definitions.”

Figure 3.2 Honesty and accountability in journalism: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing honesty and accountability as two pillars supporting journalistic integrity.”

Plate 3.2 Respect for privacy and sensitivity in reporting: AI-generated using the prompt “Generate an illustration of a journalist interviewing a source respectfully, showing sensitivity.”

Box 3.2 Avoidance of bias and distortion: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing bias and distortion in journalism with definitions.”

Figure 3.3 The watchdog role of journalism: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing journalism as a watchdog monitoring government, institutions, and society.”

Box 3.3 Shaping public opinion responsibly: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing responsible practices for shaping public opinion in journalism.”

Suggested OER search strings for sourcing illustrations

- “clarity precision journalism OER diagram”
- “curiosity persistence journalism OER image”
- “impartiality fairness journalism OER table”
- “honesty accountability journalism OER diagram”
- “privacy sensitivity journalism OER image”
- “bias distortion journalism OER table”
- “watchdog role journalism OER diagram”
- “shaping public opinion journalism OER table”

APA-style references



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Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect* (3rd ed.). Three Rivers Press.

Randall, D. (2016). *The universal journalist* (5th ed.). Pluto Press.

UNESCO. (2019). *Journalism, fake news & disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training*. UNESCO Publishing.



Course code: MCM 104

Course title: Introduction to News Writing

Course credit load: 2 Units

Series 4 Structure and Guidelines of News Stories

Series Outline

Part 1 (4.1): Understanding the Structure of News Stories

- 4.1.1 The inverted pyramid style
- 4.1.2 Alternative structures in news writing

Part 2 (4.2): Components of a News Story

- 4.2.1 Headlines and leads
- 4.2.2 Body and background information
- 4.2.3 Quotations and attribution

Part 3 (4.3): Guidelines for Effective News Writing

- 4.3.1 Accuracy and fairness
- 4.3.2 Conciseness and readability
- 4.3.3 Ethical considerations

Introduction

In the previous Series, we examined how news writers identify and develop stories for publication. Building on that foundation, this Series focuses on the **structure and guidelines of news stories**, helping you understand how stories are organised and what principles guide their presentation. A well-structured story ensures that readers grasp the most important information quickly, while clear guidelines safeguard credibility and professionalism.

The aim of this Series is to enable you to recognise the structure of news stories, identify their key components, and apply guidelines that ensure accuracy, fairness, and readability.

We shall commence this Series by exploring the structure of news stories, beginning with the inverted pyramid style and alternative approaches. Next, we will examine the components of a news story, including headlines, leads, body, background, and quotations. Finally, we will conclude by discussing the guidelines for effective news writing, focusing on accuracy, fairness, conciseness, readability, and ethical considerations.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:



SLO 4.1 describe the inverted pyramid style and explain its importance in structuring news stories,

SLO 4.2 compare alternative structures in news writing and analyse when they are most effective,

SLO 4.3 identify the key components of a news story, including headlines, leads, body, background, and quotations,

SLO 4.4 demonstrate how to write effective headlines and leads that capture attention and summarise the story,

SLO 4.5 apply techniques for integrating quotations and attribution accurately within a news story,

SLO 4.6 evaluate guidelines for accuracy and fairness in news writing,

SLO 4.7 apply principles of conciseness and readability to improve the quality of news stories,

SLO 4.8 assess ethical considerations in structuring and presenting news stories.

4.1 Understanding the Structure of News Stories

4.1.1 The inverted pyramid style

The **inverted pyramid style** is the most common structure used in news writing. It places the most important information at the beginning of the story, followed by supporting details and background information. This style ensures that readers grasp the essential facts quickly, even if they do not read the entire article. It is particularly effective for hard news stories where timeliness and clarity are crucial.



THE INVERTED PYRAMID

Journalism Story Structure

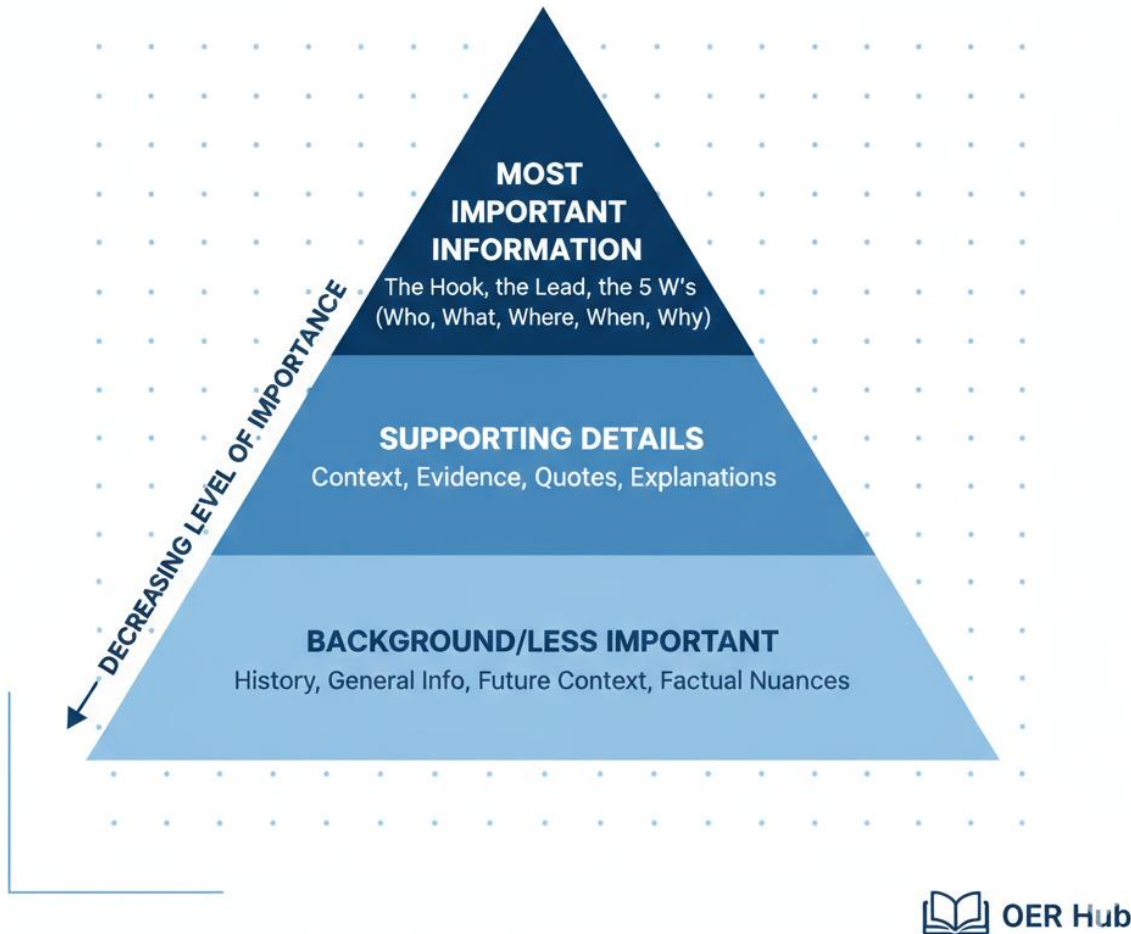


Figure 4.1 The inverted pyramid structure

Short description: A diagram showing the inverted pyramid with “most important information” at the top, “supporting details” in the middle, and “background information” at the bottom.

Fill in the blank: The inverted pyramid style places the most important information at the _____ of the story.

4.1.2 Alternative structures in news writing

While the inverted pyramid is widely used, there are **alternative structures** that suit different types of stories. For example, the **narrative style** tells the story chronologically, making it



suitable for features or human interest pieces. The **hourglass structure** combines the inverted pyramid with a chronological narrative, starting with the most important facts and then unfolding the story in sequence. Another approach is the **focus style**, which begins with a specific anecdote or detail before expanding to the broader context. These structures allow flexibility and creativity in presenting news.

Structure	Short Definition	Key Components
Narrative	Tells the news as a story from start to finish, using literary techniques like character and plot development.	Chronological flow, descriptive scenes, and a clear beginning, middle, and end.
Hourglass	A hybrid format that starts with a summary of the most important facts before shifting into a chronological account.	The Top (summary), The Turn (transition), and The Narrative (chronological details).
Focus (Kabob)	Also known as the "Wall Street Journal formula," it uses an individual's experience to illustrate a broader issue.	Anecdotal Lead , Nut Graf (the "why"), general supporting facts, and a Circle-back to the original person.

Box 4.1 Alternative structures in news writing

Short description: A single-column table listing narrative, hourglass, and focus styles with short explanations.

Fill in the blank: A structure that begins with a specific anecdote before expanding to the broader context is called the _____ style.

Pilot questions 4.1

What is the most common structure used in news writing?

Why is the inverted pyramid style effective for hard news stories?

Which structure combines the inverted pyramid with a chronological narrative?

What type of story is best suited for the narrative style?

Which alternative structure begins with an anecdote before expanding to the broader context?

4.2 Components of a News Story

4.2.1 Headlines and leads



Headlines are short, attention-grabbing titles that summarise the essence of the story. They should be clear, concise, and engaging. **Leads** (or intros) are the opening sentences or paragraphs that provide the most important information, often answering the “who, what, when, where, why, and how.” Together, headlines and leads set the tone and guide the reader into the story.



Figure 4.2 Headlines and leads in news writing

Short description: A diagram showing the relationship between headlines (summary) and leads (opening details).

Fill in the blank: The opening sentences that provide the most important information in a news story are called _____.



4.2.2 Body and background information

The **body** of a news story expands on the lead, providing supporting details, explanations, and evidence. **Background information** adds context, helping readers understand the significance of the event. Together, they ensure that the story is complete and meaningful.

NEWS WRITING STRUCTURE

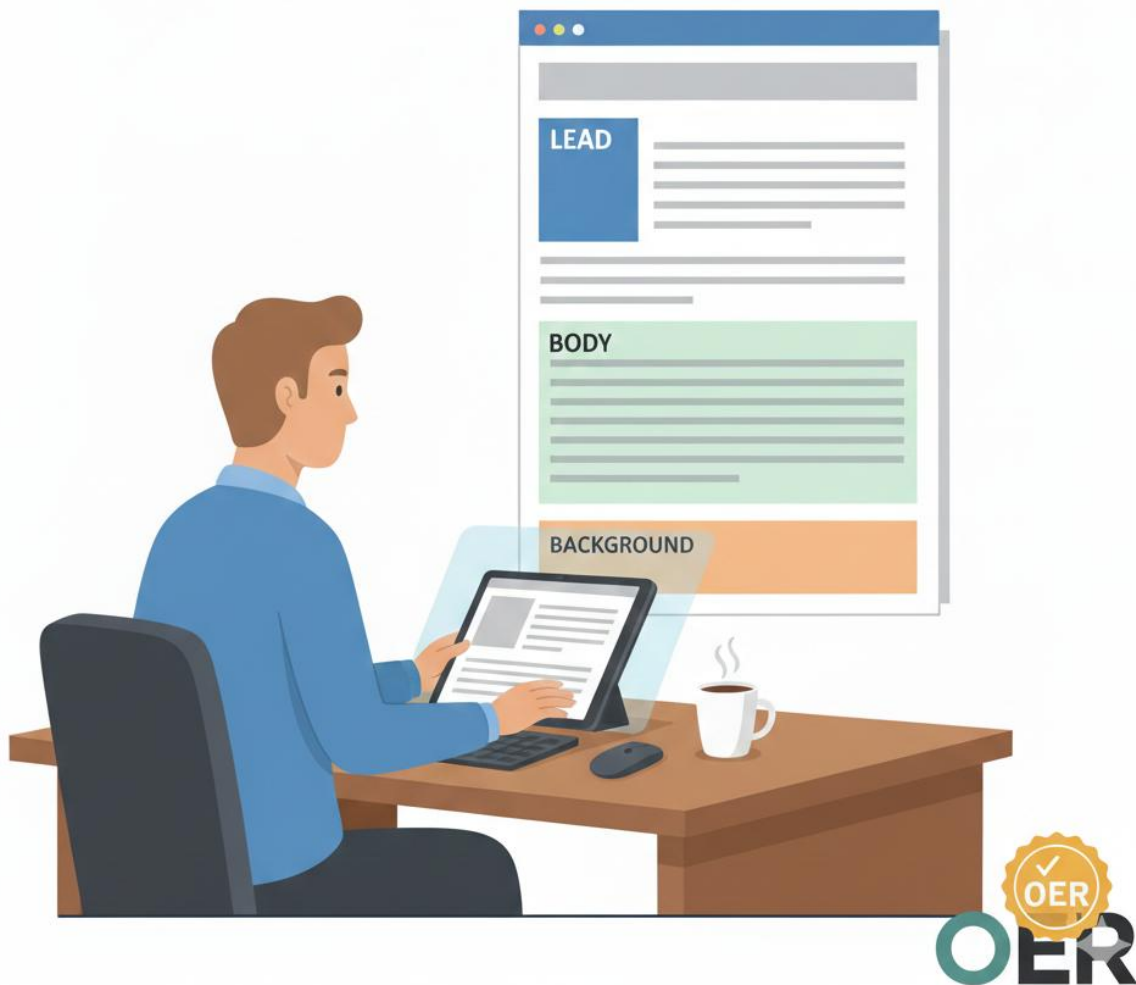


Plate 4.1 Body and background in news writing

Short description: An image showing a journalist drafting a story with highlighted lead, body, and background sections.



Fill in the blank: Context that helps readers understand the significance of an event is called _____ information.

4.2.3 Quotations and attribution

Quotations bring authenticity and human voice to a story, while **attribution** ensures that sources are credited properly. Accurate attribution builds credibility and allows readers to evaluate the reliability of information.

Concept	Definition	Purpose
Direct Quotation	The exact words spoken or written by a source, placed inside quotation marks.	To provide "flavor," emotion, and undeniable evidence of what a source said.
Indirect Quotation (Paraphrase)	A summary of a source's words written in the reporter's own voice without quotation marks.	To condense long-winded explanations or clarify technical jargon while retaining the original meaning.
Partial Quotation	A combination of a paraphrase and a few specific, impactful words from the source inside quotation marks.	To highlight a unique or controversial phrase without using a long, clunky sentence.
Attribution	The act of identifying the source of a specific piece of information (e.g., "...said the Police Chief").	To establish transparency and allow the reader to judge the credibility of the information.
Speech Tag	The specific verb used for attribution, such as "said," "stated," or "added."	To indicate who is speaking. In hard news, "said" is the gold standard because it is neutral.

Box 4.2 Quotations and attribution in news writing

Short description: A single-column table listing quotations (direct words from sources) and attribution (crediting sources).

Fill in the blank: Crediting sources properly in a news story is known as _____.

Pilot questions 4.2

What is the purpose of a headline?



What does a lead usually answer?

What is the role of background information in a story?

Why are quotations important in news writing?

What does attribution achieve in journalism?

4.3 Guidelines for Effective News Writing

4.3.1 Accuracy and fairness

Accuracy means reporting facts correctly, while **fairness** ensures that all sides of a story are represented. These guidelines protect credibility and maintain trust between journalists and audiences.

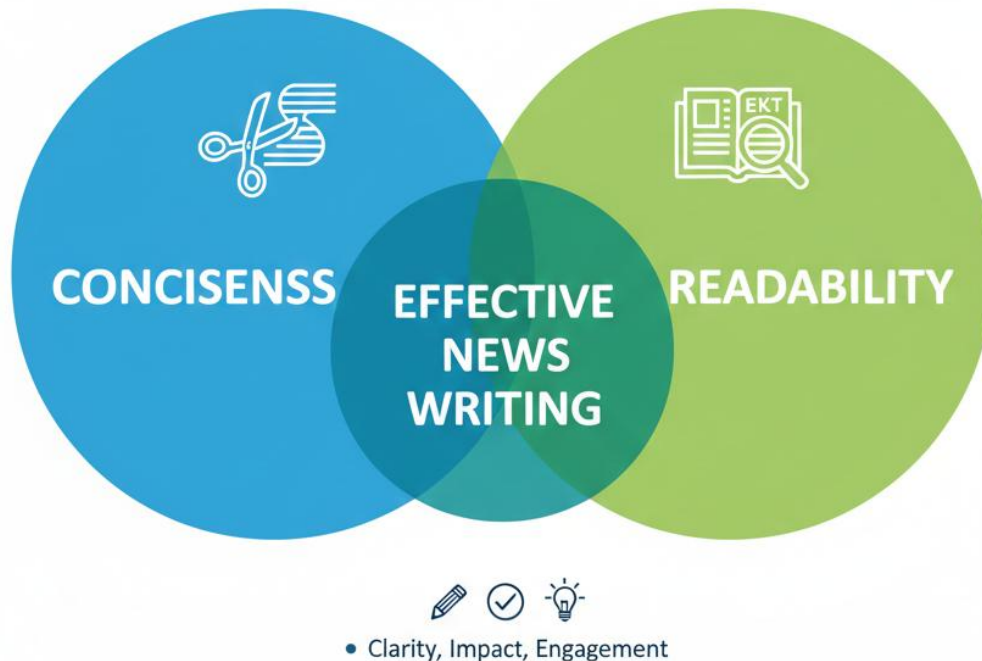
Fill in the blank: Reporting facts correctly demonstrates _____ in journalism.

4.3.2 Conciseness and readability

Conciseness refers to expressing ideas clearly without unnecessary words. **Readability** ensures that the story is easy to follow, using simple language and logical flow. These qualities make news accessible to a wide audience.



CONCISENESS & READABILITY: The Keys to Effective News Writing



OER Principles for Modern Journalism



Figure 4.3 Conciseness and readability in news writing
Short description: A diagram showing conciseness (brevity) and readability (clarity) as two overlapping qualities of effective writing.

Fill in the blank: Expressing ideas clearly without unnecessary words demonstrates _____.

4.3.3 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations include respecting privacy, avoiding harm, and ensuring honesty in reporting. They guide journalists to act responsibly and maintain public trust.



Ethical Principle	Definition	Practical Application
Seek Truth and Report It	The obligation to be accurate, fair, and honest in gathering, reporting, and interpreting information.	Fact-checking sources, providing context, and never distilling or distorting the truth.
Minimize Harm	The practice of treating sources, subjects, and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.	Showing sensitivity to victims of tragedy and protecting the privacy of non-public figures.
Act Independently	The requirement to avoid conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived, and remain free of outside influences.	Refusing gifts, favors, or special treatment from sources or political groups.
Be Accountable and Transparent	The responsibility to explain ethical choices to the audience and correct errors promptly and prominently.	Publishing a formal correction when a mistake is made and disclosing "sponsored content."
Avoid Conflict of Interest	Refraining from reporting on stories where the journalist has a personal, financial, or political stake.	A sports reporter not betting on the games they cover or a political writer not donating to a campaign.

Box 4.3 Ethical considerations in news writing

Short description: A single-column table listing ethical considerations such as respect for privacy, avoidance of harm, and honesty.

Fill in the blank: Respecting privacy and avoiding harm are examples of _____ in journalism.

Pilot questions 4.3

What two guidelines protect credibility in journalism?

What does conciseness in news writing mean?

Why is readability important for audiences?

Identify one ethical consideration in journalism.

How do ethical considerations maintain public trust?



Series Summary

This Series has focused on the **structure and guidelines of news stories**, providing you with practical tools to organise and present information effectively. We began by exploring the inverted pyramid style and alternative structures, showing how different formats suit different types of stories. We then examined the components of a news story, including headlines, leads, body, background, quotations, and attribution, which together form the backbone of reporting. Finally, we discussed guidelines for effective news writing, emphasising accuracy, fairness, conciseness, readability, and ethical considerations.

By engaging with these topics, you should now be able to describe and compare structures of news stories, identify and apply their key components, and follow professional guidelines that safeguard credibility and readability. These outcomes align with the Series Learning Outcomes, ensuring you are prepared to structure and present news stories responsibly and effectively.

Glossary of Terms

Accuracy: Reporting facts correctly without distortion.

Attribution: Crediting sources properly in a news story.

Background information: Context that helps readers understand the significance of an event.

Body: The main section of a news story that expands on the lead with supporting details.

Conciseness: Expressing ideas clearly without unnecessary words.

Ethical considerations: Principles such as respect for privacy, avoidance of harm, and honesty in reporting.

Fairness: Representing all sides of a story equally.

Headline: A short, attention-grabbing title that summarises the essence of the story.

Inverted pyramid style: A structure that places the most important information at the beginning, followed by supporting details and background.

Lead: The opening sentences or paragraphs that provide the most important information.

Narrative style: A structure that tells a story chronologically, often used in features or human interest pieces.

Quotations: Direct words from sources used to add authenticity and human voice to a story.

Readability: The quality of writing that makes a story easy to follow and understand.

Watchdog role: The responsibility of journalism to hold institutions accountable by exposing wrongdoing.

Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective questions



Which structure places the most important information at the beginning of a news story: inverted pyramid, narrative, hourglass, or focus? (Linked to SLO 4.1)

Which alternative structure combines the inverted pyramid with a chronological narrative: narrative, hourglass, focus, or pyramid? (Linked to SLO 4.1)

Which component of a news story provides context to help readers understand the significance of an event: headline, lead, body, or background information? (Linked to SLO 4.2)

Which guideline ensures that all sides of a story are represented: accuracy, fairness, conciseness, or readability? (Linked to SLO 4.3)

Which component of a news story brings authenticity and human voice: headline, lead, quotation, or background? (Linked to SLO 4.2)

Short-answer questions

6. Define a lead in news writing and explain its purpose. (Linked to SLO 4.2)
7. Identify two alternative structures in news writing and describe when they are most effective. (Linked to SLO 4.1)
8. What does attribution mean in journalism, and why is it important? (Linked to SLO 4.2)
9. Explain why conciseness and readability are important for audiences. (Linked to SLO 4.3)
10. What ethical considerations should guide journalists when structuring news stories? (Linked to SLO 4.3)

Long-answer questions

11. Analyse how headlines and leads work together to capture attention and summarise the essence of a news story. (Linked to SLO 4.2)
12. Evaluate the guidelines for effective news writing, focusing on accuracy, fairness, conciseness, readability, and ethical considerations. (Linked to SLO 4.3)
13. Compare the inverted pyramid style with the narrative style, highlighting their strengths and limitations. (Linked to SLO 4.1)
14. Discuss the role of quotations and attribution in building credibility and trust in journalism. (Linked to SLO 4.2)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 4]

Objective questions

Inverted pyramid.

Hourglass.

Background information.

Fairness.

Quotation.

Short-answer questions

6. A lead is the opening sentence or paragraph of a news story. Its purpose is to provide the most



important information and set the tone for the rest of the article.

7. The narrative style is effective for features or human interest stories, while the hourglass style is useful for combining hard news with chronological storytelling.

8. Attribution means crediting sources properly. It is important because it builds credibility and allows readers to evaluate the reliability of information.

9. Conciseness ensures ideas are expressed clearly without unnecessary words, while readability makes stories easy to follow. Together, they make news accessible to a wide audience.

10. Ethical considerations include respecting privacy, avoiding harm, and ensuring honesty in reporting. These principles safeguard public trust.

Long-answer questions

11. **Basic response:** Headlines summarise the story in a few words, while leads provide the essential details. Together, they capture attention and guide readers into the article.

Value-added response: Effective headlines and leads also shape audience perception, influence engagement, and determine whether readers continue with the story. They are critical for both print and digital journalism.

Basic response: Accuracy ensures facts are correct, fairness represents all sides, conciseness avoids unnecessary words, readability makes stories clear, and ethics guide responsible reporting.

Value-added response: These guidelines collectively safeguard credibility, strengthen democracy, and ensure journalism serves the public interest responsibly.

Basic response: The inverted pyramid style presents the most important information first, while the narrative style tells the story chronologically.

Value-added response: The inverted pyramid is strong for breaking news, but can feel abrupt. The narrative style engages readers emotionally, but risks burying key facts. Choosing between them depends on the story's purpose.

Basic response: Quotations add authenticity, while attribution credits sources. Together, they build credibility.

Value-added response: Beyond this, quotations humanise stories, while attribution ensures transparency. They allow audiences to evaluate reliability and protect journalists from accusations of bias or fabrication.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 4]

Answers to Pilot Questions 4.1

The inverted pyramid style.

It ensures readers grasp essential facts quickly.

The hourglass structure.

Features or human interest stories.

The focus style.

Answers to Pilot Questions 4.2



To summarise the essence of the story and grab attention.

Who, what, when, where, why, and how.

It provides context and significance.

They add authenticity and human voice.

It builds credibility by crediting sources.

Answers to Pilot Questions 4.3

Accuracy and fairness.

Expressing ideas clearly without unnecessary words.

It makes stories easy to follow and accessible.

Respect for privacy, avoidance of harm, honesty.

By guiding journalists to act responsibly and maintain trust.

References and Attributions [Series 4]

General references

Course content adapted from *MCM 104: Introduction to News Writing* curriculum outline.

Definitions and explanations of structures, components, and guidelines of news stories based on standard journalism texts and open educational resources (OERs).

Illustrations

Figure 4.1 The inverted pyramid structure: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram of the inverted pyramid structure in journalism with three levels: most important information, supporting details, background.”

Box 4.1 Alternative structures in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing narrative, hourglass, and focus structures in journalism with short definitions.”

Figure 4.2 Headlines and leads in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing headlines as a summary and leads as opening details in news writing.”

Plate 4.1 Body and background in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Generate an illustration of a journalist drafting a story with lead, body, and background sections highlighted.”

Box 4.2 Quotations and attribution in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing quotations and attribution in journalism with definitions.”

Figure 4.3 Conciseness and readability in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing conciseness and readability as overlapping qualities of effective news writing.”

Box 4.3 Ethical considerations in news writing: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing ethical considerations in journalism with short definitions.”



Suggested OER search strings for sourcing illustrations

“inverted pyramid journalism OER diagram”

“alternative structures news writing OER table”

“headlines leads journalism OER diagram”

“body background news writing OER image”

“quotations attribution journalism OER table”

“conciseness readability journalism OER diagram”

“ethical considerations journalism OER table”

APA-style references

Harcup, T. (2021). *Journalism: Principles and practice* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2014). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect* (3rd ed.). Three Rivers Press.

Randall, D. (2016). *The universal journalist* (5th ed.). Pluto Press.

UNESCO. (2019). *Journalism, fake news & disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training*. UNESCO Publishing.



Course code: MCM 104

Course title: Introduction to News Writing

Course credit load: 2 Units

List of Series:

Series 1: Foundations of News and Reporting

Series 2: Elements and Values of News Writing

Series 3: Qualities and Roles of the News Writer

Series 4: Structure and Guidelines of News Stories

Series 5: Techniques of News Gathering and Reporting

Series 5 Techniques of News Gathering and Reporting

Series Outline

Part 1 (5.1): Sources of News

5.1.1 Primary sources

5.1.2 Secondary sources

5.1.3 Evaluating credibility of sources

Part 2 (5.2): Techniques of News Gathering

5.2.1 Observation and fieldwork

5.2.2 Interviewing techniques

5.2.3 Using documents and records

Part 3 (5.3): Techniques of News Reporting

5.3.1 Writing clear and factual reports

5.3.2 Balancing speed and accuracy

5.3.3 Ethical considerations in reporting

Introduction

In the previous Series, we examined the structure and guidelines of news stories, focusing on how journalists organise and present information. Building on that foundation, this Series explores the **techniques of news gathering and reporting**, which are the practical skills that enable journalists to collect information and present it effectively.

The aim of this Series is to help you identify reliable sources of news, apply techniques for gathering information, and develop reporting skills that balance speed, accuracy, and ethics.



We shall commence this Series by exploring sources of news, distinguishing between primary and secondary sources, and evaluating their credibility. Next, we will examine techniques of news gathering, including observation, interviewing, and the use of documents. Finally, we will conclude by discussing techniques of news reporting, focusing on clarity, accuracy, speed, and ethical considerations.

Series Learning Outcomes

Upon completing this Series, you should be able to:

SLO 5.1 identify and distinguish between primary and secondary sources of news,

SLO 5.2 evaluate the credibility of different sources,

SLO 5.3 apply techniques of observation and fieldwork in gathering news,

SLO 5.4 demonstrate effective interviewing techniques for collecting information,

SLO 5.5 use documents and records as reliable sources of news,

SLO 5.6 write clear and factual reports based on gathered information,

SLO 5.7 balance speed and accuracy in reporting,

SLO 5.8 assess ethical considerations in news gathering and reporting.

5.1 Sources of News

5.1.1 Primary sources

Primary sources are original, firsthand accounts of events. They include eyewitnesses, official documents, speeches, press releases, and direct interviews. These sources are highly valuable because they provide direct evidence and unfiltered information.



PRIMARY SOURCES OF NEWS

Examples for Journalism

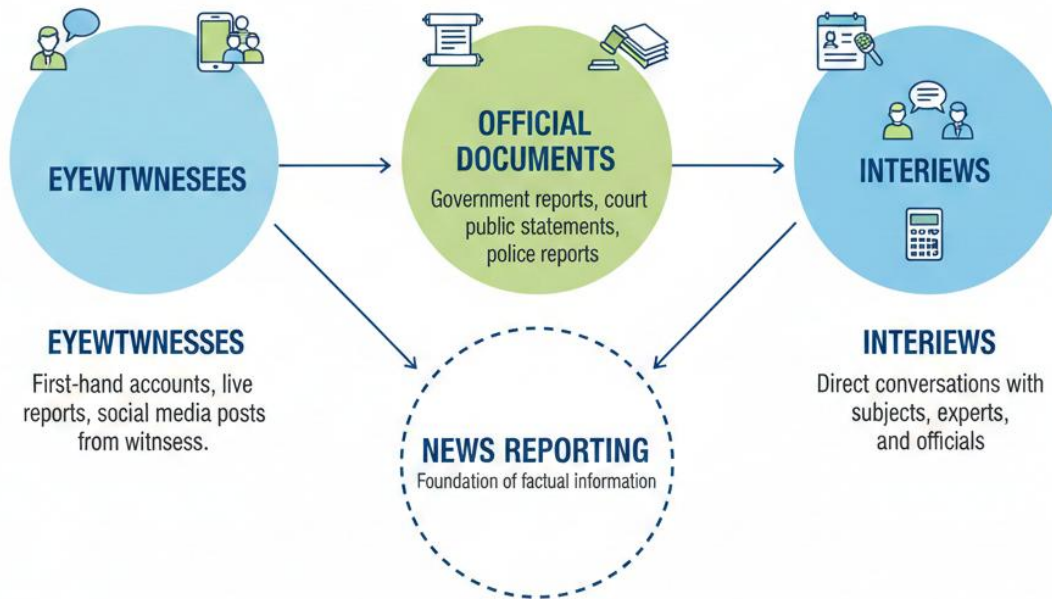


Figure 5.1 Primary sources of news

Short description: A diagram showing examples of primary sources such as eyewitnesses, official documents, and interviews.

Fill in the blank: Eyewitness accounts and official documents are examples of _____ sources.

5.1.2 Secondary sources

Secondary sources interpret, analyse, or report on information originally provided by primary sources. Examples include textbooks, encyclopedias, news summaries, and commentary articles.



While useful for context, they may introduce bias or interpretation, so journalists must use them carefully.

Source Type	Short Definition	Typical Example
Op-Eds / Editorials	Opinion-based pieces where the author analyzes a current event or policy to persuade the reader.	A columnist arguing for or against a new climate change bill.
Feature Articles	In-depth stories that synthesize multiple interviews, reports, and expert opinions to explain a complex issue.	A "long-read" article about the 50-year legacy of a historical protest movement.
News Analysis	A report that goes beyond the "who, what, when, where" to explain the "why" and the potential consequences of a news event.	A political analyst's piece explaining how recent polling data might affect an upcoming election.
Documentaries	Non-fiction films that use archival footage and expert interviews to provide a broad perspective on a topic.	A 2024 film that uses historical records to explain the causes of the 2008 financial crisis.
Reviews	Evaluative pieces that critique works of art, literature, or products, providing an interpretation for the audience.	A movie review in a newspaper or a critique of a newly published history book.
Biographies	Accounts of a person's life written by another individual, usually synthesizing letters, diaries, and public records.	A biography of a historical figure written 20 years after their death.
Scholarly Journals	Peer-reviewed articles that analyze original research or interpret existing data within a specific field.	An academic article analyzing the media's framing of a specific war.

Box 5.1 Secondary sources of news

Short description: A single-column table listing examples of secondary sources such as textbooks, encyclopedias, and commentary articles.



Fill in the blank: Textbooks and encyclopedias are examples of _____ sources.

5.1.3 Evaluating credibility of sources

Not all sources are reliable. Journalists must evaluate credibility by checking accuracy, authority, timeliness, and objectivity. A credible source provides verifiable facts, comes from a trustworthy authority, is up-to-date, and avoids bias.

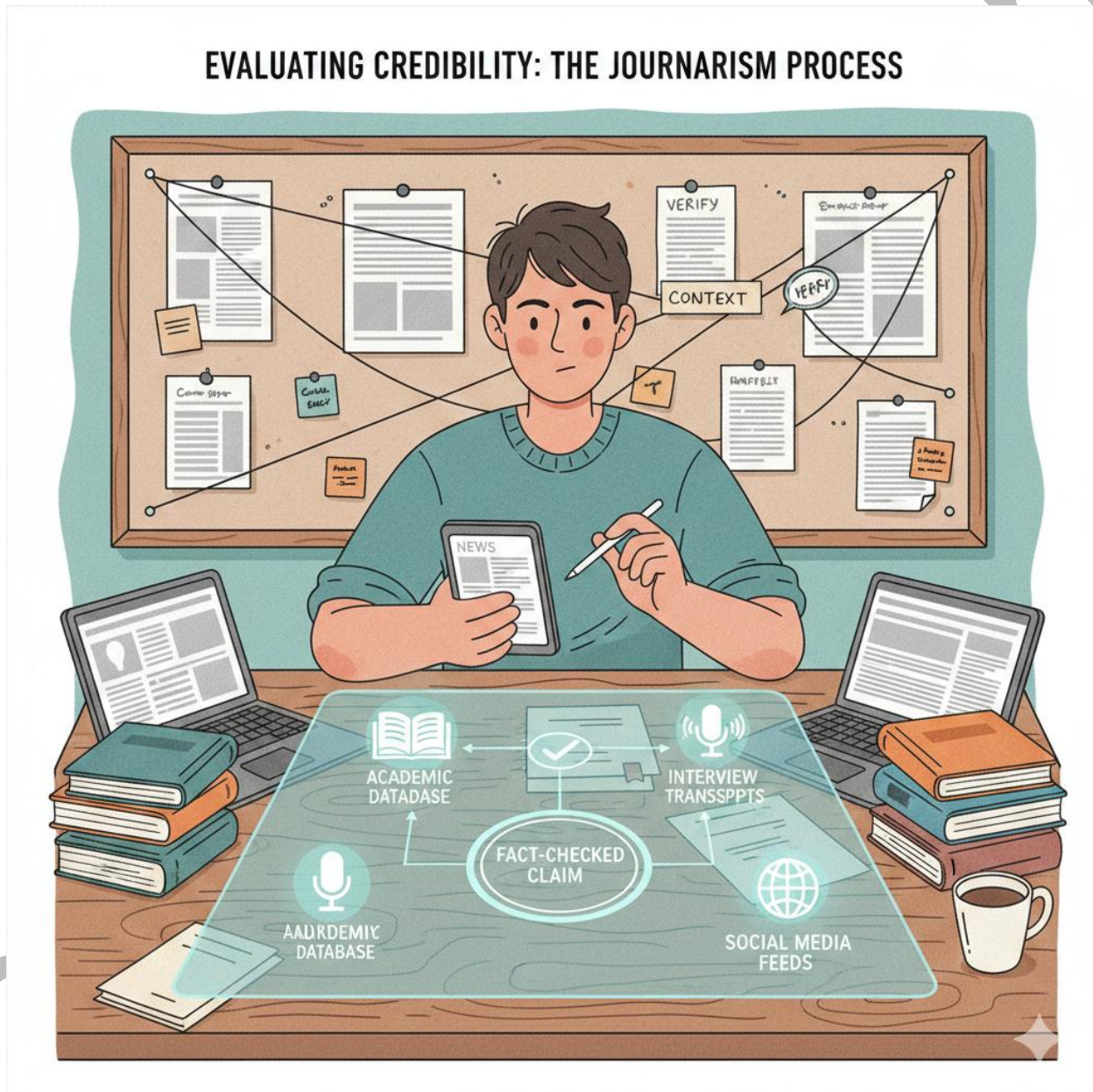


Plate 5.1 Evaluating credibility of sources

Short description: An image showing a journalist cross-checking information from multiple sources for credibility.



Fill in the blank: A credible source provides verifiable facts and avoids _____.

Pilot questions 5.1

What are primary sources in journalism?

Give two examples of secondary sources.

Why are primary sources considered highly valuable?

What is one risk of relying on secondary sources?

List two criteria for evaluating the credibility of a source.

5.1 Sources of News

5.1.1 Primary sources

Primary sources are original, firsthand accounts of events. They include eyewitnesses, official documents, speeches, press releases, and direct interviews. These sources are highly valuable because they provide direct evidence and unfiltered information.



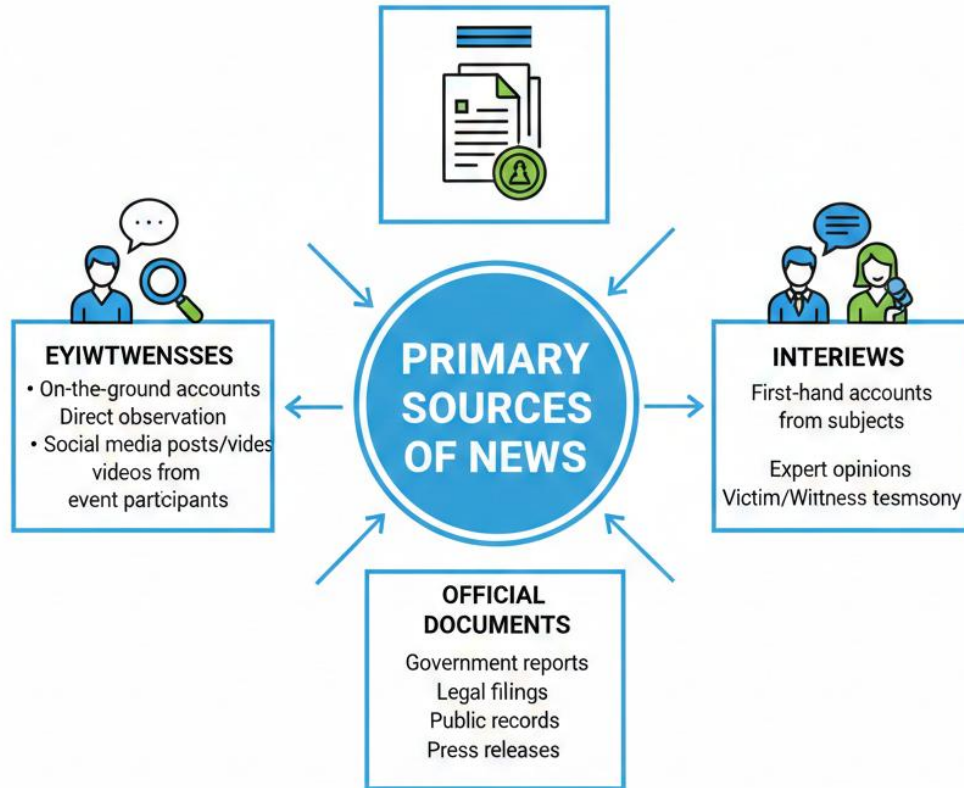


Figure 5.1 Primary sources of news

Short description: A diagram showing examples of primary sources such as eyewitnesses, official documents, and interviews.

Fill in the blank: Eyewitness accounts and official documents are examples of _____ sources.

5.1.2 Secondary sources

Secondary sources interpret, analyse, or report on information originally provided by primary sources. Examples include textbooks, encyclopedias, news summaries, and commentary articles.



While useful for context, they may introduce bias or interpretation, so journalists must use them carefully.

Source Type	Short Definition
Editorials / Op-Eds	Opinion-based articles where the author or an editorial board interprets current events and advocates for a specific viewpoint or policy.
Analysis Pieces	Articles written by subject matter experts or veteran journalists that explain the "why" and "how" behind a news event rather than just reporting the facts.
Documentaries	Non-fiction films or series that synthesize interviews, archival footage, and research to tell a comprehensive story about a specific topic or era.
Biographies	Detailed accounts of a person's life written by someone else, usually based on primary documents like letters, diaries, and interviews.
Review Articles	Critiques of books, films, or art that evaluate the quality and cultural impact of the work based on the reviewer's professional judgment.
News Aggregators	Platforms (like Google News or Yahoo News) that collect and summarize headlines and reports from various primary news outlets into one feed.
History Books / Textbooks	Materials written after the fact that use primary records to provide a structured, educational overview of historical events or academic subjects.
Scholarly Journals	Peer-reviewed publications where researchers analyze data and previous studies to draw new conclusions or identify trends.

Box 5.1 Secondary sources of news

Short description: A single-column table listing examples of secondary sources such as textbooks, encyclopedias, and commentary articles.

Fill in the blank: Textbooks and encyclopedias are examples of _____ sources.



5.1.3 Evaluating credibility of sources

Not all sources are reliable. Journalists must evaluate credibility by checking accuracy, authority, timeliness, and objectivity. A credible source provides verifiable facts, comes from a trustworthy authority, is up-to-date, and avoids bias.

EVALUATING NEWS CREDIBILITY



CROSS-REFERENCING MULTIPLE SOURCES



Plate 5.1 Evaluating credibility of sources

Short description: An image showing a journalist cross-checking information from multiple sources for credibility.

Fill in the blank: A credible source provides verifiable facts and avoids _____.



Pilot questions 5.1

What are primary sources in journalism?

Give two examples of secondary sources.

Why are primary sources considered highly valuable?

What is one risk of relying on secondary sources?

List two criteria for evaluating the credibility of a source.

5.2 Techniques of News Gathering

5.2.1 Observation and fieldwork

Observation involves being physically present at events to witness and record what happens. Fieldwork requires journalists to immerse themselves in the environment, noting details such as setting, behaviour, and atmosphere. These techniques provide vivid, firsthand accounts that strengthen credibility.



NEWS GATHERING: PRIMARY SOURCES

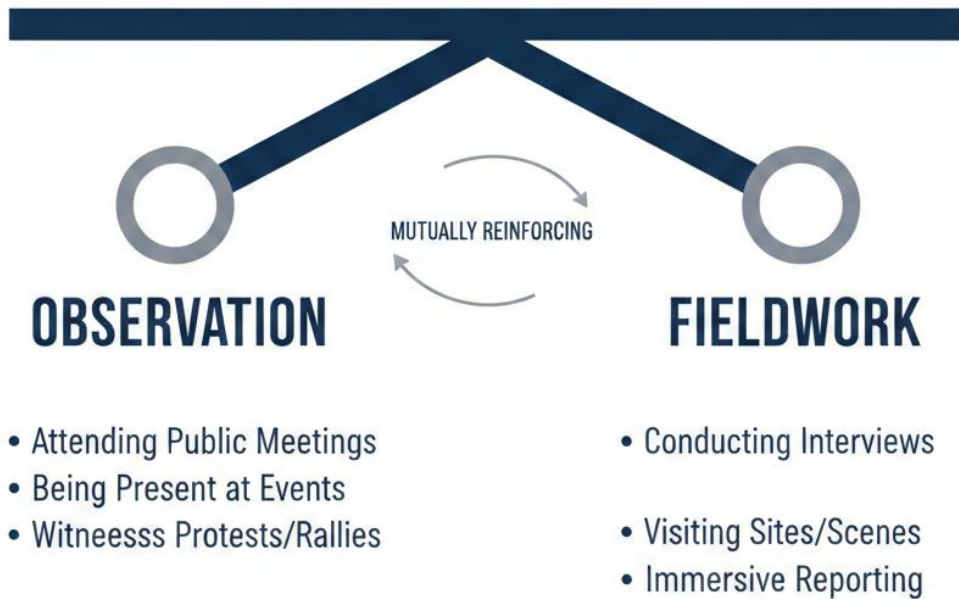


Figure 5.2 Observation and fieldwork in journalism

Short description: A diagram showing observation (watching events) and fieldwork (immersing in environment) as two branches of news gathering.

Fill in the blank: Being physically present at events to witness and record what happens is called _____.

5.2.2 Interviewing techniques



Interviews are a primary method of gathering information. Effective interviewing requires preparation, clear questioning, active listening, and accurate note-taking. Journalists must also build rapport with sources to encourage openness.

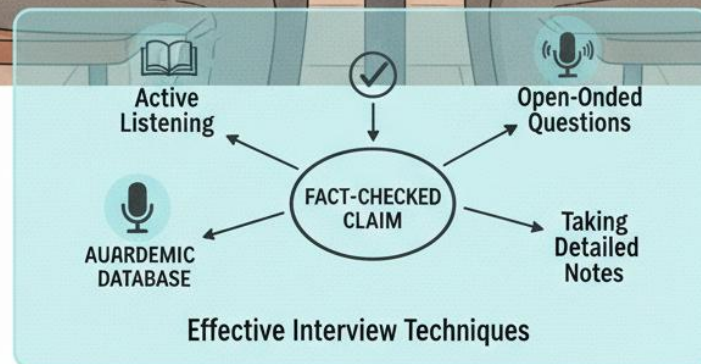


Plate 5.2 Interviewing techniques in journalism

Short description: An image showing a journalist interviewing a source with a recorder and notebook.

Fill in the blank: Asking clear questions and listening actively are part of effective _____ techniques.



5.2.3 Using documents and records

Documents such as government reports, court records, and statistical data provide factual evidence. Journalists must verify authenticity and interpret information accurately. Records complement interviews and observation by adding depth and authority.

DOCUMENTS & RECORDS IN JOURNALISM		
CATEGORY	EXAMPLES	EXAMPLES
GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC RECORDS	• Official Reports • Meeting Minutes • Public Budgets • Property Deeds	• Court Filings • Wills & Trusts • Police Reports • Lawsuits & Verdicts
LEGAL DOCUMENTS	• Voter Registration • Census Data	• Contracts • Contracts
BUSINESS & FINANCE	• Annual Reports • Tax Filings • SEC Filings • Bank Statements	• Press Releases • Audio/Video Recordings
COMMUNICATION & MEDIA	• Social Media Posts	• Interview Transcripts
RESEARCH & DATA	• Scientific Studies • Database Extracts	

Box 5.2 Using documents and records

Short description: A single-column table listing examples of documents (government reports, court records, statistical data).

Fill in the blank: Government reports and court records are examples of _____ used in journalism.



Pilot questions 5.2

What does observation in journalism involve?

Why is fieldwork important for reporting?

List two qualities of effective interviewing.

Give two examples of documents used in journalism.

Why must journalists verify the authenticity of records?

5.3 Techniques of News Reporting

5.3.1 Writing clear and factual reports

Journalists must write reports that are clear, concise, and factual. This involves avoiding jargon, presenting verified information, and structuring stories logically. Clarity ensures accessibility, while factual accuracy builds trust.

Fill in the blank: Presenting verified information in a logical structure ensures reports are _____ and factual.

5.3.2 Balancing speed and accuracy

News reporting often requires speed, but accuracy must never be sacrificed. Journalists should verify facts before publishing, even under deadline pressure. Balancing speed and accuracy ensures timely yet trustworthy reporting.



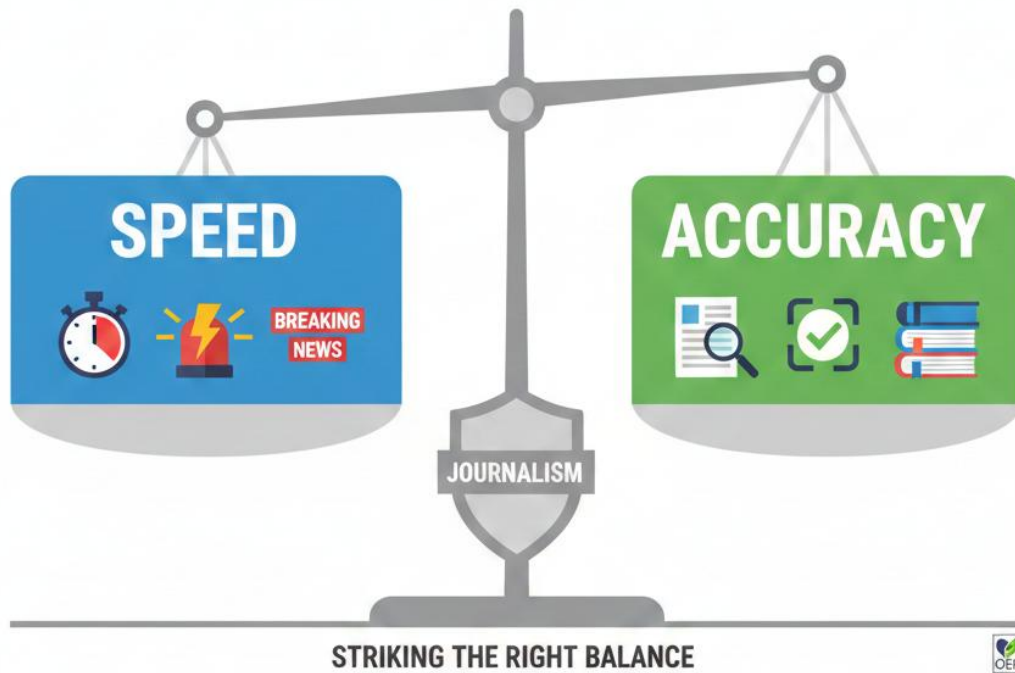


Figure 5.3 Balancing speed and accuracy

Short description: A diagram showing speed and accuracy as two scales balanced in journalism.

Fill in the blank: Journalists must balance speed with _____ when reporting news.

5.3.3 Ethical considerations in reporting

Ethical reporting requires honesty, fairness, respect for privacy, and avoidance of harm. Journalists must consider the impact of their stories on individuals and society. Ethics safeguard credibility and public trust.



Ethical Principle	Definition & Application	Goal
Accuracy & Fact-Checking	Verifying information from multiple sources before publication. It includes correcting errors quickly and prominently.	To provide the public with a reliable record of the truth.
Independence	Avoiding conflicts of interest, such as accepting gifts or reporting on a company where the journalist has a financial stake.	To ensure the report is not influenced by outside pressures or personal gain.
Minimizing Harm	Balancing the public's need for information against the potential harm to individuals (e.g., victims of crime or private citizens).	To treat sources, subjects, and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect.
Accountability	Being transparent about editorial decisions and encouraging public dialogue and critique of the news organization's work.	To maintain professional integrity and admit when mistakes occur.
Impartiality & Fairness	Presenting various sides of a story without personal bias. This involves giving subjects a fair chance to respond to allegations.	To provide a balanced perspective that allows the audience to make their own decisions.
Source Protection	Maintaining the confidentiality of anonymous sources when they are at risk, while still providing as much context as possible.	To protect whistleblowers and ensure information of high public interest can surface.
Transparency	Disclosing how the story was gathered and clarifying when a piece is news versus opinion or sponsored content.	To help the audience distinguish between objective reporting and advocacy.

Box 5.3 Ethical considerations in reporting

Short description: A single-column table listing honesty, fairness, respect for privacy, and avoidance of harm.



Fill in the blank: Respect for privacy and avoidance of harm are examples of _____ in reporting.

Pilot questions 5.3

What qualities make a report clear and factual?

Why is balancing speed and accuracy important in journalism?

What must journalists do before publishing under deadline pressure?

List two ethical considerations in reporting.

How do ethical considerations safeguard public trust?

Series 5 Summary

This Series has focused on the **techniques of news gathering and reporting**, equipping you with practical skills to collect and present information responsibly. We began by examining **sources of news**, distinguishing between primary and secondary sources, and learning how to evaluate their credibility. Next, we explored **techniques of news gathering**, including observation, fieldwork, interviewing, and the use of documents and records. Finally, we discussed **techniques of news reporting**, highlighting the importance of writing clear and factual reports, balancing speed with accuracy, and adhering to ethical considerations.

By engaging with these topics, you should now be able to identify reliable sources, apply effective gathering techniques, and report news in a way that is accurate, timely, and ethical. These outcomes align with the Series Learning Outcomes, ensuring you are prepared to practice journalism with professionalism and integrity.

Glossary of Terms

Accuracy: Reporting facts correctly without distortion.

Attribution: Crediting sources properly in a news story.

Background information: Context that helps readers understand the significance of an event.

Credibility: The quality of being trusted and believed in; reliability of a source.

Documents and records: Official materials such as government reports, court records, and statistical data used for news gathering.

Ethical considerations: Principles such as honesty, fairness, respect for privacy, and avoidance of harm in journalism.

Fieldwork: Immersing oneself in the environment of a story to observe and record details.

Interviewing techniques: Methods of asking questions, listening actively, and recording responses to gather information.



Observation: Watching events directly to gather firsthand information.

Primary sources: Original, firsthand accounts such as eyewitnesses, official documents, and direct interviews.

Reporting: The act of writing and presenting news stories clearly, factually, and ethically.

Secondary sources: Materials that interpret or analyse primary sources, such as textbooks, encyclopedias, and commentary articles.

Speed and accuracy: Balancing timeliness with factual correctness in reporting.

Concept Check Questions [Series 5]

Objective questions

Which type of source provides firsthand accounts of events: primary, secondary, tertiary, or editorial? (Linked to SLO 5.1)

Which source type interprets or analyses information originally provided by primary sources: primary, secondary, official, or direct? (Linked to SLO 5.1)

Which technique involves being physically present at events to witness and record what happens: interviewing, observation, analysis, or documentation? (Linked to SLO 5.3)

Which reporting guideline requires journalists to balance timeliness with factual correctness: accuracy, speed, fairness, or ethics? (Linked to SLO 5.7)

Which principle ensures journalists act responsibly and maintain public trust: accuracy, conciseness, ethics, or readability? (Linked to SLO 5.8)

Short-answer questions

6. Define primary sources and give two examples. (Linked to SLO 5.1)
7. What is one risk of relying on secondary sources? (Linked to SLO 5.1)
8. Identify two qualities of effective interviewing. (Linked to SLO 5.4)
9. Why must journalists verify the authenticity of documents and records? (Linked to SLO 5.5)
10. Explain why balancing speed and accuracy is important in reporting. (Linked to SLO 5.7)

Long-answer questions

11. Analyse how observation and fieldwork contribute to credible reporting, giving examples. (Linked to SLO 5.3)
12. Evaluate the role of interviewing techniques in gathering reliable information. (Linked to SLO 5.4)
13. Discuss how documents and records complement interviews and observation in journalism. (Linked to SLO 5.5)
14. Assess the ethical considerations journalists must follow in news gathering and reporting, explaining their impact on credibility. (Linked to SLO 5.8)

Answers to Concept Check Questions [Series 5]

Objective questions



Primary.

Secondary.

Observation.

Accuracy.

Ethics.

Short-answer questions

6. Primary sources are firsthand accounts such as eyewitnesses and official documents.

7. They may introduce bias or interpretation, reducing reliability.

8. Preparation and active listening.

9. To ensure information is factual and trustworthy.

10. It ensures news is timely but still credible, preventing misinformation.

Long-answer questions

11. **Basic response:** Observation and fieldwork provide firsthand details that strengthen credibility.

Value-added response: They also capture atmosphere, behaviour, and context, making stories vivid and trustworthy.

Basic response: Interviewing techniques help gather direct information from sources.

Value-added response: Effective interviews build rapport, encourage openness, and yield insights that documents alone cannot provide.

Basic response: Documents and records provide factual evidence that supports interviews and observation.

Value-added response: They add depth, authority, and verifiability, ensuring stories are comprehensive and credible.

Basic response: Ethical considerations include honesty, fairness, respect for privacy, and avoidance of harm.

Value-added response: Following these principles safeguards credibility, maintains public trust, and ensures journalism serves society responsibly.

Answers to Pilot Questions [Series 5]

Answers to Pilot Questions 5.1

Original, firsthand accounts of events.

Textbooks and encyclopedias.

They provide direct evidence and unfiltered information.

They may introduce bias or interpretation.

Accuracy and authority.

Answers to Pilot Questions 5.2



Being present at events to witness and record.

It provides vivid details and strengthens credibility.

Preparation and clear questioning.

Government reports and court records.

To ensure reliability and avoid misinformation.

Answers to Pilot Questions 5.3

Clarity, conciseness, and factual accuracy.

It ensures timely yet trustworthy reporting.

Verify facts before publishing.

Honesty and respect for privacy.

They guide responsible reporting and maintain trust.

References and Attributions [Series 5]

General references

Course content adapted from *MCM 104: Introduction to News Writing* curriculum outline.

Definitions and explanations of sources, techniques of news gathering, and reporting guidelines based on standard journalism texts and open educational resources (OERs).

Illustrations

Figure 5.1 Primary sources of news: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing examples of primary sources of news: eyewitnesses, official documents, interviews.”

Box 5.1 Secondary sources of news: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing examples of secondary sources of news with short definitions.”

Plate 5.1 Evaluating credibility of sources: AI-generated using the prompt “Generate an illustration of a journalist cross-checking information from multiple sources for credibility.”

Figure 5.2 Observation and fieldwork in journalism: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing observation and fieldwork as two branches of news gathering.”

Plate 5.2 Interviewing techniques in journalism: AI-generated using the prompt “Generate an illustration of a journalist interviewing a source with a recorder and notebook.”

Box 5.2 Using documents and records: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing examples of documents and records used in journalism.”

Figure 5.3 Balancing speed and accuracy: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a diagram showing speed and accuracy as two scales balanced in journalism.”



Box 5.3 Ethical considerations in reporting: AI-generated using the prompt “Create a table listing ethical considerations in news reporting.”

Suggested OER search strings for sourcing illustrations

“primary sources journalism OER diagram”
“secondary sources journalism OER table”
“evaluating credibility journalism OER image”
“observation fieldwork journalism OER diagram”
“interviewing techniques journalism OER image”
“documents records journalism OER table”
“speed accuracy journalism OER diagram”
“ethical considerations journalism OER table”

APA-style references

Harcup, T. (2021). *Journalism: Principles and practice* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
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