LaGuardia Community College

ENG 208 – Intro. to Digital Journalism –

Prof. Dragan

FALL **I 2020 COURSE PACK**



ENG 208 -- Intro. to Digital Journalism

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Prof. R. Dragan

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ENG 208: Introduction to Digital Journalism
Fall I 2020 – ONLINE COURSE

Our course is online at
Blackboard
bbhosted.cuny.edu
-AND-
eng208.publishproject.com

Richard Dragan, PhD/MFA
Associate Prof., English
(Office: M109-O)
Virtual Office Hrs.: Tuesdays, 2 pm – 3 pm

E-mail: eng208.lagcc@gmail.com

ENG 208: Introduction to Digital Journalism

Course Description

*From the LaGuardia Course Catalog**

The purpose of Introduction to Digital Journalism is to provide students with a basic working knowledge of online journalism today, including the technical skills using blogs and social media, producing video, audio and still digital photographs to enhance written stories. Students will look at existing examples of professional digital journalism and create their own content combining writing, photos, videos and / or audio on their own blogs or custom websites.

For Our Course

Welcome to the world of 21st-century journalism! Today, journalists are expected to produce more than words. We need to be able to produce audio, video and even web content beyond written copy. We need to know how a content management system (CMS), such as WordPress, works in order to power online publications – including personal blogs – of all sizes. We need to be able to cover a story, do an interview, in words and pictures with just a smartphone. We need to know the basics of HTML, CSS and visual design. We need to know how Twitter and social media can be used responsibly by journalists to further our craft. This course will show you what's out there in today's media landscape with some award-winning / popular 'digital news packages' and give you the basic skills and knowledge to produce your own blogs, audio podcast, photos and a photo slideshow with captions and audio, and / or a short video interview. We will look at the 'deep structures' (or theory) of different kinds of digital journalism for both full browsers and mobile news, with practical examples. We also will read

and respond to existing online journalism in order to understand what it is and what 'best practices' are available in this exciting, ever-changing field. The techniques we learn will also apply to any career in media today, even for online tools and platforms that haven't been invented yet.

E-Books (Textbook and Course Pack):

SECTIONS OF BOTH THE TEXTBOOK AND COURSE PACK WILL BE POSTED AS PDFs EACH WEEK. If you have access to a printer, you are encouraged to print out readings as we go through the course.

- **Briggs, Mark, *Journalism Next*. 4th ed. CQ Press, 2019. (ISBN 978-1544309446.)**
- **ENG 208 Course Pack**

***Links to current examples of digital journalism will also be posted for most every class at djlinks.publishproject.com – under the Digital Journalism Links menu option on Blackboard and eng208.publishproject.com. Please make time to explore the online materials each week. The more you explore, the more you will become familiar with current digital journalism today.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

***New materials will normally be posted on <u>Tuesday</u> of each week (since our F2F class would have met on TU/TH). So our weekly schedule runs from the Tue. / Mon. of each week.*

Please see below for details.

WEEK 1 *9/14-9/21*	**Course Introduction / Digital Journalism Today** • Using Blackboard and eng208.publishproject.com: Discussion Groups, Online Activities, Our 'Workflow' for the Course • Intro. to digital journalism • Legacy vs. online journalism • Looking at online journalism sites: MSM vs. start-up vs. student (and J-School) examples • Consuming news: 'lean-forward,' 'lean-back' and 'stand-up' modes • The Continuous / Immersive / Interactive triangle • Print vs. desktop vs. mobile journalism

	Reading: Preface and Introduction, *Journalism Next*, , pp. xv-xx, 1 – 6 Lab Activity: Exploring examples of current digital journalism
WEEK 2 *9/22-9/28*	• A short history of digital journalism Reading: "The Evolution of the Digital News Package," Ch. 2, *Principles of Multimedia Journalism* (online)
	Blog and WordPress Fundamentals • Setting up WordPress / Hosting options • Responsive design / Themes • Dashboard / Plugins • Web Design 101
WEEK 3 *9/29-10/5*	**More on Blogs and Online Writing** Reading: "The Power of Publishing…," Ch. 2, *Journalism Next*, pp. 45-55, 66-75 • **BLOG ASG. #1 – WRITE A 'WELCOME POST' ON YOUR WORDPRESS BLOG – DUE THU. 10/1 (11:59 pm)**
WEEK 4 *10/6-10/12*	**Professional vs. Amateur Blogs** • Sample professional blogs • Kinds of blogs / online 'beats' (and finding your interests) • Original content vs. aggregation • Blog post on a hyperlinked story Reading: "Finding Stories," Ch. 3, *Convergent Journalism: An Introduction,* Course Pack, pp. 34-48 **Online Writing Fundamentals** • Guidelines for writing effectively online • Chunking vs. the inverted pyramid • Ledes / nuggets / kickers • Voice / focus / audience / opinion / reported stories

	Reading: "Writing Across Platforms," *Ch. 2 &* "Structure and Storytelling," Ch. *5, Convergent Journalism: An Introduction*, Course Pack, pp. 13-33, 49-63
WEEK 5 *10/13-10/19*	**WordPress Dashboard (with Photos)** • Organizing online content / tags / sluglines • Adding photos to online stories in WordPress • Headlines, sub-heds and photo captions Screencast: Adding a sample story on WordPress with photos & tags **Digital Photography Basics** • Fundamentals of digital photography for blogging • Photo Editing 101: the basics • Adding photos and captions to your stories Reading: "Visual Storytelling with Photographs," Ch. 5, *Journalism Next*, pp. 153-184; **• BLOG ASG. #2 IS DUE ON THU., 10/15 (11:59 pm) – RESPOND TO AN EXISTING PIECE OF DIGITAL JOURNALISM**
WEEK 6 *10/20-10/26*	Screencast: Adding photos to WordPress Reading: "Photography," Ch. 6, *Convergent Journalism: An Introduction*, Course Pack, pp. 64-94 Photo Essays and Slideshows / Carousels Reading: Ch. 5 (continued), *Journalism Next*, pp. 179-205 Screencast: Creating a basic photo slideshow with captions in WordPress
WEEK 7 *10/27-11/2*	**Podcasts and Audio Journalism** • Introduction to podcasts • Radio vs. podcasts Online Activity: Exploring podcasts Reading: "Making Audio Journalism Visible," Ch. 6, *Journalism Next*, pp. 211-234; Ch. 6 (continued), *Journalism Next*, pp. 229-237; "Writing for Broadcast"

	Interviewing Basics with Phones • Interviewing basics in the digital age • Recording audio and video on your phone / Tips and best practices Lab Activity: Exploring sample interviews Reading: "Audio and Video Journalism," Ch. 8, *Convergent Journalism*, Course Pack, pp. 95-116 Hands-On Activity: At home mock interview practice exercise • **BLOG ASG. #3 IS DUE ON THU., 10/29 (11:59 pm) – RESPOND TO A PIECE OF JOURNALISM THAT USES A PHOTO ESSAY / SLIDESHOW**
WEEK 8 *11/3-11/9*	**Digital News Packages** • Copy + photos + audio + video + data journalism + visualizations + virtual reality (+ what's next?) • The Continuous / Immersive / Comprehensive Triangle up close with examples • Professional examples (and some innovative media organizations) Screencast: Exploring Digital News Packages Reading: "Classification of Digital News Packages," Ch. 3, *The Principles of Multimedia Journalism: Packaging Digital News*, Course Pack, pp. 190-221 Online Activity: Exploring a sample of digital news packages
WEEK 9 *11/10-11/16*	**Digital Video Basics** • Introduction to digital video • Recording live events: what to shoot / guidelines & some best practices from video experts Reading: "Telling Stories with Video," Ch. 7, *Journalism Next*, pp. 145-157; **Data Journalism / Visualizations** • Some effective examples from the MSM and start-ups • Accessing public datasets • Using Tableau (and a quick look at Google Earth)

	Reading: "Data-driven Journalism and Digitizing Your Life," Ch. 8, *Journalism Next*, Ch. 8, pp. 243-259; "Data-driven Journalism," Ch. 9, *Convergent Journalism*, Course Pack, pp. 222-246 Online Activity: Exploring datasets and data visualizations **• BLOG ASG. #4 IS DUE ON THU., 11/12 (11:59 pm) – RESPOND TO A PIECE OF JOURNALISM THAT USES A DIGITAL NEWS PACKAGE**
WEEK 10 *11/17-11/23*	**Intro. to Web Analytics** • Analyzing web traffic: Google Analytics Readings: "Building a Digital Audience for News," Ch. 9, *Journalism Next*, pp. 271-291; • Audience engagement and management • The possible dangers of metrics for journalism today • How is news consumed and distributed today? Franklin Foer, "When Silicon Valley Took Over Journalism," online and Course Pack, pp. 283-291 Screencast: Google Analytics tutorial for understanding basic web traffic and analytics **• PRELIMINARY DRAFT OF FINAL PROJECT IS DUE ON WED. 11/25 (11:59 pm) – OP ED PIECE (WITH 3 PHOTOS WITH CAPTIONS) –OR- PROFILE OF A PERSON BASED ON AN INTERVIEW (WITH 3+ PHOTOS WITH CAPTIONS) FOR INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK**
WEEK 11 *11/24-11/31*	**Social Media for Journalists** • Using Twitter effectively (and responsibly) as a journalist • Tweetdeck for working journalists • Some best practices and ethics • Facebook, Apple News (and Google AMP) Reading: Ch. 2 (continued), *Journalism Next*, pp. 75-80; "Social Media," "Introduction: Networked Journalism," Ch. 1, *Social Media for Journalists*, Course Pack, pp. 272-282

	• Citizen journalism / social journalism / the journalist as entrepreneur Reading: "Citizen Journalism and the Public Sphere," Ch. 6, *Social Media for Journalists: Principles and Practice*, Course Pack, pp. 292-317 • **BLOG ASG. #5 IS DUE ON TUE., 11/31 (11:59 pm) – REVIEW A LEADING-EDGE PIECE OF DIGITAL JOURNALISM THAT INCORPORATES DATA JOURNALISM OR A VISUALIZATION OR VIRTUAL REALITY**
WEEK 12 *12/1-12/7*	**Digital Journalism Careers** • Digital skills needed for the 21st-century newsroom / media organization Reading: Mark Stencel and Kim Perry, "Superpowers: The Digital Skills Media Leaders Say Newsrooms Need Going Forward" (online) **Course Wrap-Up** • Additional topics as materials as needed (TBA) • **YOUR REVISED FINAL PROJECT IS DUE ON MON 12/7 (11:59 pm) – OP ED PIECE (WITH 3 PHOTOS WITH CAPTIONS) –OR- PROFILE OF A PERSON BASED ON AN INTERVIEW (WITH 3+ PHOTOS WITH CAPTIONS)** • **BLOG ASG. #6 ALSO DUE MON 12/7 (11:59 pm) – REFLECT ON YOUR WORK FOR THE COURSE, THE STATE OF DIGITAL JOURNALISM TODAY AND YOUR EDUCATIONAL AND CAREER GOALS** ✹ **ALL LATE WORK MUST BE POSTED BY WED., DEC. 9th, 2020, NOON.** ***No work can be accepted after this deadline. Please plan accordingly.***

Course Requirements

Attendance and Class Rules

Since this an online class, ideally you will participate most every week. NO ONE WILL FAIL THE COURSE BASED ON LACK OF ATTENDANCE ONLY. That said, you need to participate most weeks in order to complete the 'major' assignments: 6 blog assignments and an original piece of journalism. Students who demonstrate excellent online attendance will have their semester grades adjusted upwards. If you have a lot of online absences, but still complete the work for the class, your semester grade will be slightly lower, but you will still pass the class. You will receive weekly progress reports on your progress in the course. Because of the pandemic, the window for withdrawing -- for a non-punitive W grade -- has been extended until the end of the semester. *The responsibility as an online learner is on you to make time to dig into each week's materials and activities*. We are offering virtual officehours (on Tuesdays, 2 pm – 3 pm) – which will be scheduled at a particular date and time. Everything else about our class is asynchronous. That is you do it any time during the week. You'll receive e-mail reminders and announcements on what's due, but it's up to you do make time and make progress as an online learner. You can do this. By 2020, thousands of students around the world at all levels of education have had excellent experiences with online learning. We're using some ''best practices' – ideas that have worked before -- from the CUNY School of Professional Studies – a top-rated online college program, where your instructor has been affiliated over the years.

Readings

All texts will be posted electronically for each week of our online class – along with examples of digital journalism examples (on **djlinks.publishproject.com**) for you to explore in a web browser. An important part of the online work forthis class will be to **read these texts** and **answer questions online** that let you show your understanding and ideasabout these readings. Most every reading ~~assign~~nment will have an online activity (online questionnaire) associatedwith it online for the week's tasks. **You get class participation credit for doing these online activities**. Each week,there will also be a Discussion Board question that will also let you respond to our readings and ideas. **Yoursuccess for this class depends on keeping up with both the reading (electronic texts and questionnaires) andwriting (blog & formal journalism assignments).** ***You can't just turn in the written assignments and expect topass the course; you have to do the weekly work with readings, questionnaires, and the Discussion Board (as it'sworth 30% of your grade).*** **Of course, doing the reading and other online activities is the way we learn about digital journalism together, besides writing our own blogs and one piece of original journalism (an Op Ed or Personal Essay incorporating about 3 photos with captions).**

Blogging

Every student has a personal blog on WordPress. (This has been created by your instructor to save time). A list of blogs is available under **Blog Roll** menu item on **Blackboard and eng208.publishproject.com**. We will be using blogs to respond to the readings from class, develop ideas for your own journalism pieces, publish the finished versions and then reflect on what you have worked on for the course. In all there are 6 blog assignments and 1 Formal Journalism Assignment planned (with revisions).

Formal Journalism Assignment

Besides writing 6 blog posts on a variety of assignments, you will brainstorm, research and write one piece of 'formal' journalism – an Op Ed Piece or a Profile of a Person. This piece will include about 3 photographs, which will probably be 'borrowed' and cited from Internet photos as we absolutely do not want anyone in our class to go out in the world and take photos (in a time of a pandemic). Don't worry -- Real bloggers often use Internet / stock images to accompany their stories, so it's actuallya real-world exercise to do this.

The Formal Journalism Assignment will be posted as a preliminary draft (for Week 10) for instructor feedback so you can improve it in time for the final, revised version, which will be due during for Week 12.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the theft or unattributed submission of another writer's work. The rules for plagiarism are slightly different for journalism, but make sure all the work you submit for this class is your own. Plagiarism is an offense that can severely impact your academic and professional life. I WILL REPORT EVERY INSTANCE OF PLAGIARISM THAT I FIND. Committing plagiarism is a quick way to fail this course, so please avoid it.

****COMMITTING PLAGIARISM AS A WORKING JOURNALIST ALWAYS MEANS THE END OF A CAREER IN MEDIA – DON'T DO IT!**

Deadlines

The basic rule for online work is that you can take up to 2 extra weeks to do it – with a late penalty. It is logistically impossible for you to make up all the work at the end.

For blog assignments, online work will be accepted all the way up to the end of the semester with a late penalty (-3%, or one step lower on the grading scale: A becomes A-, B+ becomes B, etc.). See above for our flexible online attendance and withdrawal policies this semester.

Final Grade

Grades will be calculated according to the following percentages:

• 1 'Formal Digital Journalism Assignment	20%
• 6 Blog Assignments (responses to examples of professional digital journalism)	50%
• Online Work and Participation (including online attendance, online questionnaires / quizzes and Discussion Board contributions)	30%*
	100%

**In case of low attendance, a different grading scale will be used to allow students who submit most of the Blog Assignments (and the Formal Journalism Asg.), but haven't been able to attend class regularly, to pass the course!*

"I'm sorry, but this isn't what I want to do. I'm going into print."

I probably heard some variation on that statement dozens of times during the semester Caitlin took my video news production course. I frequently responded that video skills were also important for newspaper reporters in the Internet age. I sometimes uttered a warning to the effect of, "Well, you never know what the future holds." I saw Caitlin after that semester and I was happy to hear she attained the managing editor position at our university's student paper. I was confident she would do well after graduation. Later, I found out I was right about that: She landed a full-time journalism job at a reputable news organization right out of college.

She says her work closely resembles what she did at the student paper – assigning reporters to stories, making editorial decisions, organizing news content and writing. Interestingly enough, Caitlin's first job is at a local television station, working as a producer in charge of evening newscasts. She says she now loves television and hopes to make a career of it.

Caitlin's story is becoming more and more common. Journalism students head down the path of newspapers or television, only to find the skills they learned apply just as easily to other portions of the field. The lines between print, broadcast and online writing will continue to blur, but the underlying value of effective writing remains at the core of each discipline. Throughout this book, we will emphasize how things have changed in the field and how life will change for you as you move from students to professional journalists. For now, we will primarily focus on the aspect of writing and how what seems to be a radical set of changes in the field is really more of an adjustment in your thinking and your approach to your audience.

A typical media-writing textbook emphasizes differences between text-based (print) and spoken-word (broadcast) writing. Print writing is for the eye; broadcast is for the ear. Print sentences are long and varied; broadcast sentences are consistently short and stick to one structure most of the time. Print sentences are information-rich; broadcasters generally limit themselves to one or two facts per sentence. Print writers have more space for depth; broadcast writers keep things simple.

The differences above are technically correct, but they miss a

larger point: Many professionals do both well as they seamlessly switch back and forth between writing for the eye and the ear. Television journalists create Web versions of their stories, often using the same Associated Press style guidelines required of print reporters. Similarly, most newspaper websites include multimedia content, some of which closely resembles television or radio news. This chapter is about writing across platforms, but it's not about two drastically different approaches to writing. It's about having multiple options for how to present information.

This chapter includes tips for mass-media writing that are useful regardless of platform. It will also clarify similarities and differences between print and spoken-word writing that are commonly misunderstood by aspiring media professionals.

What Are You Trying To Say? Well, Write That

The first thing I tell my students about broadcast or spoken-word writing is that it's not writing at all. It's talking. Often, when a student is struggling with how to compose a sentence, I'll ask the person to tell me what he or she is trying to say. "Write that" is my frequent reply. Experienced writers can produce good stories without opening their mouths, but there is an auditory component to the process of writing.

Writing and talking are closely linked because we hear words in our heads as we read. That's why experts on dyslexia and other reading difficulties say some of these issues result from a breakdown between the parts of the brain that process vision and hearing. People who see words and are unable to imagine what they sound like have difficulty understanding what they mean, and a similar logic applies to those with normal reading comprehension. Good writing sounds good in your head, and one of the best ways to hear it in your head is to hear it with your ears. Therefore, it is helpful to say things out loud before typing them.

A useful rule is: "Say it. Write it. Say it again." This approach allows you to talk your thoughts out first to figure out the clearest way to express them. After you have a handle on what you want to say, type up your thoughts and then read aloud what you just typed to make sure it sounds right. It's a good idea to do this on a

sentence-by-sentence basis, but it's also a good idea to backtrack frequently to check for overall flow.

A related rule of thumb is not to look at notes, press releases and wire copy while writing. Put those aside where you can't see them and just talk out what you're trying to say. If you don't know the facts well enough to write something, you're not ready to write anyway. Spend more time familiarizing yourself with the facts, put them aside and then write. You can always double-check your notes later to make sure you got the details correct. Like so many concepts we'll cover in this chapter, these tips are equally useful when writing for print, broadcast, the Web and other media platforms.

Write for Someone Other Than Yourself

Most of us who chose the journalism profession did so, at least in part, because we had a knack for writing. The main problem is that we either don't know or don't embrace the notion that journalistic writing is for others, not ourselves.

Good writers often have expansive vocabularies and pride themselves on using words that look impressive on the page, regardless of whether they're familiar to regular folks. However, your job is to help people understand information, not show off how smart you are. This usually means following a rule famously expressed by author George Orwell: "Never use a long word when a short one will do." It also means *not* using the right-click thesaurus function in Microsoft Word.

But There Are Some Differences ... Sort Of

Writing for spoken word is significantly different from print because it's really talking. When you speak to someone about a story you're working on, you probably use shorter, simpler sentences than the information-rich ones you would write in a newspaper article. You probably put the subject first most of the time, because that's how you talk. Very few people say, "Considering that I am hungry and it has been six hours since I last ate, I suggest that we go to lunch." Most just say, "Let's go to lunch. I'm hungry. It's been six hours since I ate anything." That's the

difference between "writing" and "talking," and if you think of it that way, you'll have no trouble going back and forth between text and spoken word.

One more analogy: When you give a PowerPoint presentation about a paper you wrote, you don't just read the paper word-for-word (unless you're trying to cure insomnia). You most likely speak in conversational phrases and might even condense bullet points so they are easily digestible. That's like converting a print news story into a spoken-word format – simply "telling" someone about the story, as in the example below:

PRINT STORY

A two-vehicle accident at the intersection of Algoma Boulevard and Wisconsin Avenue caused damage to UW Oshkosh property and three students' parked vehicles Wednesday night.

The accident, which was between a white Honda SUV and a blue Ford Taurus, occurred at approximately 4:24 p.m., according to Oshkosh Police Officer Rob Kraemer of the Crash Investigation Team.

"The white vehicle was going to make a left-hand turn and go down Algoma," Kraemer said. "The blue vehicle was traveling southbound on Wisconsin. The white vehicle turned left in front of that vehicle and they collided. The blue vehicle then went up over the curb and struck the two parked motorcycles, and then one of the motorcycles hit a parked car next to it."

The driver of the Honda, who was not carrying passengers, was charged with "failure to yield to those in the right of way while taking a left-hand turn," according to Kraemer. The driver of the Taurus had one passenger in the vehicle.

No one appeared injured as a result of the accident, but those involved were complaining of aches and pains, according to Kraemer.

Five vehicles total were involved in the accident, three of which were parked in the South Scott Hall parking lot where the Taurus ended up.

A large campus directional sign was hit down by the blue car and was by removed from the scene by Campus Facilities

Management. The cost to replace the sign is yet to be determined, according to LeMire.

TELLING THE STORY

You: Hey Joe, did you hear a wreck messed up some UW Oshkosh property and a couple of parked cars yesterday afternoon?

Joe: Really? Where?

You: At the intersection of Algoma Boulevard and Wisconsin Avenue.

Joe: What happened?

You: Well, a white Honda SUV was turning left onto Algoma and hit a blue Ford Taurus at around 4:30.

Joe: How bad was it?

You: Nobody was seriously hurt, but the Taurus got knocked into three parked cars and also hit a campus directional sign.

Joe: Anybody get a ticket?

You: The driver of the Honda was charged with "failure to yield." *Joe*: What are they going to do about the messed up sign? *You*: The police say they don't know how much it'll cost to replace.

BROADCAST STORY

A wreck damaged some UW Oshkosh property and a couple of parked vehicles yesterday afternoon. It happened at the intersection of Algoma Boulevard and Wisconsin Avenue. Police say a Honda SUV was turning left onto Algoma and hit a Ford Taurus at around 4:30. Nobody was seriously hurt, but the Taurus got knocked into three parked cars and also hit a campus directional sign. The driver of the SUV was charged with "failure to yield." Police say they don't know how much it'll cost to replace the sign.

Note: The above example is for the purpose of illustration and because you might need to convert your own print stories to spoken word, but this does not mean it's OK to convert *other people's* print stories into your own spoken-word versions. That would be stealing.

VIEW FROM A PRO

STEPHEN DUBNER

Stephen Dubner is a former New York Times reporter, a former story editor for New York Times magazine, a best-selling author, a nationally known public radio host, a former commentator for the NFL Network and a successful podcaster. However, he is best known for his collaboration with economist Steven Levitt, which resulted in the nonfiction bestsellers "Freakonomics" and "Superfreakonomics", each of which sold more than 4 million copies.

Although many journalists have feared moving from platform to platform, Dubner said he enjoys the freedom and flexibility it provides.

"It's great to have different media or idioms to work in," Dubner said. "Most people who write have a variety of interests and ideas, and it's nice to have the ability to toggle back and forth between media."



Figure 2.1
Stephen Dubner.

However, in writing his most successful books, Dubner deliberately blurred the lines between conversational spoken-word writing, and print style. He said many people are uncomfortable with what he calls numerical narratives, stories built largely on statistical data.

"The voice that I used is a very conversational voice," he said, "and it's also what I would call a fairly interactive voice – meaning talking to the reader – asking the reader, 'Here, I'm going to tell you something; I want you to think about it; and now think about how you think it went; and

now I'll tell you how it went.' It's a level of engagement that I thought was necessary."

Dubner said he literally used his own voice to achieve a conversational voice with "Freakonomics".

"Everything I write, when I rewrite, and proof, and edit, I always read out loud," he said. "I really believe in that. I never forget that writing was invented as a means to record conversation – spoken language. That was its primary function, and I think there's still a lot to be said for that."

Despite his successful career as a print journalist, Dubner said he is not a fan of certain approaches to newspaper writing.

"My least favorite writing is the writing that sounds like no one in their right mind would ever speak it aloud," he said. "I understand the need for that sometimes, especially with technical and academic writing, but the New York Times, which I love – I read the leads of the A-1 news stories every day, and what kind of bad computer translation software rendered this from the Croatian into English? Nobody in their right mind speaks like that."

Dubner said he embraced convergence long before the term entered common usage. He has routinely crossed platforms since his college years at Appalachian State University.

"I was actually a broadcast journalism major at Appalachian," he said. "I'd always been a writer, and my dad was a newspaperman, and we had a family newspaper, and I wrote for the college newspaper, but I actually did go there as a broadcast journalism major."

Like many media professionals, Dubner said the Web and social media bring exciting possibilities for aspiring journalists.

"An individual can create his or her own media channel," he said. "You can take an idea and put it into three different formats, you can take three different ideas and put them into one – whatever you want it to be – and I think that's a remarkable opportunity."

Dubner said there are hopeful signs for the economics of the media business.

"I happen to love the public radio model," he said. "I really like that it's essentially funded by voluntary contributions. We've written a little bit about pay-what-you-want schemes generally, and how they work or can work or sometimes fail. That's not a bad model."

Digital and entrepreneurial journalism provide good opportunities,

but Dubner said it's still worthwhile to start one's career at an established media outlet if possible.

"If you're an individual starting out in journalism trying to go from zero to something, believe me, I acknowledge it's really hard, so I think it's good to hook yourself to an institution if you can – if only to develop your own self as a brand as you go," he said.

Writing Guidelines

The next section will explore traditional writing style guidelines of broadcasting and print. While it is necessary to use a comparison/ contrast format for clarity of explanations, the intent is to demystify the differences.

Sentences, words and phrasing

The same

Use the simplest words and the simplest sentence structures to express a thought. Put the subject as close as possible to the beginning of the sentence, followed as soon as possible by the verb and then the rest of the predicate.

Clarity is the key to all good writing. If a reader is confused, a writer has failed to communicate effectively. If you don't understand something, you can't expect your reader or viewer to understand it. If you don't understand it, either figure it out or leave it out. Achieve clarity first, then think about the fancy stuff.

One of the best ways to attain clarity is through the use of active voice. This requires you to position the words in your sentence in a noun-verb-object format. For example, the simple sentence "Bill hit Bob" is in active voice. The noun is the simple subject (Bill), the verb is the word of action (hit) and the object is the word that receives the action of the verb (Bob). In other words, you are answering the question "Who did what to whom?" and doing so in that order.

Passive voice is the opposite of active voice. It leads to longer sentences with less active verbs (often called linking verbs) and it reverses the order of the pieces. "Bill was hit by Bob" is an example of a passive-voice sentence. As you can see it's longer (five words versus three words), contains a linking verb (was) and is more

complicated in terms of order. (For more on this, you can consult any decent grammar textbook or various grammar-based websites.)

Active voice is better than passive, but sometimes passive is acceptable. “Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was laid to rest” is OK because writing that “Israelis laid former prime minister Ariel Sharon to rest” offers little additional information and de-emphasizes Sharon’s prominence. More commonly, though, an active sentence such as “A man died” is stronger and more efficient than “A man was killed.” That’s why media writing instructors emphasize the use of active voice.

Avoid repeated words and phrases. One of the most difficult situations for news writers comes with fire coverage, because these stories can be impossible to write without using the word “fire” repeatedly. For example, a paragraph in a fire story could say, “Firefighters brought the fire under control after 30 minutes, according to Fire Chief John Jones. It was the third fire in the neighborhood this week.” Some alternate the word “blaze” with “fire” to reduce repetition, but this raises a question about common usage. There are no easy answers, but crafty use of the pronoun “it” can help, as can selective removal of the word fire when possible, as in “Chief John Jones” instead of “Fire Chief John Jones.”

Steer clear of “newsy” words that are also vague, such as alleged, allegedly, reportedly, apparently, officials, authorities and residents. These words are not always wrong but are best used sparingly. Consider how regular people would say something, because that’s the best way to make sure they’ll understand. Also, keep in mind that the word “allegedly” does *not* protect you from a libel suit. The best rule of thumb is good-old attribution.

Similar

Broadcast: If the thought is too complicated, break it into multiple sentences.

Print: Generally one major fact per sentence (paragraph), but related facts (supporting details) can be worked in as additional clauses or phrases.

Different

Broadcast: Keep sentences short so they can be spoken in one breath, the speaker can easily inflect properly and the listener can easily comprehend. This sometimes means leaving out certain details you might include in a print story. For instance, in spoken-word writing you will generally avoid dependent clauses and appositive phrases because they're hard to say out loud and hard for the listener to follow.

Here are a few examples of problematic sentences and a few ways to fix them:

Poor: Archie Jones, 22, assistant director of the American Society of Fraternities and Sororities, says the result is unacceptable. (Long appositive phrase)

Poor: Archie Jones, who is assistant director of the American Society of Fraternities and Sororities, says the result is unacceptable. (Dependent clause)

Better: 22-year-old Archie Jones is assistant director of the American Society of Fraternities and Sororities. He says the result is unacceptable.

Another idea – leave out a few more details: Archie Jones is assistant director of a Greek organization. He says the result is unacceptable.

If this bothers your hardcore print news reporter sensibilities, it's OK, because you can include the additional details in the text version of your story or in a graphic at the bottom of the TV screen.

The operating principle here is that sentences are generally easier to follow when the subject and verb are close together and the total word count is short. This is a key concept in spoken-word writing. Longer, information-rich sentences are OK in print because the readers can navigate the information at their own pace, but this does not mean all print sentences have to be long and complicated.

Verb tense

The same

If it happened in the past, it is fine to write it that way. The same rule applies with the present and future tenses.

Similar

Broadcasters like to emphasize immediacy because newscasts generally air live. Newspaper stories traditionally favored past tense because writers knew their readers wouldn't see the stories until the next day. This is changing somewhat with the Web and social media, but the important point is that both print and broadcast news writing value timeliness.

Broadcasters sometimes use the present-perfect tense in leads when reporting past occurrences that are relatively new at the time a newscast airs. For example: "Police have made an arrest in connection with a bank robbery that happened yesterday." This is not common in print editions of newspapers but could be useful in tweets or Web stories.

Different

Broadcasters frequently use the simple present tense for story leads: "A man is shot this afternoon." Many TV news producers, and even some writing instructors, consider this acceptable, but the best, most successful writers avoid the practice most of the time. Some may like it for stylistic reasons, but it is a violation of the principle that broadcast writing should be conversational. You wouldn't say to your mom, "I wreck my car this morning," so talking to your television viewer that way makes little sense. If you're looking for a simple rule, here it is: Write for the spoken word the way people talk.

Style

The same

Print and broadcast journalism are stylistically different for reasons discussed previously, but they do have commonalities. News writers should avoid the use of opinionated descriptors. To say "A car ran into a building" is hardly disputable factually, but as soon as you add that it was a "pretty car" that ran into a "big building," you jeopardize your credibility, because your reader or viewer may disagree. This leads to another stylistic similarity, which is the use of attribution. You could say, "A car witnesses described as pretty ran into a large building, according to an officer at the scene." This

detaches your opinion from the story, which is what both print and broadcast news writers do most of the time.

Similar

Broadcast: Use contractions in almost every case where they're possible, because that's the way people talk. The exception is when you're emphasizing the word "not." It's possible to mishear "weren't" or "can't" as "were" or "can," so in such cases it's preferable to say "were not" or "cannot." Most other exceptions result from the personal preferences of certain reporters, producers, anchors or news directors who find contractions too informal.

Print: Traditionally, print journalists avoided contractions, but AP style and many newspapers have loosened this rule in recent years. Ask your instructor or your boss what the preference is, and follow it.

Different

Perhaps the most obvious style difference between print and broadcast journalism results from broadcasters' emphasis on relating to their audiences. Traditional journalistic ethics encourage the reporter to become a transparent vessel for information. This relates to the principle of neutrality, which has been central to journalism for many years. If a reader can get the necessary information from a story in the paper without thinking about the leanings or biases of the reporter, there is an assumption that the reader can trust the information as accurate.

Broadcasting is inherently different because the person presenting the news is seen and/or heard, resulting in a more complete human connection between the presenter and the audience member. The broadcasting industry converted this potential weakness into a strength by marketing its news presenters as likable, relatable personalities. As a result, it makes sense that broadcasters would personalize the news to a greater extent than newspaper reporters, often using words like "we," "us," and "you," as well as emphasizing a story's direct impact on the audience rather than taking a just-the-facts approach. With the popularity of TV, however, some newspapers have adopted similar

approaches, so what used to be a big difference between print and broadcast journalism has diminished in recent years.

Stylebooks

The same

The AP Stylebook is a great resource for any journalist regardless of platform because it clarifies common questions that arise in news writing. For instance: I don't want to be repetitive, so can I alternate between referring to a serviceman as a "Marine" and as a "soldier"? The answer is "no", as they aren't interchangeable. This kind of question and thousands of others like it make the AP Stylebook indispensable. At www.apstylebook.com, you can purchase a paper copy of the book or you can sign up for an annual digital subscription for a searchable AP Style database.

Similar

AP's Stylebook rules are occasionally the same for both print and broadcast. Many hasten to point out that an AP Broadcast Stylebook is also available, but its use is not as common in broadcast newsrooms as the print version is for newspapers. This is because a broadcast script is written, first and foremost, for the person who will say the words on the air, so the primary concern is with the preferences of that person. For example, the AP Broadcast Stylebook places phonetic "pronouncers" in parentheses after the correctly spelled proper name: "Edward Kennedy (Ken-uh-dee) voted for the measure." Some broadcasters like it that way, but others find it distracting and prefer to remove the proper spelling, leaving only the phonetic pronouncer ("Edward Ken-uh-Dee voted … "). Print stylebooks achieve standardization, but broadcast scripts are often individualized.

Different

While the AP Stylebook is "the bible" for most print reporters, broadcast journalism lacks an equivalent book. Anchors and reporters prefer that their scripts be formatted in different ways, and whatever helps them sound as good as possible saying the words is what counts. This makes it vital that producers and

anchors work together effectively. When in doubt, a producer should ask the anchor for personal preferences, and it is incumbent on anchors to pre-read scripts before going on air, making corrections as needed.

Attribution

The same

Any purported statement of fact short of "the sky is blue" needs attribution. This is difficult for some new journalism students to get used to, but it is essential to the profession. Average readers might not be consciously aware of the journalism profession's rules, but they will know if you're just shooting from the hip or haven't done your homework. They'll know if you're merely stating the obvious or repeating the same ideas over and over again. They'll know if you're spouting your opinion. The way to avoid any such perception is to write tightly attributed news stories. Always ask yourself, "Says who?" If you don't know a specific answer to that question – or if the answer is "me" – you have more work to do.

Similar

The standard rule in journalism is that some form of the word "said" is preferable to its synonyms (stated, claimed, uttered) because most other words have opinionated connotations. A common expression in journalism is "'Said' (or 'says') is a good word" meaning both that it's not opinionated and that it's a benign word that doesn't get old when repeated frequently. This rule of thumb applies in both print and broadcast journalism.

"Title before name" is a rule commonly taught in broadcast news writing, but there's no rule against it in print. The idea is that "Joe Smith, district attorney" doesn't roll off the tongue as easily as "District Attorney Joe Smith." A great trick is to remove words like "of" in titles. For example, "Director of Human Relations Joe Smith" can be shortened to "Human Relations Director Joe Smith." Occasionally exceptions might arise, but generally if you see the word "of" in a title, you can probably get rid of it by slightly reordering the words.

Different

A common-sense rule in broadcasting is to put the attribution at the beginning of a sentence in order to prevent confusion regarding the source of the information. If we went on TV and said, "Jones robbed a bank, according to police," it would sound as if we stated unequiv ocally that he's guilty before the all-important attribution to police sources. The better approach in broadcasting would be, "Police say Jones robbed a bank." It is worth pointing out, however, that this does not amount to a difference between print and broadcasting in every case, because there's nothing wrong with attribution at the beginning of a sentence in print either. This rule is just more flexible in print.

When quoting or paraphrasing someone's words, some form of the word "said" is preferable, but the verb tense is different. Newspapers traditionally used the simple past tense "said" for the same reason they preferred the past tense in general. Radio and TV newscasts, on the other hand, are often live, so they emphasize what's going on now – even as it applies to the playing of a soundbite now. So, *said* is a good word, and so is *says*.

Punctuation

The same

The most useful punctuation marks in news writing, regardless of medium, are commas and periods. It is possible to write entire stories using only these two punctuation marks. Dashes are also useful but should not replace periods. Many people in news regard semicolons as unnecessary because they usually do the same jobs as periods.

What's good for print is often good for broadcast. A good example is hyphenating compound modifiers – cases where two words work together to modify a third, as in "well-known person" or "mid-June weekend." If you're saying the words out loud, it's important to see the hyphen so you don't accidentally pause in the wrong place ("well … known person").

Similar

Both print and broadcast news writers use commas, but in

broadcast writing it's preferable to avoid certain kinds of expressions that require them. Appositive phrases, parenthetical expressions adding detail as in this sentence, are difficult to say out loud and sometimes trip people up on the air. As a result, many get the impression that it's wrong to use commas in broadcast writing, but this is incorrect. Commas are useful in broadcast writing for most of the same purposes as in print, but it's best to limit yourself to one major fact per sentence. "Johnson, a bricklayer from Toronto, won the lottery" would read more easily as "Johnson won the lottery. He's a bricklayer from Toronto."

Different

The most pronounced differences between print and broadcast when it comes to punctuation are best understood as common sense rather than style rules. Broadcast scripts are private documents written exclusively for the eyes of those who will say the words on the air and members of the production crew helping with the broadcast. Therefore, the script is prepared with the primary goal of helping the reporter or anchor say the words clearly and understandably without messing up.

Punctuation, therefore, gives the speaker a roadmap for how to say the words. Most commonly, this means using punctuation to denote pauses, as in this sentence. Many broadcast writers overuse commas, because they hear in their heads how they intend to deliver a given sentence. However, writers commonly use dashes or ellipses for a similar function, so the previous sentence might look like this: "Most commonly, this means using punctuation ... as a roadmap ... to denote pauses – as in this sentence."

There tend to be two camps in broadcast newsrooms – those who prefer dashes ... and those who prefer ellipses. In a print newsroom that strictly followed the AP or another stylebook, editors would institute a uniform rule for how and when to use commas, dashes, ellipses and other punctuation marks. In television, the rule is simply to ask the person who will read the copy for a personal preference.

Numbers

The same

Both print and broadcast journalists seek the best ways to maximize the information provided while keeping things short and not confusing viewers or readers. Both forms of writing prize clarity and precision above all else and this includes instances where numbers matter to a story.

Similar

Print and broadcast writers both use words for numbers one through nine and figures for higher numbers like 16 or 432. Both also use words for large numbers like "million" or "billion." Broadcasters typically follow the same rule when combining smaller and larger numbers, as in 17 million. The traditional broadcast rule takes the concept a little further, following the same principle with thousands, as in six thousand.

Different

Broadcasters try to avoid numbers whenever possible. When faced with a complex number, broadcasters will try to round the number in order to make it simpler. This is because it's unlikely that a listener will be able to process a complex number, like 18,983, while driving a car or cooking dinner. It's better simply to say "around 19 thousand." In print, on the other hand, readers have the time to stop and think about the number or reread it if they want to, so the reporter may as well be as accurate as possible.

Quotes/soundbites

The same

Quotes (in print) and soundbites (in broadcasting) add a human element to a story that goes beyond objective facts. They offer opinion, color and human experience to a story.

Print and broadcast journalists place quotes or soundbites in their stories with very little introduction. There's no need to write in a print story, "Jones had this to say ... " because the attribution and quotation marks will make it obvious. The same is true with soundbites in broadcasting. Words like "had this to say" are a waste of space in print and a waste of time on the air.

Similar

Television news packages (edited video stories) sometimes have more soundbites than sentences delivered by the reporter, but there are no definitive rules about this. Newspaper writers and TV producers make stylistic choices determining how their stories come across, but these are developed and learned through experience. For the beginning journalist, there is no need for confusion in this regard. Quotes and soundbites serve the same journalistic function and are integrated into stories the same way.

Different

Print writers can remove vocal fillers ("um", "ya know", "like") more easily than broadcasters can. Digital editing makes it technically possible to do so, but the result is noticeable to the viewer unless more time is devoted to editing than is typically available. As a result, soundbites tend to run "as is," which can mean they contain less information than a similar length quote in a newspaper.

Story form and length

The same

Both print and broadcast newsrooms have standard lengths and story forms that are fairly consistent, but the importance of a given story also plays a role in the amount of space (print) or time (broadcast) an editor will devote to it. Generally, your editor, producer, news director or assignment-desk editor will give you an idea how long and what type of story you're being asked to deliver at the time you receive the assignment. One great thing about the Internet era in journalism, however, is that limitations on story length don't necessarily apply to Web versions. Even if you're asked for a short, 300-word, just-the-basic-facts story for your paper's print edition, you can add more information online. This is especially useful for broadcast journalists, who face greater restrictions in story length.

Different

Broadcast: A common approach to formatting a broadcast story is: Grab attention (using one short sentence or fragment); summarize

key facts (either in the first or second sentence); a few more sentences answering the question, “What else do I need to know?”; and end with what happens next (“Jones will appear in court tomorrow morning”) or a brief tidbit of information that’s related but wasn’t part of the essential “what happened” elements – like “This is the third bank robbery in Springfield since Monday.”

Print: A lead summarizes the story such that a reader could conceivably read only one sentence and have the general idea of what happened. Subsequent sentences add detail. In traditional inverted pyramid form, these details are placed in descending order of importance, which really means descending order of impact on a reader’s understanding of what happened.

FINAL FOUR

If you take nothing else away from this chapter, here are four things you should remember:

1 Your audience usually won't see your broadcast script, but they will see your text article. Broadcast scripts are functional for their intended purpose, which is to prepare for speaking on TV, radio or Web video, but their writers often need to tidy them up before presenting them for the readers. If you understand this, the supposed differences between print and broadcast writing become less daunting.

2 Use simple sentences: Subject (who or what), verb (did what), object (to whom, when, in what context, where, why – but not too much of this in one sentence). If you answer these clearly, you're probably doing a decent job writing news, regardless of platform.

3 Print sentences provide more detail because there's more space, whereas broadcast sentences are short and simple in order to be read smoothly in one breath and be easily understood. But writing news always means answering the following questions on behalf of your reader or viewer: What's the point? What else do I need to know to understand the story? How does it affect me? What's going to happen next? What else is interesting about the story that wasn't covered previously?

4 If you feel more comfortable writing for print or for spoken word, there's no guarantee this will change, but you don't have to fear switching back and forth. Just keep it clear, answer the key

questions, always be mindful of your reader's or viewer's understanding of the information, and you'll successfully navigate the world of cross-platform writing. And remember: "Say it. Write it. Say it again."

3

Journalists say that one of the hardest things about the job is finding new stories each day. In the 1940s and 1950s, competition among newspapers was fierce, making it tough to find "scoops" and unique angles on important stories. Today, the number of competing media outlets is exponentially larger than it was back then so it will be even more difficult to find stories that are unique to your publication.

Great reporting requires a strong work ethic, combined with an inquisitive nature and a heavy dose of tenacity. In some cases, great stories come from an odd stroke of luck, but in most cases, you can make your own luck through some of the tips outlined below.

This chapter will explain how to have the right mindset as you pursue potential stories. It will also reveal how you can find stories in a traditional news beat as well as how you can look beyond the standard stops on a beat to get some really great news pieces.

The Audience Principle

If you want to write things people want to read, you need to find stories that people want to hear. The best way to do this is to start with the idea that you are writing for your audience, so you should shape your approach to content accordingly. You need to learn who is in your audience, what things impact those readers and what kinds of things they want to know (or need to know).

Some things are universal: Money, work, health and leisure. People of all backgrounds will likely have an interest in these topics. If you know the specific demographic and psychographic elements that apply to your readers, you can fine-tune stories on these issues. For example, how to avoid injury at work can be a simple topic, but the story will be different if you are writing for people who work desk jobs or if you are writing for construction workers.

Other things have a limited but engaged audience. How to afford college is likely an important topic for many people reading this book. However, once those people finish college, that topic won't matter as much anymore. Wedding magazines are filled with stories on how to pick a perfect dress for a certain body type and how to plan a princess-style wedding on a pauper's budget. Parenting magazines constantly reassure new parents that there is

nothing wrong with children who are fussy eaters and that eventually the children will learn to use a toilet. Once the weddings are planned and the children are toilet-trained, these magazines become less useful and thus fall out of favor with that set of readers.

You need to look at the readership you are trying to serve, figure out what matters to those readers and then seek stories that will be interesting and helpful to them.

5WS AND 1H

The "5Ws and 1H" serve as the bedrock of journalistic writing, and they can also help you as you try to figure out what kinds of stories you should seek.

- Who will want to read this?
- What do I need to tell the reader?
- When does this matter to them?
- Where, in a geographic sense, will this story have the most impact?
- Why should someone read this?
- How can I appeal to this audience?

HOW TO KNOW AN AUDIENCE

Advertising and marketing professionals take audience characteristics seriously because their livelihood depends on getting the right people to see their work and buy their products. News writers, on the other hand, often decide that if they write on a topic that interests them, the resulting story will interest the readers. This mistake can alienate readers who view the journalists as self-centered and disconnected.

To reach your readers, you need to fully understand who your readers are. Here are three key things to consider when assessing an audience:

• Demographic Segmentation: Standard survey "check-box items" allow

researchers to use measurable personal characteristics to divide a population into a series of specific groups. Age, race, gender, education and economic status are just some of the ways in which you can parse a population. If you understand who reads your work, you can better tailor your work to meet their needs.

For example, people in the "traditional college student" age bracket (18–24) are more likely to be interested in certain forms of technology than people in an "older adult" (65+) age bracket might be. In addition, the approach to the writing can differ, as younger individuals more readily accept less-formal writing.

If you can understand who is reading your work based on a few simple descriptors, you can fine-tune your approach to what stories you are writing and how you are writing them.

• Geographic Segmentation: The Web is a worldwide medium, but sites are often more or less popular in certain geographic regions. The content will reflect certain aspects of that area or that area's key interests.

In Madison, Wisconsin, people need to know how to dig out of their houses after a blizzard. In Madison, Georgia, residents are more likely to experience sunstroke than a blizzard. The upper peninsula of Michigan has issues with bears that dig through people's trash, while the swampier parts of Florida have issues with alligators that eat unattended pets.

Even when your readers come from various locations, your own geographic placement can lead to interesting stories. What makes your area special? What are some of the things that happen here that don't happen elsewhere? What are some of the traditions, oddities and otherwise unique elements that make your place on Earth different? In capturing those things, you can offer your readers a wider array of information and you can find a lot of stories that will entice and engage your readers.

• Psychographic Segmentation: Just because people are from the same general area or the same age group, it doesn't necessarily follow that they will have the same interests. If you have two 35-year-old men who make $50,000 a year, live in Chicago and spend 10 percent of their money on sporting events, it doesn't necessarily follow that an article

on hockey will interest both of them.

Psychographics allow you to use values, attitudes and lifestyles to better understand a target audience. If you use these topics to shape your focus on an audience, you can better understand specific things that matter to your readers.

For example, college students in the United States traditionally fit into the 18-to 24-year-old age bracket, with a 44 percent to 56 percent male/female split on gender. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (http://nces.ed.gov), the racial breakdown shows that 61 percent of the students nationwide are white, 14 percent are black, 13 percent are Hispanic and 6 percent are Asian/Pacific Islander, with the remaining 6 percent unknown or listed as "non-residents." However, not every college student is going to be interested in the same things, even if you picked a group of them from the largest chunk of each demographic category.

On the campus of Gustavus Adolphus College, a private college associated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church, one prominent campus tradition is "Case Day." This underground student event, which challenges students to consume 24 beers in a day, has been a prominent story in the college's student newspaper for a number of years, despite administrators' pleas to halt the festivities. Conversely, on the campus of Brigham Young University, a private college associated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, alcohol is not allowed, in accordance with the Mormon Church's law of health and proper diet.

Not every experience within a demographic will be the same and thus using psychographic analysis to determine the interest of people for whom you are writing will be important.

Beat Reporting

Legacy publications, such as newspapers and magazines, often divide their coverage into geographic or topical areas known as beats. Each beat is then assigned a reporter who will cover the news that occurs in that area. Media outlets use beats to help reporters familiarize themselves with the important facets of an area or topic. This approach also prevents multiple reporters from reporting on the same topics.

Many websites have a niche approach to coverage as well: ESPN.com, for example, focuses entirely on sports; ADA.org focuses on news related to oral health; and FarmersOnly.com is a dating site that serves as "*The* place for farmers and ranchers to meet like-minded people." In each case, the focal point of the publication can help writers look for stories on topics that would interest the site's readers.

If you are covering a beat or working in a particular niche of journalism, you have some ready-made stories that are easy to find. Here are some ways you can use a beat-reporting approach to find stories and inform your readers.

Follow the beat

Most beats will have a clear "home base" that is obvious to a good reporter. Government reporters will start at city hall or the statehouse. Education reporters will have a school district office and schools. Crime reporters will have police precincts and a sheriff's department.

Many beats will have scheduled gatherings you should attend, such as city council meetings, school board meetings and police commission meetings. At these events, you can look for inter est ing stories that matter to your readers. In addition, you can introduce your self to the important people on your beat. It is a good idea to be familiar with the administrators who work in the area that you cover. When you get to know these people, they will likely tip you off to stories.

Talk to other people

Officials are important and you should view them as crucial sources for your beat. However, you also need to look beyond the people with the fancy titles and big offices. In many cases, the people who can put you on to great stories are not the people in charge.

Secretaries, or administrative assistants, are aware of everything that comes through an office on a daily basis. If someone is being hired or fired, these folks see all the paperwork involved in the process. If someone has a plan to build or destroy something, chances are good that the secretaries have seen the blueprints or

construction contracts. Secretaries also serve as gatekeepers for an office and determine who gets to see the boss and whose phone calls or emails get returned. Secretaries are vital to the day-to-day operation of most places on any beat.

The same thing is true of security guards, janitors and other people who help keep things functioning. They often see things others do not and can offer you different perspectives on things that happen on your beat. Do not treat these people poorly because you think they lack value.

In addition, talk to the people impacted by what is happening on your beat. Teachers and principals will have views on education, as will parents and students. Defense attorneys and social workers can help you find stories on a court beat as often as judges and prosecutors. The more people you talk to, the wider the scope of the stories you will find.

Beats, which are also referred to as “rounds” or “patches” in some places, will vary from city to city and country to country. Here is a non-exhaustive list of areas you might find yourself covering. In some of these areas, you might have sub-specialties, such as covering a particular branch of government or a specific sport.

Government
Police and fire
Courts
Science and health
Environment
Arts and culture
Entertainment
Lower education (K–12)
Higher education (college)
Business
Faith/religion
Technology
Sports

Look at the competition and outdo them

No self-respecting journalist enjoys getting scooped on a story, but it is part of life in this field. When a competitor publishes a story that you don't have, consider it a challenge and an opportunity. Every story, no matter how well done, will have flaws. Your job is to find these flaws and fix them.

Stories often leave unexplored angles that beg for follow-up pieces. For example, if the president of your university unexpectedly retires, the first story will likely be the "who and what" piece that explains who this person was and what he or she did at the institution. The first-day story will include background on the departing president and a number of "we're sorry to see the president leave" quotes from various people.

What is missing are the "why" and "how" elements of the story: "Why" did this person decide to leave and "how" will the school fill the president's role with someone else? You can easily look for ways to fill those gaps when you follow up. You can also dig around for information on potential candidates for this job. If you keep looking ahead, you will make sure you that you are at the forefront of this story for the duration of its lifecycle.

Localize the news

Things that happen all over the world have the potential to create a direct local impact. Your job is to find a way to explain that impact and make it matter to your readers. These types of stories, known as localizations, are among the best types of stories because they are easy to conceptualize and they have direct audience appeal.

When you see stories on things like statewide initiatives or countrywide budgets, look for ways to point out what this means to people in your area. Localizations need to have value beyond mere reaction from audience members, especially if the people are not aware of what is actually happening on the broader stage. In addition, not every national or international story will have a strong local appeal. However, when you can see a clear line from the big story to your readers, whip up a local version.

People on people

Profile stories can give you an exciting glimpse into the lives of interesting people. Readers enjoy the life stories of other people who are like them or who have experienced things they never will. Profile subjects are like the stars of their own movies. A skilled storyteller can show that movie to a broader audience.

When selecting a profile subject, look for people who spend a lot of time in the public eye. These people can be important business CEOs or the person who has spent 45 years teaching grade school. The idea is to reveal aspects of this person's life and personality to the audience in the hope of entertaining and engaging your readers. Look for people who interest you and see if they would be willing to tell you who they are and what they do.

VIEW FROM A PRO

JAMIE BECKMAN

Jamie Beckman's road to freelance success began in Emmaus, Pennsylvania, a city with a population of just over 11,000, when she interned for Men's Health magazine. Since then, she has worked for Budget Travel, Popular Mechanics, Marie Claire, Town & Country, Redbook and USA Today's newsstand magazines, just to name a few. She is also the author of the book, "The Frisky 30-Day Breakup Guide", which was published in 2010.

Beckman said the key to writing for such a broad array of publications is to think about what the people in the audience will want to know.

"Before I begin a story, I always think of the reader," she said. "Who is he or she? What do these people want to get out of this piece? I write a lot of service journalism-oriented listicles: tips, tricks and hints about health, relationships, travel, beauty . . . you name it. I always try to keep in mind who I'm writing for."



Figure 3.1
Jamie Beckman.

To help her find ideas for freelance pitches, Beckman said she uses every aspect of her life to come up with stories.

"Once I was walking to the grocery store, and I happened to have skipped my workout that morning, and I thought to myself, 'Jeez, I wonder what it would take to get a work-out out of, say, walking down the street, or carrying groceries?'" she said.

"I ended up pitching and selling the idea to Redbook. For the piece, I interviewed experts about exactly how fast you'd have to walk to work up a sweat and how you can strength-train by carrying your groceries to the car."

"You don't have to be a genius to come up with good ideas," she added. "You just have to act on the idea as soon as you have it and pitch it to an outlet that would actually be interested in it."

Over her career, Beckman has worked in traditional and digital media. She said the Web made her more nimble and writing for magazines helped her appreciate the value of the editing and revision process. However, she said, the tenets of journalism she learned in school more than a decade ago remain important.

"No matter the platform, good reporting and writing will always stand out," Beckman said. "If you're unsure about how to transition from one platform to the other, talk to your editor about expectations, story length and anything extra he or she might need."

The most important thing about finding ideas, is having faith in yourself, Beckman said. The key is to be persistent in looking for them.

"You *will* get ideas. You *will*," she said. "Try to socialize with different types of people and listen to what issues they're going through, where they're hanging out, what they can't get enough of at the moment. Also, read as much as you can and use social media to follow the news, follow crazy entertainers, follow thought leaders in your industry. . . . You don't have to be the smartest person or the best freelancer right out of the gate. Hang in there. Persevere. Then beat everyone else who gives up."

Beyond the Beats

To prevent yourself from falling into a rut, you will need to look into some things that go beyond the standard fare of event coverage and rewriting press releases. If you get into the field as a freelancer, you will also be responsible for generating your own story ideas so you can pitch them to editors at a variety of publications. Below are some suggestions that can be helpful to you if you are on a beat or on your own.

Read everything

If you follow the advice of Jamie Beckman (see the "View from a Pro" box in this chapter), you should look at everything around you as a potential story idea. One of the best ways to find the ideas is to read anything you can get your hands on.

General trends, big news items and other things you find in the daily papers and on well-trodden websites can give you some basic ideas, but if you look at other, less-common bits of text, you can find great stories. Reading the back of a cereal box can make you wonder, "Who writes the copy for the kiddie games on these things?" Reading through your junk mail can clue you into the latest scams going through people's inboxes. Reading graffiti can lead you to a historical piece on how tagging began and why it initially had a useful purpose. This kind of curiosity can have you interviewing cereal manufacturers, Internet detectives and vandalism experts. It can also lead to some engaging stories.

If you want to pitch a piece to a particular publication, Beckman suggests you read at least the past three issues of the publication so you can understand its audience and the tone it takes with the readers. You can also use this as an opportunity to discover what that publication has already done and then expand it, localize it or contradict it. The more you read, the more chances you have to find a topic of interest.

Sourcing yourself

As much as you aren't writing for yourself, you do have a number of traits, skills and experiences that are universal. When you need to find story ideas, look inside yourself for things that you are doing, or have done, that might be worth sharing with other people. When you find these topics, look for ways to make them more universal so that your readership can relate to your work.

If you got a parking ticket at a broken meter, you might feel compelled to write about this as an issue of fairness. However, your ticket probably isn't the only one of this kind. Interviews with other people who park in the area, police officers who ticket cars and legal experts who deal in these issues can help you widen the scope of the story beyond your experience. This will help readers relate to the topic and draw a larger audience to your story.

I AM

When you need an idea, look to some of your own experiences and ask some basic questions. These can send you down a road that gives you promising leads.

- What are my hobbies?
- What stresses me out?
- Where have I worked?
- What do I do that I think is easy but others are amazed by?
- How am I different now as opposed to X years ago?
- What was the most important toy I got as a child?
- What do I do every day?
- Where have I lived?

Stop tuning out

The prevalence of portable electronic devices gives people an opportunity to carry a library of entertainment with them wherever they go. Smart phones, digital music players and e-readers allow people to disappear into their own world while waiting for a bus or walking across campus. As fun as they can be, these devices prevent you from seeing story ideas.

The next time you go somewhere, unplug yourself from these digital distractions and really look at the things happening around you. Bulletin boards and kiosks around campus are filled with potential story ideas just waiting to be discovered. As you take a walk around the city, you might notice new businesses cropping up or construction happening in your area. You might overhear a conversation between two people who are walking in front of you or see a growing trend in how people are dressing. The more attuned you stay to the world, the more likely you are to find odd stories in unlikely moments.

View things with wonder

Comedian Dana Carvey said his son once asked him, “Daddy, does God have feet?” The question lacks pretense. It lacks fear of mockery. Best of all, it isn’t even close to the weirdest question rattling around in the head of a child. Somewhere along the way, we stop wondering where the stars go in the daytime or if fish can drown. The daily grind of life and the fear of sounding stupid limit our ability to engage in wonder.

If you want to find great stories, ask the favorite question of all children: “Why?” Some of the best stories come from wondering why things are the way they are. Malcolm Gladwell wrote a piece for The New Yorker called “The Ketchup Conundrum” that touched on the evolution of condiments, the sensory perception of taste and food marketing over time. The question that launched his tale was simple: We have dozens of types of mustard. Why do we really only have one type of ketchup?

Simple “why” questions can lead to incredibly fun and rewarding stories. Besides, if you are wondering about the topic, it is a safe bet

you aren't alone in your puzzlement.

Be nosy

A good journalism instructor can teach you everything aside from how to be nosy. Nosy people tend to make the best journalists because they dig into almost every topic and ask almost any question. When you are at a coffee shop, eavesdrop on someone else's conversation. When you are in the line at a store and you hear two strangers talking about something that interests or irritates them, join in. In some cases, the things you learn will reinforce ideas you already have ("Why isn't there more parking on this campus?") while in other cases, you might be introduced to a whole new world ("Did you know there's a class you can take that teaches you how to be a circus clown?"). The more you can intersect with the lives of other people, the more likely it is you will find some quality story ideas.

FIVE WEIRD QUESTIONS THAT COULD BE STORIES

Is there a group of FBI agents that does nothing but check if people have copied old VHS tapes or DVDs? At the front of every movie, there is a threat from the FBI and Interpol and anyone else noting how copying and distributing tapes is a crime. Has anyone ever been busted for moving tapes to DVDs for their own use? If this branch of government does exist, what is life like as one of these intrepid G-Men who is on "movie patrol"?

Why can't the United States develop a popular dollar coin? Across the European Union, the Euro comes in coin form. In Canada, the "loonie" is so widely recognized, the country's mint secured rights to the term. The pound in Britain is also circulated heavily in coin form. Since the 1970s, the U.S. has gone through the Eisenhower dollar, the Susan B. Anthony dollar, the Sacagawea dollar and a series of presidential dollar coins. Despite the various attempts to make these coins work as common currency, paper dollars remain the more popular choice. Why?

How do police learn to deal with inebriated people? Drunk people are

like snowflakes: No two are exactly alike. Some are violent and some are docile. Some are loud and others fall asleep in between sentences. Law enforcement officials are required to deal with intoxicated people at a fairly steady rate. How do they prepare for this? In some districts, police departments recruit citizens for a "drunk academy," where they volunteer to drink to certain points of intoxication to help train newer police. In other cases, the police are required to rely on books and ride-along training. How does your area do this?

How does someone campaign for coroner? In many small towns and various counties, the job of coroner is still an elected position. Campaign signs pop up for various candidates, although it is often an uncontested election. Still, the question remains, how does the candidate convince others to vote for him or her?

What is the weirdest thing you can buy for $20 at a yard sale or flea market? People have various forms of taste when it comes to how they dress, how they decorate and what they value. A yard sale is a chance to get an inside look at the personal items of a wide array of people. Any weekend with decent weather can lead to rummage sales, yard sales, garage sales and other similar venues. Get out there and see what's available.

FINAL FOUR

If you take nothing else away from this chapter, here are four things you should remember:

1. **You should keep your focus on your audience**. You can use what you see, hear and experience to find story ideas, but your search should not start and stop with you. Keep your audience in mind when you look for stories and when you write them. The more you keep the focus on your readers, the better your work will be.

2. **Everything can become a story**. Ideas both large and small have led to stories that draw readers and make for interesting conversation pieces. Keep working on an idea even if you don't think it is worth anything on first glance. Give it a chance to develop.

3. **Pay attention**. The less time you spend in your own little world, the more things you will see happening around you. If you open the aperture on your mental lens, you can let in a lot of great ideas that will lead to many incredible stories.

4. **Persistence is key**. The adage of "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" applies here as you look for stories. Just because the first editor didn't like the story idea or your first source wasn't all that great, it doesn't mean the next editor won't like it or the next source won't be great. Don't give up easily.

In newspapers, we call them "pieces." Online, we call them "articles." In broadcast, we call them "packages." Regardless of the field or the jargon, these things are all stories and, for them to be effective, we need to use quality storytelling as we communicate our messages.

Storytelling is a skill and art as old as humankind. Whether we are talking about ancient people who gathered around the fire to tell the stories of a triumphant hunt or discussing a novel we just finished reading, stories have a number of key elements. Stories must grab our attention. Stories can't get too long or repetitive. Stories should give us a sense of finality when they are done. Good storytellers know how to apply their skills to help tell stories.

In this chapter, we will outline the key elements to good storytelling, including things that make for great stories and things that lead to bad stories. We will also explain how successful and engaging stories should start, continue and end. Finally, we will discuss various formats of storytelling and explain which ones work best for what types of stories.

Basic Rules of Storytelling

Regardless of your field or your area of interest, a number of simple rules will help you improve your approach to storytelling. These aren't mind-blowing revelations, but before you decide to put pen to paper or your fingers to the keyboard, think about these basic maxims:

If you wouldn't read it, don't write it

One thing that happens when you flip to the "journalist" side of the storytelling relationship is you tend to forget what it's like on the "reader" side. The purpose of journalism is to engage the audience members with good writing and inform them with important information. You should keep the audience at the forefront of your mind whenever you write an article, produce a package or post some information. Always remember you aren't writing for yourself – you are writing for the readers.

Don't write 1,000 words when 500 will do. Don't use words you wouldn't normally use because you got a "word-a-day" calendar for

your birthday. Don't drag people through twists and turns when a straight line is a better way to get from Point A to Point B. Overwritten, meandering stories likely bother you to the point of distraction. If that's true, don't write that way.

This maxim goes beyond the text portion of the field and can be applied to any of the tools you use in convergent journalism. Video stories on the Web, for example, are just as guilty of violating this rule as print stories are. When you post a video online, you are asking your audience members to shift from an active media experience to a passive one. This means you must give them a good reason to stop hopping from site to site and watch your video.

Would you watch a 15-minute video of your university president, standing at a podium, mumbling something about how students are a "vital resource" on your campus? Probably not, so think long and hard about why you would want to post video in that format. In some cases, some of your more "news junkie" audience members might really want to see the video in its entirety. In these cases, you can consider posting the whole video. However, if it's clear to you that no one would really get anything out of this, cut a few key soundbites from the video and post them with some text-based information to introduce them.

Go through your photo slideshows with the same sense of purpose. Just because you can empty your camera's memory card into a slideshow, it doesn't mean you should. Instead, eliminate things that you wouldn't want to see as a viewer. Remove photos that don't add to the overall story and delete images that are repetitive. This will lead to a tighter story and a grateful audience.

Right tool, right job

Storytelling isn't just about writing, shooting or drawing. It's about making your point in the clearest possible way. Photographers often say "A picture is worth a thousand words," which is true when you are capturing scenery or emotional exchanges among people. In other cases, a thousand words could run circles around a photo, especially when the photo is just someone standing at a podium.

In convergent journalism, storytelling is about using the best tool to accomplish the job. People erroneously assume that convergence is all about making things digital or using video. Instead, this

approach to storytelling is about making sure that people get the best story in the most appropriate format.

Consider how best to give your readers the story. In some cases, text works beautifully while in other cases a graphic will be a much better option. Photos can do things that video can't and the opposite is also true. Examine each tool and figure out what benefits it can provide to your readers as you approach each storytelling opportunity.

Show, don't tell

Writers often can't seem to get out of their own way during a story. They want to tell you that something is "the most important issue" or that someone is "extremely fortunate," and in doing so, they violate one of the primary rules of storytelling: Show, don't tell.

Showing is the way to really explain a story. Don't tell me, "Here is a rich man." Instead, show me the facts that support your point. The man drives a new car each week and gives away the old one to charity. He owns a home in all 50 states so he doesn't have to worry about finding a hotel room when he travels. Countries who can't get financial support from China reach out to him for help. Those facts would have any reader saying, "Wow! This guy is rich!"

If you let the sources and the facts do the hard work for you, the storytelling becomes much easier. In addition, the readers will come to the conclusions on their own and be much more satisfied with what they learn.

VIEW FROM A PRO

HOLLY HEYSER

Holly Heyser has covered everything from lame-duck governors in Virginia to duck-hunting excursions in California. In between, she worked as a business reporter and editor, served as an adviser for a college newspaper and took up food photography. In each phase of her career, Heyser has focused on how best to tell stories to her audience.

"When I covered state legislatures, I had to be fluent in the language of politics, but to write stories, I had to translate for consumers – the group of people affected by any particular story. Easy to say, hard to do,"

she said. “Where the need to understand your audience became crystal clear for me was my return to the student newspaper as faculty adviser. . . . I finally started saying, ‘Write stories YOU would want to read, not what you think your professors or the administration would want to read,’ and they turned out some great stuff.”



Figure 5.1
Holly Heyser.

In her current job as the editor of California Waterfowl Magazine, she said she is using every skill she has picked up over her entire career to tell stories. In doing so, she noted that she always keeps an eye on her readers and what they would want to see.

“How you figure out your audience isn’t rocket science,” Heyser said. “First, who reads your publication? When I worked for the Orange County Register, I knew my audience tilted heavily conservative and not obsessed with public affairs. At the [St. Paul, Minnesota] Pioneer Press, it was fairly liberal and deeply interested in public affairs. At the magazine I run now, my audience is pretty much entirely duck hunters. But that knowledge just gives you broad parameters. For each story, you need to think about who might want to read it and whom you think needs to read it. Now, what stuff that you found interesting during reporting would appeal to THAT audience? There’s your story.”

Heyser said she became more comfortable with this approach once she started her hunting blog, where her audience’s feedback helped shape her topic selection and story approach. She said she learned that writing is about clear communication, not following overly strict rules.

"All too often [students] try to write the way they think they're supposed to write, which is all too often boring," she said. "Even when I was in school back in the 80s, I knew 'boring' was the kiss of death for a story. People's attention spans are WAY shorter now, so boring is even worse."

Although she knows storytelling takes time and talent, she said it isn't beyond the reach of anyone who really wants to do it.

"We have been storytellers since we've had language – *we know how to do this*. Trust yourself," Heyser said. "Take any story you like – and by 'story' I mean a story in *any* form, including video, comedy or Facebook posts – and think about why it engages you. Emulate that. It might feel like copying, but repeat it often enough and you will discover your own touches that make your writing very *you*, and you might even do something completely new, a game-changer in storytelling. Man, that feels *so good*. And it's totally doable."

Structuring Your Stories

The idea behind structure is to give your readers a clear path through a story. Whether the story is a hard-hitting investigative report on financial mismanagement or a child's bedtime book, the writer has to look for ways to present information in a clear and coherent format. For convergent journalists, the pattern of storytelling will deviate slightly as they operate across different media platforms. However, every story should have three basic things: a beginning, a middle and an end.

Beginning: Make me care

Audiences have more choices than ever before when it comes to what media they will read, watch or otherwise consume. The days of a handful of TV stations, a newspaper and a few magazines have been replaced by thousands of channels and millions of websites. Through each of these media outlets, an almost unlimited amount of content pours forth, forcing readers to make quicker decisions regarding what they will and will not spend time with.

This makes the beginning of your story more important than ever before. If you only get a fraction of a moment to capture the

attention of a reader, you need to put your best foot forward in hopes of doing so. This is where strong starts can benefit you as a storyteller.

Hard leads

In traditional media terms, the opening of a story is called a lead and it is meant to provide the reader with the most important information on a given topic. We usually refer to this as the 5Ws and 1H, or the "who," "what," "when," "where," "why" and "how" of a story. This approach is direct and it gives you the best chance to grab your readers right away. If you don't provide this material immediately, you can distract or annoy your readers.

When it comes to hard news, the audience members want to know how bad a fire was, who won a game or what a new law means to them. They don't care which fire department responded to the fire, how long the game took or if two city council members were sniping at one another.

Here's an example of what we mean: Imagine you go home today after class and your roommate says to you, "Hey, your mom called. There was a fire at her house." What would be the *first* thing you would want to know? You would probably ask if anyone was hurt. You might then ask how big the fire was or how much damage it did. You probably would want to know how the fire started. Instead of telling you any of this information, however, your roommate started off with "The Johnson County Fire Department responded to a fire at 111 W. Main St. Ladder truck 11, chief 12 and pump truck 18 responded along with members of Fire House 28 . . . " At a certain point, you will probably start yelling at your roommate, "JUST TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED!"

Put yourself in the place of the readers when you are writing. Just tell them what happened.

Soft leads

Not all stories are meant to have a lead that gives the readers a quick, punchy look at the news. In many cases, a short observation, a decent anecdote or a narrative opening can provide your readers with a much better reason to read on.

If you are writing longer stories, such as personality profiles or in-depth pieces, you can rely on a softer lead to help people see an issue from a different perspective or a more emotional angle.

For example, a story about a baseball player at your university who broke his leg during a game, spent six months rehabilitating his injury and then led his team to the College World Series has the makings of a compelling story. However, if you write a lead that simply lays out those facts in a way similar to what you see above, you won't get many readers to emotionally invest in this story.

A story that begins with a description can get the reader's attention better:

> Bobby Smith took his lead off first base, dancing back and forth between safety and danger, hoping to distract the pitcher. It was the first practice of the season, but for Smith, every minute on the diamond was a minute spent perfecting his craft.
>
> The lanky lefty on the mound ignored Smith and delivered a curveball to the plate, inducing batter John Witzmar to slap a tailor-made double-play ball to the shortstop.
>
> "The minute he hit the ball," Smith said, recalling the event almost a year later, "I could hear my dad hollering in my head, 'Hustle! Hustle!' I had to break up the double play."
>
> Smith's spikes dug into the semi-frozen infield and tore up chunks of dirt as he flew toward second. He was out by a country mile, but he could still protect Witzmar if he could just get to second fast enough.
>
> "It was a clean play," Smith said. "I went in low and I slid hard. My foot hit the bag and our second baseman, Carlos, went up in the air to avoid me. Then, everything went wrong."
>
> A sickening crack sliced through the infield chatter as Smith hit the bag. Doctors would later diagnose it as a compound fracture of the tibia. The bone pressed outward against his skin and pain tore through him as if he had been shot.
>
> "My sock was distorted, the way the bone had stuck out," he said. "I tried to stand up but nothing moved. For the first time in my life, I thought, 'Oh, God. I might never play again.'"
>
> As Smith told the story of his gruesome injury, he gestured to his mended leg with a hand that sported a College World Series championship ring. From the grim diagnosis, to his yearlong rehab and through to his MVP performance in the World Series, Smith said he clung to the word he heard in his head the day of his injury: Hustle.

The soft lead brings the readers into the scene at the very moment in which the player broke his leg. In doing so, the readers are allowed to feel sympathy for him and also follow him through his journey into recovery and through to redemption. However, notice how the soft lead ends on a hard bit of information: Who he is and

why we should care about him. This element, which follows the pattern of an inverted pyramid lead, is called a nut paragraph and allows for you to seal off the narrative lead and move the reader into the meat of the story.

Middle: Make it matter

Once you grab your readers' attention, you need to keep it. In terms of writing, graphics, videos or slideshows, the core of the piece is where the most important material resides. Each paragraph, each second and each image in the middle of your story is another opportunity for you to retain your audience members or lose them. This is why you have to make your middle matter.

Here are several key things to consider when shaping the middle of your story.

Value

In print journalism, reporters often discuss a concept called "notebook emptying." The idea behind it is that reporters feel that if they gathered information, they don't want it to go to waste. Thus, they shake every fact, quote and anecdote out of their notebooks and put them in the story. This approach can lead to bloated stories that contain large chunks of material lacking in value.

Value should be at the forefront of your mind in everything you do, but it is particularly important in the middle. After you write your lead, find your establishing shot or in some other way actively engage the audience, you might find yourself relaxing a bit too much in your work. It's often a chore to find the most important information or craft that perfect lead, so once you get past it, you probably feel ready for a break. However, when you build the middle of your story, keep providing your readers with value. The minute you stop doing this is the minute they give up and move on to something else.

When you build your piece, each paragraph needs to reinforce the lead. When you are creating a video story, each shot should give the readers a reason to stay engaged. When you put together a slide show, each image must tell a story and advance the overall storytelling goals of the slideshow.

Repetition

In some instances of storytelling, repetition has its place. In video, the repeating of a soundbite, a video clip or natural sound can provide impact and value as the journalist attempts to show consistency. In print, repetition can provide cadence for the readers, giving them the sense that a fact is crucial to the overall story.

However, in many cases, repetition isn't part of a larger storytelling approach. Instead, it is simply journalists not being careful.

When you go through a story, look for the big cases of repetition, such as paraphrases and quotes that say the same thing or sources who repeat themselves for no reason. Eliminate these major repetitions and then focus on the minor repetitions as well. When you have four adjectives in a sentence, try to eliminate three of them. When you have someone who provides you with quotes that fail to gain traction in storytelling, condense the bloated quote into a stronger chunk of paraphrase. When you find yourself using redundant phrases like "completely destroyed" or "armed gunman," remove them and make your writing leaner.

In photography, examine the images in the middle of your photo story to see if you have too many shots of a single subject. If you do, pick the one or two that best convey your message and cut the rest.

Boredom

This goes back to the first rule we mentioned in this chapter: If you wouldn't read it, don't write it. The same basic concept applies to video, audio, photography and graphics. Just because you get excited about writing 10,000 words on public policy or producing a 20-minute video on a soccer match, it doesn't follow that your audience members will want to stick around for every word or every second of your story.

The human attention span is only a few seconds long. Every few moments, you have to poke people to keep them alert and attentive. With this in mind, you have to take a "seek and destroy" approach as you review the middle of your story for boring material. Take the opportunity here to switch from reporter to editor and look for things that shouldn't be there.

End: Find closure

Anyone who has watched an old Western movie knows how these pieces of Americana traditionally end: The good guy vanquishes the bad guy, he gets the girl and they ride off together into the sunset as the credits roll. This approach gives the audience no sense of ambiguity. The movie is over.

Stories you tell have a similar need, a sense of closure. However, you can't just slap "The End" on the piece after your final paragraph or last image. You have to find a way to seal off the story and give readers a feeling of finality.

Text

In text writing, a good closing quote will usually do the trick. As you do your interviews for a story, you can look for something one of your sources says that provides you with a good ending. This could be a city council representative saying, "The meeting might be over, but this issue is far from resolved." Quotes like this allow you to demonstrate that the piece is finished without you as the writer having to say it. When you insert yourself into the end of a story, the closing can feel like you are telling people "the moral of the story is . . . " Let the source do the heavy lifting for you.

If you don't want to rely on a quote, a simple summary of fact could help you here as well. To close a preview to a meeting, you could note, "The Jackson County School Board will review this issue in its March 4 meeting." This is a fact, so you don't end up doing a morality play, and yet you can still close the story.

Video

In broadcast, journalists have the ability to end their pieces in a number of ways that will bring the story to a close. One of the more traditional ways of ending a broadcast package (see Chapter 8) is with the reporter wrapping things up in a stand-up. The reporter will summarize the story before signing off with his or her name and the station's call letters. This clearly shows the viewers that the reporter has completed the task at hand and the newscast is ready to move on.

In other cases, the reporter would be live on the set or live on the

scene of an event. This would allow the package to end with a closing shot or a closing soundbite before the journalist comes back on screen to do a short question and answer session with the anchor. At the end of this, the anchor usually thanks the reporter and the newscast moves on.

For videos on the Web, where this interaction isn't necessary, the journalist's wrap-up described above would usually work best, with the reporter signing off on the story either with a voice-over or stand-up presentation.

STRUCTURE FORMATS

Here are a few types of structure you can consider:

- Inverted pyramid: This is the traditional format of print and online news stories. The goal of this format is to provide the 5Ws and 1H as high as possible in your story and then build the remaining parts of the story in descending order of importance. Each paragraph after the lead should be less important than the lead, but should also aid the lead in telling the story. Paragraphs at the bottom of the story are less important than those closer to the top.

- Narrative: This format tends to work well in broadcast, as it is both simple and clear. In most cases, people have become accustomed to a narrative approach and it therefore makes it easy to consume in both an aural and visual approach.

  In this approach to storytelling, journalists give a strong account of events through the use of characters and actions. (The soft lead above is a good example of this.) The piece is balanced through the positions each source takes within the story and then concludes, even if the news itself isn't over. An example of this would be a broadcast report of a school board meeting in which the board members are discussing the value of adding technology to a particular school in the district. Some members will support the idea, making a case that technology will improve the lives of the students. Others will argue against it, noting that the costs are too high or that the board can't play favorites among the schools in the district. In the end, the board will either vote on the issue

(resolution) or push the decision off to another meeting (conclusion). In either case, the story ends.

- Hourglass: This format requires you to blend both of the aforementioned stories into a single approach to storytelling. An hourglass format requires the writer to sum up the core of the story in about five or six paragraphs in an inverted-pyramid fashion. After that, the story takes a turn, providing the readers with a short transition that allows them to see that the story will now continue in a different way. The story then moves into a narrative format in which the piece has a beginning, a middle and an end, where the writer weaves together chronology, quotes and other elements to tell a richer and deeper story.

- Circular/chronological: In some broadcast news stories, journalists employ a more "circular" approach to the story, which uses chronology as well as some elements of an inverted pyramid to tell a story. The stories traditionally start with a lead that more directly mimics a newspaper headline. Since broadcast journalism uses passive media, people often divide their attention among several tasks while the news is on. To make sure the viewers and listeners are attuned to a story that has value to them, the lead must get their attention without giving away too much. You can think of the lead the way you would consider starting a conversation: "Hey, did you hear about X?" This will allow the audience members to adjust their attention to the story and then you can begin with the core of the piece.

  The story will then develop in chronological order until it leads all the way back to the beginning. For example, a crime story could lead with, "Police are looking for a man who robbed the Quik-E-Mart on Smith Street tonight." The story would then settle into the chronology of the event: the man entered around 8 p.m., displayed a handgun and demanded money. He then fled on foot toward Main Street. After the chronology, the story bends back toward the beginning with a description of the suspect and a plea to the public: "Anyone who has seen this man is asked to contact the police department at 555–1212." This brings the story back around to the beginning element where the journalist noted police were looking

for the man.

FINAL FOUR

If you take nothing else away from this chapter, here are four things you should remember:

1 Work for your audience. Don't write for the sake of writing or because you think you matter. Don't throw together a ton of photos and figure the audience members will figure out what to do with them. Don't run an overly long video just because you didn't want to cut any of it. You need to build your stories for the purpose of satisfying your audience members. If you wouldn't want to read it, see it or listen to it, don't publish it.

2 Structure matters in storytelling. Great stories are said to "tell themselves." That misperception has led to some horrible storytelling. Don't think that you can put the pieces of a story together any which way and things will be fine. Determine how best to order the elements of your stories and then present them accordingly. If the pieces are well-structured, they will come across clearly and smoothly.

3 Use the best tool to tell your stories. Not every tool is equal when it comes to storytelling. As a convergent journalist, your job is to figure out which approach will give your audience members the most bang for their buck. Don't gravitate toward a single tool because it is the one with which you feel the most comfort. Consider text, photos, audio, video and graphics as your potential storytelling tools and then apply the best one in each situation.

4 Storytelling is natural. As Holly Heyser said, storytelling is

something people have been doing forever. Focus on what matters most, convey your message in a clear and coherent fashion and give your readers a sense of value based on what you've given to them. You can do this.

A camera is an amazing piece of engineering because whether it costs $5,000 or $100, it is still a box with a hole that lets in light. Cameras are produced for a variety of purposes, yet they all do the same basic thing: Record an image of the scene in front of them.

The aim of this chapter is to help you learn enough about photography so you can make the kind of photographs you envision. This chapter reviews the technical aspects of cameras, introduces you to image composition and advises you on how to use this knowledge to tell stories visually. This chapter will combine both a basic-level walkthrough of photography as well as a higher-level approach to some more complex photography terms. As with any aspect of this book, some of this will be more valuable to you if you are interested in this specific area of convergence. However, even if you see yourself as being more of a graphic or text reporter, understanding how photography works can benefit you as you converse with photo journalists and plan your overall approach to storytelling.

Cameras and How They Work

Before you can get the best images out of a camera, you need to understand how a camera works. The word photography means writing with light, and cameras do just that by capturing the light reflecting off objects to create images. Accepting this fact enables you to understand why your photographs have turned out a certain way. For example, you might notice that a great-looking sunset behind your friend turned this person into a silhouette. That's because there is more light coming toward the camera from the sun that there is reflecting off the subject's face.

Inside the Lens

The most underrated part of the camera is the lens, which reshapes the light coming into the camera. The camera's lens is actually a family of elements, which may be composed of glass or plastic. The lens is able to focus and magnify light through the movement of the lens elements in relation to each other, thereby focusing light on the surface of a sensor. Budding photographers must realize the

limitations of the lens as well as the other parts of the camera and then align their expectations with the equipment.

Apertures

After passing through the lens' front elements, the light goes through the aperture, which is the hole in the lens that allows a certain amount of light through. The aperture is located in the rear part of the lens. Photographers adjust the aperture to maximize or minimize the amount of light entering the camera. The aperture also affects the range of sharpness. Setting the aperture to its smallest f-stop number equates to "opening the lens" to a ""wider aperture," in photo slang, to allow in more light. So as the hole gets larger to allow in more light, less depth of field is achieved. As the hole becomes smaller, more depth of field results. Opening the aperture reduces depth of field for a smaller range of sharpness, and stopping down increases the range of sharpness. You now have the power to do something with your camera that you can't do with your eyes – make objects at different distances vary in sharpness.

F-stop numbers

F-stop numbers represent the size of an aperture's opening. Small-numbered f-stops represent larger openings than big-numbered f-stops. This seemingly illogical relationship confounds many people new to photography, who don't know that an f-stop is the product of dividing the length of the lens (front element to back element) by the diameter of the aperture opening. Most lenses have a range of f-stops that can be changed by the user or the camera's programming. If a lens ranges from f2 to f22, this means f2 allows in the most light while f22 allows in the least light. Furthermore, f2 produces the least depth of field while f22 provides the most depth of field. The range of f-stops will vary from lens to lens.



Figure 6.1 *This graphic of a lens shows various aperture settings that let in varying amounts of light.*

(SOURCE: MIRJANAJOVIC/ISTOCK VECTORS/GETTY IMAGES)

Inside the Camera Body

After the light has moved through the lens elements and aperture, it needs to reach the recording surface. Some cameras use a mirror to reflect incoming light to a viewfinder made of a prism or mirror. The most common type of camera using a mirror is the single-lens reflex (SLR, or DSLR for the digital version). The mirror enables the user to see the scene by looking into the optical viewfinder. Because the light moves through the lens, up from the mirror and into the optical viewfinder, users get to quickly see the image with clarity.

Almost every DSLR moves the mirror upward, causing a

momentary blackout effect as light passes underneath the mirror, so the light can pass under the mirror and to the sensor. The rapid movement of the mirror causes a problem known as camera shake, which can contribute to pictures being blurry. Camera designers have resolved some of the problems with new "mirrorless" designs that send an electronic signal to the window on the back of the camera, known as a live view on the DSLR. Although the mirrorless designs allow for quieter picture taking and smaller camera bodies, the electronic viewfinders tend to suffer from a lag not present with optical viewfinders.

Shutter vibration and sound

With or without a mirror, the light needs to hit the sensor. Two kinds of shutters allow the pixels of the sensor to receive the light. The traditional kind is the mechanical shutter of a focal plane type, which involves moving two metal shutters out of the way and putting them back in place. Photographers often prefer quieter picture taking because it allows them to work more stealthily. Some cameras allow users to choose the volume and sound of the shutter, in order to allow for both quiet photography and a more traditional experience.

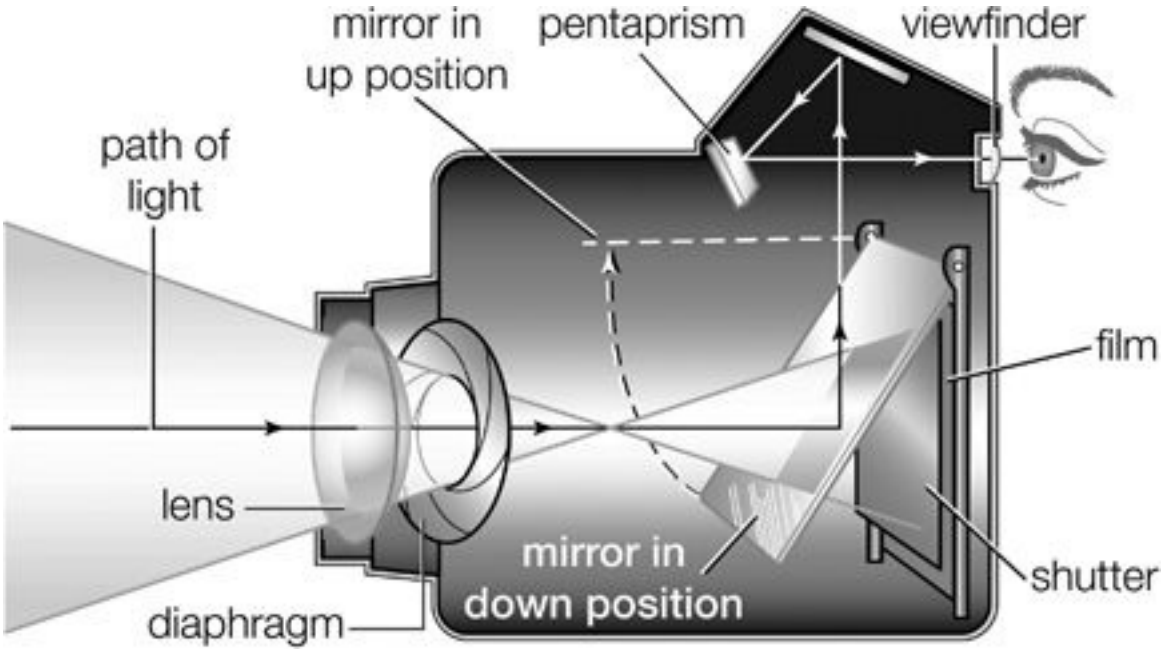


Figure 6.2 *Camera body with labeled parts.*
(SOURCE: ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA/UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/GETTY IMAGES)

The shutter can remain can remain “open” longer to allow in more light or shorter to freeze action. The problem with “slower” shutter speeds is that movement, either by the subject or the photographer, results in blurry pictures. Because “faster” shutter speeds freeze action, those like 1/250, 1/500 and 1/1000 are used to accurately capture the moments of action. Slower shutter speeds, such as 1/125, 1/60 and 1/30 are best for non-moving subjects or to intentionally show action as a blur, and they frequently require a tripod.

Choosing the Right Tool for the Job

Anyone, professional or amateur, needs to understand how a camera works to be able to choose the right camera for the subject. Sometimes, the ever-so-convenient cell phone will do the job, but other times only a professional DSLR will suffice.

The cell/mobile phone camera

The mobile phone has revolutionized photography because, for many people, it is a ubiquitous tool. There is a popular saying: “The best camera is the one you have with you.” For now, the cell phone camera has significant limitations. These limitations include the following issues:

- While the regular zoom lens is an optical zoom – meaning the optics physically move to zoom in and out – the cell phone uses a digital zoom, which crops and enlarges the image. The resulting photograph does not have the same image quality as one made with an optical zoom.
- If you want your subject to fill your frame, the cell phone user must be close to the subject. Your feet become your zoom lens.
- Regular cameras take pictures first and foremost, and are usually not useful for sending images. Smart cell phones do all sorts of things, so the camera is not a priority, thus leading to weaker images.

The quality of mobile phone cameras will continue to improve, although they will remain inferior in image quality to cameras with

larger sensors. For now, the mobile phone camera will suffice for still shots of people under good lighting and well-lit landscapes where fine detail hardly matters.

Compact camera

The compact camera market is dying from cell phone popularity. As the sensors in cell phone cameras improve in size, pixel count and programming, the compact camera's superior qualities are reduced and become less significant. One of the few advantages of the compact camera compared to the cell phone is its lens, which is typically an optical zoom lens that produces a superior image. Cell phone users have to move to make their subject larger or smaller, while people with regular cameras can zoom in or out.

Furthermore, many compact cameras are easier to hold than cell phones. Better ergonomics enable camera users to make pictures without the blurriness caused by camera shake. Compact cameras also tend to have more manual control options than cell phone cameras for greater creative control.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

The table below represents the characteristics of different categories of cameras. Some categories may have a wide range of levels of camera.

	Cell phone	**Compact**	**Mirrorless system**	**DSLR system**
Types	Camera built into phone; tend to have similar options	Lenses cannot be changed; almost all models are cheapest in price	Most models are at advanced consumer to enthusiast level, but professional models have emerged	Inexpensive camera body and one lens kits typically start around $500; professional model bodies cost thousands of dollars
Portability	Easy	Convenient	Convenient to somewhat inconvenient	Inconvenient

Best uses	Unexpected moments; subtle photographs; well-lit scenes	Family gatherings when a cell phone isn't good enough	Travel and walk-around photography	Difficult subjects, like motion and bad lighting
Best outputs	Mobile devices, and small and medium screens	Mobile devices, most screens and small prints	From screen to finer printing	From screen to finer printing

Mirrorless and DSLR systems

Two camera designs are popular with advanced amateurs and professionals: mirrorless and DSLR systems. These systems allow for interchangeable lenses, which are typically of higher quality than built-in lenses. Because of their larger sensors, better lens options and quicker operating functions, the mirrorless and DSLR interchangeable-lens systems are the preferred choices for professional work.

Most mirrorless and DSLR systems are popular because of their sensors' sensitivity ratings, or the light-absorbing properties of the sensor. Sensitivity is identified by the ISO, for International Organization for Standardization, and is represented by numbers. The higher the ISO number the less light you will need to capture the image. Higher numbers also increase the risk of image degradation through color distortion and reduced sharpness.

Each individual sensor produces a picture element known as a pixel. Having more pixels enables larger printing but not necessarily better-looking images. Take a 10-megapixel camera, for example.

ISO	**≤ *200***	**200–400**	**400–800**	**Above 800**
Detail/color	Best	Slight decline in quality visible	Continual slight decline in better cameras, but cell phones and compacts show significant decline	Loss of quality becomes more noticeable with higher ISOs and smaller sensors
Uses	Sunny days; studio	Action on sunny or slightly	Action with darker outdoor	Low-lighting with people

	photography	overcast day	lighting; well-lit indoor scenes without action	when tripod can't be used, people moving
Cameras	All work best in this range	Decline least visible in larger sensor cameras, like DSLR and mirrorless; may be top of range for many cell phone and compact cameras	Reproduction with cell phones and compacts will show significant visual noise (loss of detail, color inaccuracies in shadows)	The best DSLR and mirrorless cameras show significant superiority; cell phones and compacts shouldn't be used unless no other camera is available

This camera would have a 10-million-pixel sensor, which is really 10 million individual sensors working together.

There is no perfect camera because certain situations call for specific cameras. It is important to understand the basic principles of photography and the various camera functions to determine which camera you need. While the photographer's vision is more important than the camera, a picture can't be made without one.

The Photographer's Vision

Photographers organize various objects within a frame when they construct images. Photographers use various visual composition skills to make mundane subjects appear more interesting.

Design basics

Before getting into framing, it is helpful to understand some fundamental design principles. Everyone knows what a "line" is, but not everyone knows that different lines communicate different ideas. A horizontal line across the frame is familiar and reassuring because it resembles the horizon we are all familiar with. For example, it is reassuring to walk along an even and flat floor, but it is not reassuring to walk across a jagged and angled floor. As a line appears thinner, the line communicates more lightness, airiness, delicateness and softness than a thicker line. As a line becomes thicker, it also becomes more solid and almost trustworthy.

Vertical lines are more dynamic than horizontal lines because they run perpendicular to the reassuring horizontal lines. Vertical lines are also commonplace in our environments, yet they are not as reassuring as horizontal lines because they move up and down while we tend to look left and right.

A diagonal line would seem to be the average of the two and feel moderately reassuring. However, diagonal lines are considered action lines because they suggest movement and following them forces us to look both across and up through a plane. Photographers and other visual communicators use diagonal lines to create excitement, motion and drama. Use caution when emphasizing diagonal lines. In most cases, they should appear naturally in the environment, such as a railroad crossing sign or the Y-intersection road sign. Avoid tilting the camera at an angle to force diagonal lines. As Tom Ang noted in "Picture Editing", the horizontal and vertical lines of subjects should usually run parallel to the sides of pictures.



Figure 6.3 *This image demonstrates the power of lines to give weight – the thick black lines – and to give direction, because the repeating, thick lines move your eyes from the*

right/front to the left/back.

Faces

Photography frequently involves faces, especially journalistic photography. People read newspapers, magazines and websites and people have a tendency to be drawn to other people. Trees, puppies and kittens do not consume media, so photojournalists should use them sparingly. The most dramatic way to represent a face is to show it straight on or in profile. The angled face may have become popular because it shows both sides but emphasizes a so-called "better side," yet this perspective is not as dramatic as the alternatives. Expressions also matter to photographers, who may look at hundreds of frames of a subject, looking for just the right appearance.

In addition, facial features often allow photographers to showcase emotion and feeling while capturing key moments in events. For example, a photo of a player who has just scored a game-winning touchdown will have more value if that player's face is prominent in the shot. The smile, the tears of joy and the expression of satisfaction all convey the elation of the moment. Conversely, a player who just lost the game on that same touchdown will also showcase emotion within the moment. The sadness on that player's face can tell a story just as easily and as powerfully.



Figure 6.4 *The photograph of this young man conveys value through the accentuation of his facial features, which clearly denote his displeasure.*
(COURTESY OF MELISSA BEYER)



Figure 6.5 *This image demonstrates the principles of repetition of pattern and branches' weighty lines as strength. Images can contain more than one principle as this one does. Notice how the snow-covered bird's nest breaks up the repetition of pattern and its roundness contrasts against the heavy lines.*

Patterns

Many visual communicators use repetition to increase interest in a picture. This practice shows the same or similar objects multiple times in a photograph. Repetition can be found in the hurdles during a track meet, students standing in line buying books and the rows of desks in a classroom. A photographer or designer will often provide some element that stands out from this repetition, however. Maybe a runner has tripped over a hurdle while the rest of the racers clear them or one shopper is falling asleep in the checkout line or a student sits at a desk looking befuddled.

VIEW FROM A PRO

MELISSA LYTTLE

Melissa Lyttle is a photojournalist on the "Enterprise Team" of the Tampa Bay Times, which produces a monthly narrative journalism magazine. This affords her the opportunity to spend more time with her subjects and colleagues than most photo journalists can when working for daily news papers.

"I always try to find out everything I can about the story or subject beforehand, and have a conversation with the subject if possible before making a picture, so I can do the best job of putting myself in the right place at the right time," she said. "And then I'm usually on the road, trying to spend as much quality time on the assignment as possible before publication."



Figure 6.6
Melissa Lyttle.

The magazine's team approach requires more collaboration than many other photo journalists have with their colleagues.

"A typical week for me right now consists of a budget meeting on Monday, planning out the week with the team of writers I'm assigned to," Lyttle said. "We all bring story ideas to this pitch meeting and bounce things off of each other before they're fully formed to get feedback and help shaping the idea. The rest of the week I'm usually in research mode or photography mode."

Lyttle said she didn't jump straight into magazine teamwork. She studied journalism in college and she had four internships, including one at her current employer. She was employed at the Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel for five years before rejoining the Times.

She said practice has been the key to helping her hone her photography skills at each stage of her career.

"The only way you're going to get better at anything is by doing it," she said. "Plain and simple. If you want to get better at photographing news, listen to a police scanner and send yourself out to cover things."

Even though subjects differ, Lyttle said she approaches scenes by looking for three things: "Moment, light and composition – always," she said.

She said beginning photographers should work on the basics to improve their craft. Fundamentally, they need to learn to make sharp photographs by focusing on the simple things.

"As simple as this sounds, it's probably focus and a steady hand," she said. "I've seen way too many blurry, unusable photos from photographers just learning."

STABILITY

The ability to keep the camera steady is one of the toughest things for beginning photographers. Here are several suggestions to help you improve stability:

- Lean on something: Find a stationary object that will help you keep your body stable. This object can be anything from a tree to a wall, as long as it is sturdy and will prevent you from wobbling.
- Lower your center of gravity: Although this can change your perspective, you can squat down into a crouch or sit on the ground to help you become more stable.
- Use a stabilizing device: Tripods and monopods are great tools to help keep your camera stable. In addition, other everyday items can become stabilizing devices. You can set your camera on a table or a chair. If you are concerned about the camera sliding around, invest in a beanbag and place the camera on that.
- Focus on your breathing: If you are panicking about the shoot or if

the adrenaline is running high for you, you will likely twitch and thus create blurry or unstable photos. Focus on slowing your breathing and depress your shutter when you exhale.

Color and Grayscale

Photographers must also contend with the issues of color and grayscale when making and editing photographs. Certain colors attract more attention than others, and some photographers look for bold colors in scenes. Photographers refer to images that stand out for their color or grayscale contrast as ones that "pop."

A color image that pops has many bright, bold colors or one or two colors that jump from plainer surroundings. An image of a field of tulips pops if well lit by the sun, as does a red barn against a blue sky. Naturally occurring images can pop, but the intensity and direction of the light can make it challenging for photographers working to a deadline. Some photographers use shortcuts like Instagram or Adobe Photoshop to saturate their images for attention, but these tend to look unrealistic. Additionally, news organizations frown on the significant alteration of images because the images no longer represent the reality of the scene.


TELEPH

Figure 6.7 *The red of the traditional British telephone booth and the bright green of the foliage create an image that leads to a great color pop. See the color image on the companion site at: www.focalpress.com/cw/filak.*


Santa Fe

Figure 6.8 *In the color version of this image, shown on the companion website, you can see how the photographer captured the ambient color produced by the lights, thus also capturing the mood of a big city at night. www.focalpress.com/cw/filak, for the color figure.*

Light as color

The color of light can also create a mood, so photographers use the ambient light (light in the environment) to communicate the essence of a place. Photographers often manually set the color balance on their cameras so the camera doesn't compensate for the color of the light. A dreary office is enhanced by showing the green from the fluorescent lights; two people holding hands on the beach look better against the yellow-red light of a sunset; and the bluish noon sunlight makes the devilish downward shadows look even more unfriendly. Consider the color of light before leaving the camera on auto white-balance. The color of the light can help to tell the story, too

The ambient color produced by the street and car lights in Figure 6.8 result in a color effect that appears somewhat unnatural, yet also authentic to anyone who has been out at night in a big city. If the photographer had used an auto white-balance approach to compensate for the color, the scene might feel less authentic. The effect is similar to that of an incandescent light bulb, which produces a warmish yellow color compared to midday light. That light may not appear natural compared to neutral daylight, but getting rid of that color in a photo makes a warm indoor scene look like it was taken outdoors.

Old-school pop

Grayscale images, popularly known as black and white, can pop because of their contrast, which is the range of tones between black and white in an image. High-contrast images have fewer tones but pronounced darker and lighter tones, while low-contrast images have pronounced gray tones in the middle section of the grayscale. Images with a slight increase in contrast can offer a more realistic image, still with some pop.

Whether you want color or grayscale pop, muted tones or realism, you can change the settings in the camera to produce these effects.

Some cameras have menu options to show scenes with saturation or with muted colors. Depending on the make and model of the camera, this option can be found under color mode or art filters. If you are working for online publication and not print, you will want your camera to produce Red-Green-Blue (RGB) images, not Cyan-Magenta-Yellow-Black (CMYK). Properly setting the camera options will help to provide the color representation you want.

SHOWING TEXTURE

One of the toughest aspects for photographers is showing a subject's texture. Visible texture enhances the appearance of reality because the photograph seems to be more lifelike. Most objects, like wood, grains and metal, require sharp representation to show their textures. The focus has to be precise when the texture needs to stand out. Photographers can improve their chances of locking in the focus if they use a tripod and a deeper depth of field.

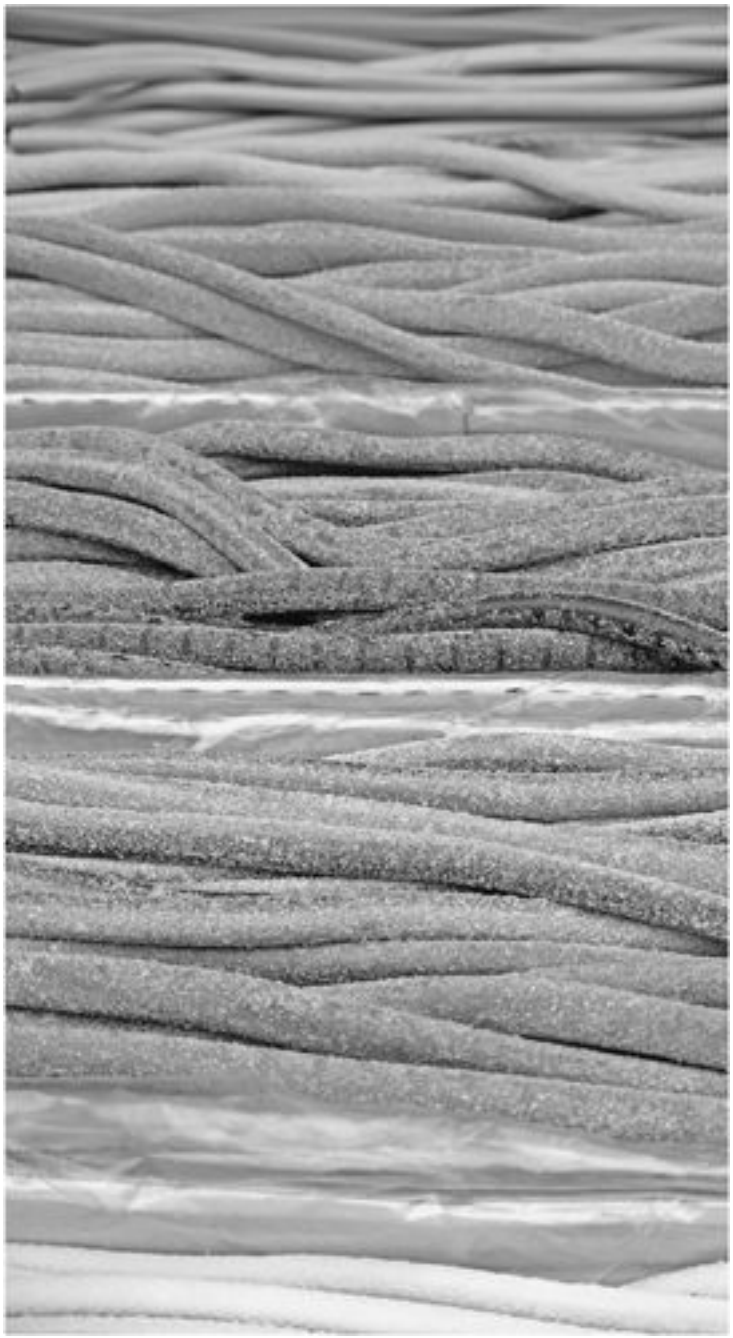


Figure 6.9 *See the companion website, www.focalpress.com/cw/filak, for the color figure of the candy ropes.*

Notice how the candy ropes appearing sharpest also reveal the most texture, thus also feeling more realistic. While all the ropes are covered in sugar, the ones in focus appear to have more sugar because their texture is more visible.

Framing

The over-reliance on centering is one of the worst forms of redundancy in photography, second only to parents who tell their children to smile for the camera. This is not to suggest a subject should never be centered. An example of centering frequently seen in the press is the mug shot. This head-and-shoulders shot has equivalent space around the head to the frame, with the exception of the greater space under the chin. While the head is not perfectly centered, its close posi tion ing to the center demonstrates the limited value of this composition.

A centered subject has the ability to draw attention to it because of the habit of the viewer to look in the middle. A centered composition also tends to be symmetrical in design, so the picture looks balanced.

A way to simplify the composition is to exclude other visual elements, either by not having other details around or using a telephoto lens. The subject takes over the frame through its isolation from the rest of the visual world. If you want your single subject to command attention, don't place any other details in the frame. In contrast, the scaling of visual elements emphasizes a centered subject by making it larger than the other visual elements. Photographers will get closer to the subject to make it appear larger than other things in the frame, which makes the subject appear more important.

A wide-angle lens, for example, inherently represents reality but is often perceived as a distortion. Whatever is closest to the lens becomes larger, and objects quickly become smaller in the distance. This is sort of like the effect of holding a pencil up to your face while also seeing the skyscraper in the background. They look to be the same size, but you know your pencil is not as large as a skyscraper because your mind rationalizes the relationship. Some photographers center their subjects in the frame with the wide-angle lens by getting close to the subject, which emphasizes the subject and reduces the size of the background elements. The background may appear sharp because of the depth of field, however. For example, some photographs of a singer will place that person in front with the band members smaller in the background.



Figure 6.10 *This is an example showing how centering is not necessarily boring. All the lines lead you to the man in the alley, but the photo is not just about him. Otherwise, he'd be too small.*

Playing by the Rule of Thirds

A more popular way to compose is to apply the Rule of Thirds, which isn't so much a rule as it is a highly recommended asymmetrical composition. Some cameras and image-editing programs are making it easy to crop images following the Rule of Thirds by applying a simple 3-by-3 grid over the image. By cutting up the frame with two equally spaced horizontal lines and two equally spaced vertical lines, the frame is now divided into kind of a tic-tac-toe board. The Rule of Thirds requires the photographer to place the main element at the intersection of the lines. Imagine photographing a housing developer while trying to show the land and the emerging homes. A poorly composed photograph would place the developer in the center next to a house that dwarfs the person. A better composition would place the developer along one of the vertical lines with the head at the top intersection. Filling the

rest of the frame is the landscape of emerging homes. This composition allows the viewer to see the human subject easily, as well as the housing development that is the reason for the story.



Figure 6.11 *Image-editing software, like Adobe Photoshop, will allow you to view your images with the tic-tac-toe board superimposed on your image. This will help you see how the Rule of Thirds applies to each image you use.*

Perspectives

Photographers create interest by photographing from varied perspectives. Don't always take pictures looking straight on when you can lie on your back looking up, get up high to look down or look parallel to the ground. Photographers also move around subjects to see every side in order to find different aspects of the subject. A plain storefront may have a beautiful mural on its back wall, but you'll never know if you don't circle your subject.

Putting the Image Together

These concepts (centering versus Rule of Thirds; realism versus pop; color versus black and white) work with the technical requirements when photographing. For example, a subject may be

isolated from other visual elements in a variety of ways. A photographer might use a telephoto lens to reduce the space around the subject, along with applying wider aperture to minimize the depth of field. In this same scenario, the photographer might find a brightly colored background distracting, so might use a grayscale mode to create a more neutral background.

The most accessible approach to good composition and technique is simplicity. When you photograph a subject, try to approach it with the aim of showcasing the most important person, object or idea. Then, think about what supports or doesn't support that main idea. Distracting elements are objects in the frame that pull our eyes away from the internal, logical flow of the elements that are telling us the story. Light fixtures help us to see, but they appear in too many photo graphs for no good reason. If the light fixture isn't useful for storytelling, crop it out or move your position. Similarly, look for the edges of doors and window frames, hands, cars, soda pop bottles, trash cans and other objects that people tend to ignore because they are so ubiquitous. Beginning photographers tend to accept these objects as so organic to an environment that they don't think of finding a way to not show them.

Your feet make the greatest cropping tool. By moving around the subject, you can see new things and get rid of others. You can usually remove a distracting element if you zoom in or walk to a new position. Try moving to a new position rather than moving the objects out of the way or erasing them digitally later, as photographers consider these approaches to be unethical.

Simplifying your frame is the easiest way to compose, regardless of whether you center your subject or use the Rule of Thirds, or whether you use color or grayscale mode. This simplicity does not equate to being simplistic. For example, a person moving should be shown with more of the frame ahead of the subject instead of behind it. This lead space allows the viewer to imagine the subject moving through that space. This is simplifying your frame, but a simplistic cropping would crop in on the runner with no lead space at all, isolating the subject from the contextual space.

The following two photos show the difference between a complex composition and a simple composition. (See Figures 6.12 and 6.13.)

The photo of the different flags intentionally confuses the viewer

because you don't know where to look, while the photo with the single flag gives direction by following the flag down and to the back.

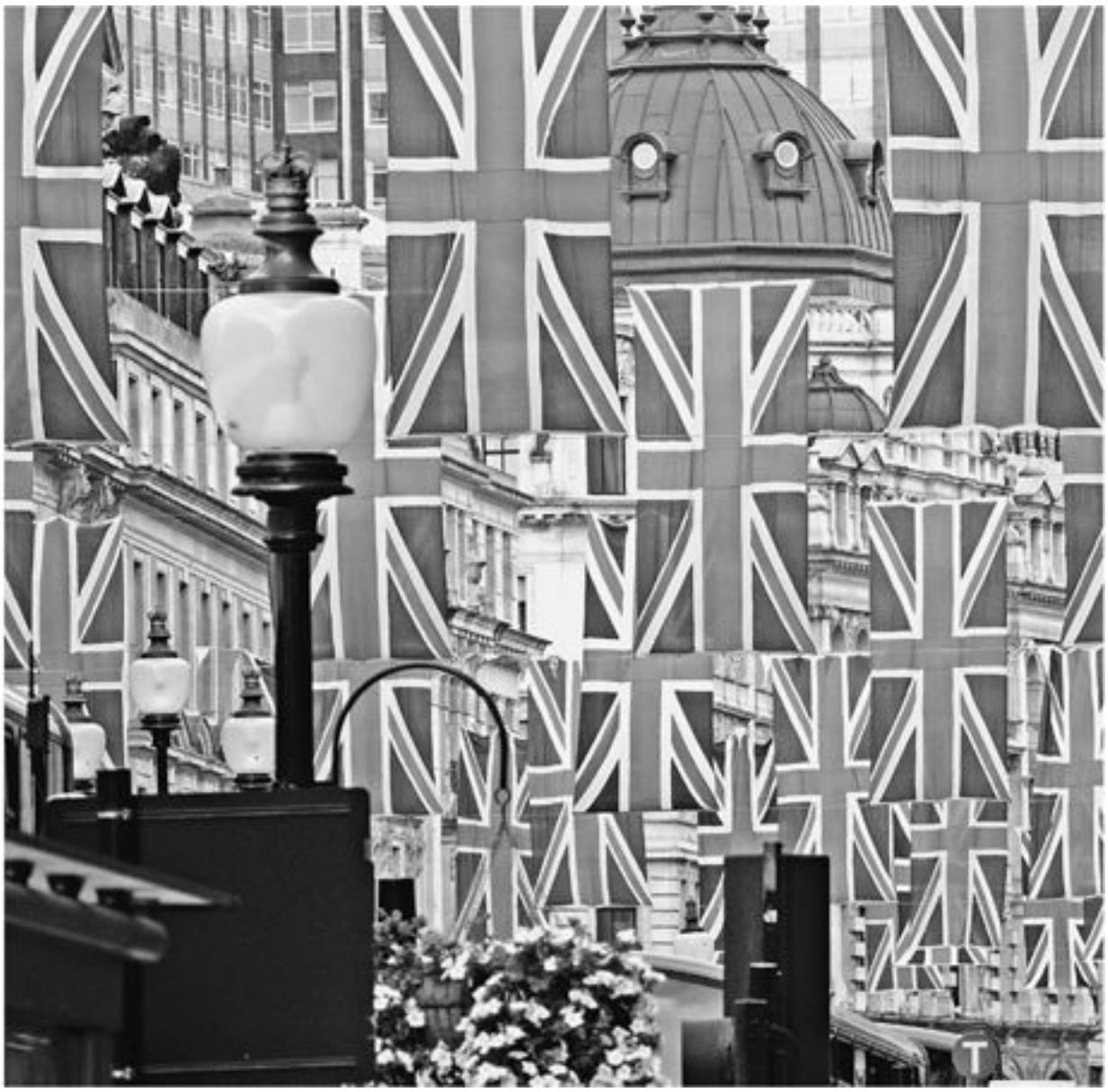


Figure 6.12 *See the companion website, www.focalpress.com/cw/filak, for the color figure.*



Figure 6.13 *See the companion website, www.focalpress.com/cw/filak, for the color figure.*

How to Construct a Picture Series

A picture series also benefits from simplified frames because each photograph offers the viewers a specific aspect of the story. The visual anchor may change photo-to-photo, or the surrounding context or characters may change while the visual anchor remains the same. In either case, the series relies on a thread. For a picture series to become a story, the set of images demands more informational context and a tighter visual thread.

Some publications use online picture galleries to show the public an array images not good enough to make it into the print product. Other publications use the galleries as an opportunity to increase Web traffic. Unfortunately, too many galleries are full of images that fail to interest anyone outside of the friends and family members of the subjects. Because the galleries are a dumping ground for mediocrity, they are not structured in any coherent form.

In contrast to most online picture galleries, photographic series

and stories rely on content and ordering. The photographic series is more interpretive than the photo story because there aren't traditional rules of lensing and content. The series of images minimizes context and leaves the audience to interpret the overall meaning. The series often provides little or no text to explain the images, and viewers are encouraged to come to their own interpretation as if listening to a string of interpretive songs.

The photographic story, as photojournalism professor Greg Lewis explains, is based on the seemingly ancient practices of Life magazine. Life editors expected their photographers to return with wide (also known as long) shots for context, medium perspective to bring the viewer into the scene, and close-up shots to show detail. Images should show the subject's faces, interactions with others when applicable, the passage of time or of a sequence when appropriate.

The photo story has evolved since the heyday of Life. Newspapers carried on the photo story, although photojournalists still felt limited by the constraints of space in printed newspapers and magazines. The emergence of online publishing led to initial promises that photo-journalists would get to have more opportunities to do photo stories with as many photos as they desired. The promises quickly dissolved for most photojournalists because of the time required to make a high-quality photo story. Relatively few photojournalists received the opportunities to explore long-form photo stories.

Multimedia Photojournalism

The new visual journalist has to move fluidly between still photography and video recording. One of the biggest challenges is deciding when to shoot stills and when to shoot video, because differences exist between the forms of technology and the approaches to shooting in these media. On the technical side, some newer hybrid cameras – those with still and video options – allow for a still image to be taken in the video mode. Some cameras capture a frame from the video when the user presses the still photography shutter button while the video is being recorded. Other cameras aren't as proficient at recording the still during the

video, instead pausing the video for the still to be taken.

Cameras that record 4K-video produce frames of high enough quality to pull and use as a replacement for still shots. As prices drop on 4K, many convergence journalists will choose this format because of its ability to pull stills as needed, without having to worry about quality. The downside to this is the space and time involved in editing. Larger storage devices are needed to hold so many high-resolution frames, and finding the best frame for a still image will require a great investment of time.

Visual journalists who want to be active in both still and video recording need to think about the technology needed to perform hybrid visual journalism. On the side of ease, the best smart phones can record HD video and have a port for microphones. Again, the smaller sensor will produce limitations on image quality. The mirrorless camera systems, in general, take better video than DSLR cameras, and many have ports for microphones. As stated earlier, they are lighter, which is often preferred for multimedia work. Many hybrid cameras are simply still cameras that have movie modes, and their microphones will pick up distracting sounds like a lens zooming.

FINAL FOUR

If you take nothing else away from this chapter, here are four things you should remember:

1 The occasional centering of subjects is good, but consistently centering subjects is bad. Move high and low and in a circle to truly understand your subject and create more diversity in your compositions.

2 Look for the strong visual elements such as line weight, movement and repetition of pattern to organize your picture, as well as textures and the ambient color of light to enhance the realism of a photo.

3 Picture galleries should only be as long their ability to maintain interest. Displaying boring photos will make viewers stop looking and possibly leave the site.

4 Photo stories tell their tales through both the variety of the images and the coherence of the message. This form is more engaging than picture galleries but photo stories are more difficult to create.

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Good storytelling remains dependent on good writing and understanding how the value-added features of sound and pictures combine with the words to convey information. This said, the use of audio and video in journalism allows the reporter (storyteller) to add the "show" to the "tell." When done correctly, mixing text, audio components and visual elements helps audiences learn about events and remember information that impacts their lives.

In this chapter, we will cover the basic principles required to make the added value of sounds and images to a broadcast news or Web story worth readers' and viewers' time. We will also cover how to write for this form of journalism in a way that will help your audience consume the information you present to them.

Writing for the Ear

Relaying information to your audience comes down to teaching your listeners and viewers what you believe is important. The successful conveyance of an event or issue requires you to communicate the facts as if you were actually talking to your audience. Writing for the ear means writing the way you talk – as if you are starting off the story with, "Hey, did you hear about . . . ?" The essence of writing for the ear includes both knowing how to write clearly and concisely, as well as ensuring a smooth delivery for the person actually reading the script.

For reporters and anchors, who may or may not do their own writing, conversational style reflects a convergence between the written word and the spoken word. Writing in short sentences in simple subject–verb–object sequence characterizes the "easy to understand the first time" quality of broadcast newswriting. (For more on stylistic aspects of this form of writing, see Chapter 2.)

Show and Tell: How It Helps the Audience

The addition of audio and video becomes a way to increase the potential for learning and understanding on the part of the audience, with the narration enhanced by an additional mode of conveying information. As mentioned in Chapter 7, this is known as dual coding, which means that the listener or viewer receives

information via two “codes” or channels. We typically see dual coding in the form of video being narrated by a reporter or anchor. The spoken words accompany the images on screen and we both hear and see the information.

Onscreen graphics, whether as an over-the-shoulder graphic or a full-screen graphic during a television news story, also provide dual coding. The use of visuals that relate to the audio portion of a news story increases the potential for recalling that information later – we associate the words spoken with an image because they have been received via more than one code.

Word and Picture Overlap

Researchers of television news consistently note that people tend to have greater understanding, recall and interest when television news stories are presented with interesting visuals. However, because people watching the news split their attention between the sound and the images, it is important to build a certain degree of redundancy into a news story. Also called semantic overlap, this means that the video should match the audio narration and vice versa – if a full-screen graphic of text is shown onscreen, the narration the anchor provides should match the words onscreen.

Too much overlap between the verbal and visual, however, can be just as detrimental as too little. If you have audio and video that present identical information, you can bore or offend your audience members. Good journalists strive to strike a balance when it comes to this issue.

Most information gain occurs when the video portion of a television news story complements the audio narration. If the words don’t match the pictures, audience members must decipher the onscreen visuals at the cost of paying attention to the audio narration. Research has found that, when this happens, people tend to create more negative thoughts about the story and its presentation. Mismatching video and audio has been found to impair learning. Whoever writes a news story should also know what video footage will accompany it. Writers must work closely with the production team members who will visually translate the news story script into what will appear onscreen.

Similarly, when an audio-only soundbite is used in a radio or podcast news story, the story copy should explain who is talking during the soundbite. The time constraints of radio and television news, however, require the writer to be economic with words and pictures so the maximum amount of information is conveyed in a minimum amount of time.

Audio

Radio is the original form of broadcast journalism. The addition of the recorded or live words of a news source is the audio version of the direct quote in print news – and serves much the same function as quotes in newspaper and online stories. Radio (or audio) journalism relies on three story forms based on the use of audio:

1 the reader
2 the wrap-around
3 the package.

In radio, newscasts typically make use of all formats.

The reader

In a reader, the announcer reads the story in a straightforward manner on the air. This is the easiest way to get the news to the audience. Readers are the shortest story form time-wise and typically run between 15 to 20 seconds.

The wrap-around

The wrap-around uses reporter copy to introduce a soundbite and then uses additional copy to augment what the source said. The anchor reads the story, introduces the recorded actuality then continues with the rest of the story. Wrap-arounds can include up to two soundbites before the story becomes cumbersome and confusing.

A good analogy of the wrap-around is a sandwich – the script before and after the actuality could be considered two pieces of bread and the actuality is the filling. Wrap-arounds are read live during a newscast, with either the anchor or the producers playing

the actuality at the proper point of the story. Wrap-around stories can run between 40 and 45 seconds.

HOW TO PRESENT THE SOUNDBITE

When introducing an actuality/soundbite, the anchor should

1 identify the person speaking with his or her name and title
2 provide a hint as to what the listener will hear.

Redundancy in the case of introducing a soundbite prepares the listener for the actuality itself without using the same words the source is using. You need to avoid using the exact words that are heard in the soundbite as the introduction for the soundbite. Also, don't be lazy in your writing – to introduce a soundbite with "So and so had this to say" is just as bad as parroting the source in the introduction. It takes no training to write, " . . . had this to say."

Here are some examples. The colon at the end of the intro sentence means a soundbite is to follow. After each introduction, read the recorded audio transcript to hear how each intro sounds:

Recorded audio from Mayor Roberta Roberts chosen as a soundbite

It's really a matter of whether or not we value our children's education, so this sales tax increase shows that improving our education system has finally become the topmost consideration in our community.

Bad: The "parrot" introduction

MAYOR ROBERTA ROBERTS SAYS IT'S REALLY A MATTER OF WHETHER OR NOT WE VALUE OUR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION:

Just as bad or even worse: The "lazy" introduction

MAYOR ROBERTA ROBERTS HAD THIS TO SAY:

Better: The paraphrase set-up

MAYOR ROBERTA ROBERTS SAYS THAT VOTERS HAVE SHOWN THAT THEY'RE WILLING TO PAY AN EXTRA FEW CENTS AT THE CASH REGISTER FOR BETTER PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

The soundbite itself usually lasts no more than 15 seconds. The actuality you choose should be something that the interviewee says that you cannot paraphrase without losing its impact. Just like a tasty sandwich filling, choose a sentence or two from an interviewee that

adds flavor to your story. Actualities should contain information that you can't say better yourself – it should be "colorful" in terms of the language used and provide interest as well as information.

When choosing soundbites from interviews, the audio quality itself needs to be good. The source's voice should be clear and free of invasive background noise. Too much natural sound drowning out the speaker's words will make the actuality unusable. If the background sound is more prominent than the source's words, the listener will focus on the noise, which negates the purpose of getting a source to speak to you.

Before leaving a scene or the interview, a brief playback is a good idea so that, if necessary, you can rerecord the interview. This is also a good idea for recorded phone interviews, so you don't have to call the source back or try to find another source when you're on a deadline. It is better to discard a bad piece of audio rather than using it and detracting from the story.

NATURAL SOUND

The inclusion of natural sound can provide an aural context for the listener and an immediacy to the story itself. In a story about an outdoor music festival, for instance, faint music would add value and depth to the piece. However, if the music itself is louder than the speaker's voice, then the soundbites you collect will be worthless.

A short excerpt of natural sound can serve as actuality, as long as it is preceded by an introduction so the listener knows what the sound is and as long as the natural sound is discernible. In feature or human-interest stories, natural sound adds context and variety. The sound of hooves clopping on cobblestones in a feature story about a blacksmith who crafts horseshoes, for instance, gives the story an added dimension.

Use natural sound in audio-only stories with care. Effective use of natural sound requires clear, recognizable sounds and noises that precede a brief description in the script. For example, a reporter could include a few seconds of parade sounds before saying something like, "Today's Saint Patrick's Day Parade transformed downtown into a multicultural celebration." The script serves to confirm what the

listeners suspect: They have just heard the sounds of a parade. Conversely, the same sentence could be used to introduce the natural sound, which would prepare the listeners for what they will hear next. The same principles of intros and outros used in audio news apply to video stories as well, as we discuss later in the section on video.

The package

The long form of the audio news story is the package. The term "package" implies it is self-contained and ready to give, just like a wrapped gift. Reporters usually produce their own packages in radio news, but editors may prepare some packages. Packages typically include soundbites from two sources, but two soundbites from the same source can work as well. The reporter is also responsible for writing the introduction to the package, which the news anchor will read on the air.

An introduction similar to the introduction that precedes an actuality in a wrap-around will precede a package. This form of storytelling usually runs from 60 seconds to 90 seconds. The introduction to the package itself should run no longer than 15 seconds.

Video

Television news stories are written in the same broadcast style as radio news, but the added element of video requires more information to be included on a page of script. TV news scripts thus are written in a double-column format, with the video information, including shot instructions and visual graphics, on the left side and the audio portion on the right side.

Just as any radio journalist should be able to read a script that someone else wrote, TV news scripts are written so that they can be aired without having to ask the writer any questions. In other words, the writers should have composed the script so that it can be handed off to others and easily understood.

TV NEWS SCRIPT EXAMPLE

TV NEW VO SCRIPT EXAMPLE

ALADDIN VO 9/21 6 PM WRITER: JONES	
	(STEPHANIE)
ANCHOR ON CAM E: ALADDIN	A LAS VEGAS LANDMARK IS CLOSING ITS DOORS TODAY.
START ENG/VO :00-:20	THE ALADDIN HOTEL-CASINO ENDS ITS 34 YEARS ON THE STRIP AS IT
CG: ALADDIN HOTEL-CASINO	MAKES WAY FOR A NEW RESORT. CLOSE TO 15-HUNDRED EMPLOYEES ARE BEING LET GO. THE HOTEL'S 17-STORY TOWER IS TO BE IMPLODED NEXT WEEK ... IT'LL BE THE FIFTH IMPLOSION HERE IN THE PAST FOUR YEARS. A NEW ALADDIN IS IN THE WORKS, WITH PLANS CALLING FOR 26-HUNDRED ROOMS AND A NEW MUSIC-THEMED HOTEL NEXT DOOR.
END ENG	

Figure 8.1 *A sample of a television script, which details both the words the reporter will speak and the elements that will appear on the screen during this story.*

In this example of a television news script for a VO, the left side indicates what will appear on screen and the right side indicates what the anchor reads. ANCHOR ON CAM means the story starts with the anchor on camera. E: ALADDIN means there is an effect titled "Aladdin." This tells the director to superimpose a graphic illustrating the story over the shoulder of the anchor. START ENG/VO means to roll the video (ENG stands for electronic news gathering, the term for "videotape"). The anchor reads the story as the video plays onscreen. CG: indicates what text will appear superimposed over the video as it plays. END ENG means the story is completed. The half-

underlines on the right side of the script let the anchor know when the videotape will start and when the story and video ends. The video portion of this story is assigned 20 seconds of newscast time.

Assignment editors traditionally assign videographers and reporters to stories based on the news plan for the day. The editors listen to the police and fire department scanners for breaking news and read news releases as well to determine what merits news coverage.

Reporters and videographers typically work together to cover news events. The reporter takes notes at the scene, conducts interviews and writes the story. The videographer decides what to shoot, sets up the equipment for interviews and records the reporter's stand-up or live shot. Both members of the team understand what makes for good writing and good video and they often assist each other throughout the process.

Video News Story Formats

Television newscasts rely on four basic forms of video storytelling, from simplest and shortest to most complex and longest:

1 the story read by the anchor on camera live during a newscast, known as an on-cam reader
2 the voice-over (VO)
3 the voice-over sound-on-tape (VOSOT)
4 the package.

Newscast producers decide which story format to use for each story they include. These story formats serve as the television versions of radio news stories, only now visuals accompany the verbal portion.

The on-cam reader

The on-cam reader story might have just the anchor speaking, or it could have an over-the-shoulder graphic onscreen while the anchor

reads the story. The onscreen graphic, created by the production team, typically consists of some kind of still photo or computer-generated picture and text that relates to the story itself. Again, the idea is to infuse the graphic with some redundancy with the news story copy so that it complements what the anchor says. Readers typically last 15 to 20 seconds.

The VO

The VO (voice-over) is basically narrated video. The anchor reads the news script over the video. The VO usually begins with the anchor onscreen for a sentence. At the beginning of the second sentence of the story, the screen cuts to video footage that has been edited to the script, with just a few extra seconds of video as padding in case the anchor reads the story more quickly than expected. An onscreen graphic or CG is superimposed over the lower part of the screen to indicate the geographic location of the story (such as city and state, or city and country). VOs typically run from 15 to 20 seconds, but more complicated VOs may run as long as 30 seconds.

The VOSOT

The VOSOT (voice-over sound-on-tape) serves as the video version of the wrap-around. The anchor is first on camera, and then the screen will cut to edited video that plays while the anchor reads the story. The video is broken up with a soundbite, with more video to follow. The VOSOT begins with the anchor onscreen reading the first sentence, and the VO starting usually at the start of the second sentence. The timing of the VO portion of the story is crucial, because the video editor relies on the timing indicated in the script to edit in the soundbite. The video editor then adds the remaining footage for the rest of the story which consists of the anchor-narrated VO. VOSOTs typically run from 30 to 45 seconds.

A soundbite source is identified during the soundbite video with an onscreen graphic usually consisting of two lines of text. The graphic normally includes the source's name and title, which is either an occupation or a short note explaining why that person matters to the story. For example, it would be irrelevant to identify

a witness to an accident with an occupation (for example, "accountant"). Instead, audience members would rather know how that person mattered to the story (for example, "accident witness"). As the writer of the story, you would be responsible for providing the production team with all the names and titles of the people involved in the soundbites.

The package

The package is really a recorded VOSOT that a reporter narrates and a videographer assembles. The anchor introduces the television package during the newscast itself. Even though the package is a self-contained, recorded story, it does require a scripted introduction. A good package intro uses enough detail to engage the viewers as it sets up the story to come. Similar to the introduction to a soundbite, a package intro should give a hint about the story itself, rather than simply telling the viewer that the reporter "has the story."

Sometime during the package itself, the reporter makes an appearance in a "stand-up." Stand-ups locate reporters at a scene, and allow them to comment on what is going on or what happened at that locale. The point of stand-ups is to place reporters in the field. These can be useful to fill in information for which there is no video or provide solid transitions between two disparate parts of a story. From more of a marketing standpoint, the stand-up can provide some interactivity between the reporter and the audience and provide an opportunity to attach the station ID to the story at hand.

In the stand-up, reporters become involved in the storytelling without actually becoming part of the story. However, sometimes reporters serve as participants for human-interest stories that require demonstrations – for example, a reporter might participate in a sporting event or celebratory festival to show viewers what it's like to be there as well as to provide additional visual interest for a story.

THE VIDEO ESSAY

The video essay (or audio visual montage) contains video and

natural sound edited in such a way as to tell a story without relying on voice-over narration. The images, natural sound and soundbites carry the storyline of an event or theme. Music may serve as the soundtrack as well.

The video essay is usually reserved for stories with high emotional content or for stories where the visuals are too complex or emotional for narration. The essay relies on the idea that a picture is worth a thousand words. At one end of the emotional spectrum, a video essay might reinforce the violence and horror of a disaster, such as the attacks in New York City on September 11, 2001. At the other end, video of a hot air balloon festival can use the colorful balloons and surrounding landscape to tell a happy and peaceful tale.

With the videographer serving as the producer, reporter and editor of the story, the video essay format allows for a greater degree of creativity and expression.

Video in a Converged Environment

The concept of converged media is important because it seeks to draw an audience from demographics that do not consume traditional news formats. While baby boomers watch newscasts from beginning to end, read daily newspapers and perhaps even listen to National Public Radio in their cars on the way to work, millenials generally rely on digital devices to consume news in small bites. This should not be read as saying either the boomers or the millenials are “worse” than each other. They each simply employ different news consumption habits. Conver gence efforts allow journalists to reach these groups in a way that best reflects how the group members consume news.

Converged media production could not have happened without two things: The development of digital video and the development of the bandwidth necessary to carry that video on the Web. We are now at the point where content and technology come together to provide the possibility of a rich, multimedia experience for viewers.

One of the bigger issues pertaining to video and the Web is the concept of “shovelware.” This term refers to the transferring of

content from traditional to digital platforms without a sense of the differences between the two. In print, this can mean copying and pasting a story from a newspaper to the Web. In broadcast, it usually means cutting story packages from a nightly newscast or stripping off the video from a TV broadcast and running the audio as a streaming sound or podcast file.

In some cases, these simple transfers make sense. The audiences between the platforms may differ, and thus the Web audience won't be seeing a rehash of what it already saw on the TV news. The approach is also easy, because it uses material that is already available and thus doubles the reach of the material with almost no effort. In other cases, the shovelware approach is just about being lazy and not adjusting your thinking when it comes to a convergent environment. Some video stories could be longer or shorter for Web audiences, depending on the content of the story and the interest level of the viewers. On-cam readers could be repackaged into a series of simple text briefs, as having the anchor read them for the Web offers almost no value.

The approaches to video journalism here all have value on both traditional and digital platforms. The trick to doing this kind of work well on the Web is to understand which forms of broadcast journalism translate best to the Web for each story and then approach your content accordingly.

VIDEO TERMINOLOGY

Video journalists have a terminology unique to their profession. Most of that terminology describes the various camera movements and shots used to create a strong video narrative. Below is a series of terms that video journalists use to describe camera movements and types of shots.

Pan, zoom and tilt

These moves occur without moving the supporting tripod or pedestal. A panning shot moves the lens in a horizontal direction, while a tilt moves the lens in a vertical direction. A zoom draws a subject closer via the manipulation of the lens. Not all lenses are zoom or "variable focal length" lenses, but they have become the standard in videography.

Push and pull

These movements are also made with the zoom lens, but where a zoom is done while the camera is in stand-by mode to set up a shot, both pushes and pulls are slow zooms either toward the subject (push) or away from the subject (pull), done while the camera is in record mode.

Dolly and truck
These moves involve not only the camera and lens, but also the tripod or pedestal to which the camera and lens are attached. A dolly moves the camera closer to or farther away from the subject, while a truck moves the camera horizontally to the subject. These moves generally require a lot of space and, while used heavily in film production, are not used as much in journalistic videography.

Establishing, long, medium and close-up shots
These types of shots represent the way film and video is typically shot for playback on a large screen or a television monitor. The establishing shot is typically a shot that sets the environment around a story. It could be a long shot of an apartment complex where firefighters battle a blaze or the inside room of a business where a newsworthy event took place. A long shot is taken from a distance, thus allowing the videographer to capture a wider swath of a scene. A medium shot presents video that is akin to what viewers would normally see with the naked eye. A close-up shot lets viewers see details that may not be apparent in a wider shot.

Cover and cutaway shots
These shots are taken specifically for the editing (or "post-production") process. Cover video is generally close-ups of hands performing some task. It should be a shot of something germane to the story being told. Cutaway video is more generic and is often B-roll (or secondary) video of the general scene. B-roll is used to visualize a news script, and is used to "fill in the gaps" between primary video, such as soundbites.

When *Not* to Use Video

The assumption for many people in the world of converged journalism is that video should be used for every story, which is not true. Video (or any other production element) should be used only

when it can help tell a story in an effective manner.

Most viewers of converged journalism sites do not want to watch a video of a city council meeting. Unless a reporter can find some compelling reason to use video, a text-based story would likely be a better approach to the topic. If the journalist decides to use video, however, video quality is certainly something to consider.

Video Quality

A story can be exceptionally compelling, but if the video quality is bad, you will have an ugly story. If you pay attention during the acquisition of video, you will have access to good video elements during the editing process that will make a story stand out.

Sound issues

Nothing ruins a video faster than bad audio. Journalists should be using equipment that features professional, grounded audio inputs (commonly called XLR). Whether microphones are wireless or wired, having a good mic and professional inputs will solve many problems. Journalists should plug a set of headphones into the camera to make sure they are getting good audio. Do not rely on the camera to adjust its own audio through "auto gain" circuits or other automated camera features. Manual control of audio is not difficult and is part of the videographer's art.

Lighting problems

Backlighting happens when a journalist positions a subject in front of a window or other bright, light-colored surface. The iris within the lens of the camera determines how much light will fall onto the light-sensitive chips within the camera. Positioning the subject like this will make it almost impossible to get good video.

Close the iris down to limit the light and your subject soon become a silhouette with no defining features at all. Open the iris up to get features on your subject, and the light coming from the background will cause the whole video frame to lose definition (commonly called "blown-out video"). The solution is to reposition your subject away from the light.

Visual interest

Video shot during interviews that will later be used for soundbites should contain some visual interest as well. Placing a news source within the context of his or her work or expertise, rather than at a desk, will provide visual interest and further enhance the source's value within the story. Similarly, the background visuals for reporter stand-ups for packages should place that reporter at the scene or in a context related to the story.

Take advantage of the environment and position your interviewees where lighting is optimal and the background adds something to the visuals. It could be as simple as moving an interview to another part of a room or even down the hall where some semblance of visual variety is happening. Always be aware of where you are, no matter if you are the reporter or the videographer. Creativity on the part of both team members, and appreciation for each other's strengths and ideas, will help to produce good quality video and stories.

These two reporter stand-ups were both shot at the same Renaissance Faire. The reporter stand-up in Figure 8.2 is framed well, but a bit boring. In comparison, the reporter in the stand-up in Figure 8.3 took advantage of the costumes available from an event vendor, creating a more creative and lighthearted image, inviting the viewer into the narrative of the story.

This reporter stand-up shows creativity, but it does not show well on small screens. Keep monitor size in mind when framing a shot to meet the criteria for good video on the Web.

The composition of this video serves as an example of good framing. While this shot is acceptable, the background could use a bit more visual interest (see Figure 8.4).

Video on the Web

Where and how your audience members access your video will determine if the video does a good job of conveying information to them. A small screen, such as a phone or tablet, will accentuate shaky video, so use a tripod, monopod or some other device to hold your camera steady. A small screen will make long and establishing

shots almost worthless unless the subject of the shot is scenic, so avoid these shots and concentrate on medium and close-up shots for your story. Use close-up and extreme close-up shots to heighten emotion, and medium shots for the bulk of your story. Finally, framing your shots can have a great impact, so remember to frame your video appropriately. (See Chapter 6 for a discussion of framing rules.)



Figure 8.2 *A standard version of a stand-up at a Renaissance Faire. This is simple, but a bit boring. However, it gets the job done.*



Figure 8.3 *An innovative approach to a stand-up at a Renaissance Faire. This reporter demonstrated a deeper level of engagement with the topic and was willing to try something different.*

Moving away from technology and into content, webcasting generally means individual short stories rather than full newscasts. In cases where the website is an offshoot of a television station, individual stories can be cut from the latest broadcast for inclusion on the website. The real downside of webcasting for many journalists is the loss of the more traditional news cycle. With the advent of first 24-hour cable news and then the Web, journalists have less time to get their stories produced, let alone actually thinking deeper about the implications of their stories for the communities they serve.



Figure 8.4 *Long shots like this one tend to play poorly on small video screens like phones. Consider your media platform before selecting video shots like this.*



Figure 8.5 *Medium shots of interview subjects play well on tablets and phones. Consider moving subjects to areas where they are easy to film and that add value to the overall interview.*

Shovelware, as noted above, refers to content posted on a station's website that comes directly from television newscasts. It's easy to post packages or newscast segments without any editing, and to upload story scripts from a reporter's computer. Because they are essentially self-contained entities, the package makes the optimal news story format for the Web.

The package easily translates to an audio-video story on a news station's website, as it can be uploaded, basically, "as is." The uploading of text in the form of a written package intro, along with hyperlinks within that text, essentially completes the process for posting a television news package online. For stories that were initially aired as live shots during a newscast, however, the in-studio anchor introduction is usually included in the posted video story. Other formats, such as the on-cam reader, the VO or VOSOT, don't lend themselves that well to an online version. These can easily be rewritten as print-only stories, with hyperlinks to their corresponding video, as long as that video is not too short.

VIEW FROM A PRO

JOE W. MORRISON JR.

Joe W. Morrison Jr. is an Emmy Award-winning journalist with nearly 30 years of broadcast news experience as a videographer, editor and producer. Morrison now owns a full-service video production company in central Florida, and produces a wide range of video projects for non-profit entities, legal firms, small businesses and families.



Figure 8.6
Joe W. Morrison Jr.

In his career as a videographer and editor, Morrison has shot and edited video for nearly every kind of story imaginable. He says that no matter what the subject matter – whether hard news or human interest features – good video is compelling.

"Good video makes you want to see more," Morrison said. "It stimulates the senses, entertains you and educates you. Good video takes you to another place and makes you glad you have eyes and ears." Lousy or poor video, on the other hand, does not connect viewers to the words being spoken in the telling of a story and the pictures being shown onscreen, which is the same conclusion that researchers have known for years regarding the overlap required for enhanced recall and understanding.

Whether it is a camera or an audio recorder, familiarity with the tools used for gathering audio and video is of utmost importance, he said. Morrison always has a battle plan before stepping out of the newsroom, but keeps his eyes and ears open for the unexpected.

"I always plan out ahead of time what I want to accomplish during a shoot," Morrison said. "You can do this, and yet still leave room (and time) for creative, spontaneous and

unexpected things that might come up during the shoot, and they almost always do come up, thank goodness."

The interplay of audio and video can never be understated, Morrison said, noting that even professionals can make ugly mistakes in this area.

"I've seen many shoots ruined because the videographer was too lazy to mic the subject or didn't monitor audio while recording it," he said. "I don't want bad audio to distract me and keep me from enjoying a story."

According to Morrison, future journalists must be able to work both in front of and behind the camera. Knowing what makes for good newswriting and good video is essential, especially in today's television news environment, Morrison added.

"Journalism today is an industry in a state of transition," he said. "Since newsroom staffers may be asked to do numerous jobs, it helps to have a wide variety of skills. There is never a substitute for good storytelling abilities."

FINAL FOUR

If you take nothing else away from this chapter, here are four things you should remember:

1 It's about storytelling. The basics of good storytelling serve as a foundation that prepares the videographer and the reporter to communicate information effectively to the audience. Beyond video that excites or grabs the attention of the viewer, use audio and video to tell the story.

2 It's about quality – technical and artistic. Good video has the potential to make an emotional impact on viewers. Skilled videographers apply their training as artists to spot interesting visual elements that relay emotion in some way as part of the larger story they are telling.

3 It's about knowing your equipment, through and through. Good audio and video require familiarity with the equipment. Audio and video are equally important in broadcast newsgathering. Extra noise, distracting sound and poor fidelity will kill a radio story. Poor audio, in turn, will kill even the best video.

4 It's about caring. Take pride in your craft and appreciate the effort it takes in bringing the news of the world to the people listening and watching your work. In the hectic world of broadcast and Web journalism you need to get it fast, but not at the expense of getting it right. The good journalist is always concerned about producing high-quality work.

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CHAPTER 5

Using Audio and Podcasts

INTRODUCTION

Audio is an exciting medium for journalism as it requires the audience to engage and use their imagination. This creates a special bond between the journalist and the listener. The key difference between audio and other news media is that it is the 'theatre of the mind' and allows you, the journalist, to paint pictures in the listener's head. No other medium has quite that privilege. We have a range of tools with which to create aural painting, including interviews, commentary, eyewitness accounts, background sounds, music and archive. BBC producer Chris Ledgard told us that he believes there is something special in the way that audio delivers to its audience. 'The power of the human voice is really strong and if you have voice coming out at you and saying something which is interesting and spikes your curiosity, then it's a way of drawing people into your story. We are all drawn to the human voice.'

Online audio is delivered in two main ways – as a downloadable file (e.g. in MP3 format) or streaming (for example: streaming audio radio stations via BBC iPlayer, iTunes and Spotify). Online audio packages are often referred to as podcasts, a term based on the Apple iPod. Podcasts have the advantage that they can be streamed from a website or downloaded if the audience has access to RSS feeds, iTunes or similar software. With the rise in the use of mobiles, tablets and iPads, the podcast is a very convenient 'time shift' format to download and listen to when convenient.

Internet audio stations and podcasts may be relatively new but the art of making good audio packages is not. For 80 years pure audio has almost exclusively come to us via the radio and many of the conventions of the radio news journalist can translate to the new world of converged media. In

this chapter we look at the tradition of high-standard professional audio journalism but we also encourage you to experiment and try new techniques. Online news sites are much better for experimentation than if you are working for long-standing radio news organizations. As with all journalism each generation has a different take on audio and they will change the way it is delivered. An example is that radio stations are increasingly being enjoyed on digital TV and via Internet streaming through apps on tablets and mobile phones.

>>OBJECTIVES<<

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

1. record audio on location;
2. improve your listening skills;
3. write a script and make a package;
4. edit using different sound sources;
5. deliver podcasts and streamed content.

AUDIO JOURNALISM

The human imagination is extraordinary. If a reporter says, 'The packed airliner skidded off the runway and crashed into a hangar bursting into a ball of flame', immediately you can see that in your mind. It is generally agreed that the audio-only listener is much more engaged than the online reader, the video news viewer or the print reader, as the listener really does have to use their imagination. This is what makes writing for audio so exciting. By clever use of words and sound the audio package can be really evocative and engaging. But it does have to be written differently even from its near relative video. Audio is much more descriptive because, in absence of pictures, the reporter has to make sure that everything is described, or use background sounds, music or archive to convey the story. If you want to see an example of how this works watch a football match on TV with the sound down and have BBC Radio's 5 Live commentary on. Notice the difference in

approach from the usual commentary.



Figure 5.1 The audio studio. (Source: Paul Lashmar)

AUDIO IN A CONVERGED WORLD

Audio is part of the world where no platform dominates and audio production is a skill set needed by all news reporters. In the converged world of journalism, editors will expect you to be able to make a professional standard audio package and put it online. It may be a stand-alone news package or it may be an element of a multimedia piece of reporting. Jon Smith (2007) points out 'the ability to work with video and audio has become a highly-prized asset among editors looking for new journalists'. Sarah Niblock (2011) also highlights these changes in the approach to journalism when she says, 'Newsrooms are being reorganized and re-fitted to reflect the arrival of new media forms; traditional roles and job descriptions are becoming outmoded and redundant as editorial staff are required to work across two or more media simultaneously'.

Once upon a time the reporter working in audio had to lug around a large reel-to-reel tape recorder called an Uher with lots of batteries and tapes and a microphone. Now nearly every reporter walks out of the office with a mobile phone that records sound. The professional may take out a dedicated and digital audio recorder like those made by Zoom or Sony which is light and fits comfortably into the hand.

The advance of technology means that audio is now wide open as a medium and the possibilities endless. 'It's an experiment, really,' according

to Christopher Lydon (cited in Hammersley, 2004), the former *New York Times* and National Public Radio journalist, a pioneer in the field of audio journalism. 'Everything is inexpensive. The tools are available. Everyone has been saying anyone can be a publisher, anyone can be a broadcaster,' he says. 'Let's see if that works.'

However forward looking we are, we must also look to how we arrived at where we are today. Audio may have great potential but the standards we judge it by are set by how news has been and is delivered. We need to understand how those professional standards have been achieved before we start to break the rules and find new ways to deliver the news in the audio medium.

A SHORT HISTORY OF AUDIO

As in all broadcasting in the UK, the history and benchmarks tend to come from the BBC. The BBC started broadcasting by radio in 1922, but the rapidly growing BBC radio audience didn't get a lot of news in the early days.



It was in the United States where the potential of radio was first most clearly shown. Nearly every student of audio journalism will have been told the story of and listened to the scratchy recording of Orson Welles's dramatization of H.G. Wells's science-fiction novel *The War of the Worlds* in the US because it remains the most compelling example of the power of radio.

The arrival of the TV age in the late 1950s resulted in much soul searching as to whether radio was dead. Believe us when we say that music radio in the UK in the 1950s and early 1960s was dull and all delivered by a very worthy but patronizing BBC. Then a major challenge came in 1964 when ten pirate radio stations started broadcasting from just outside UK territory, often using wartime forts or anchored ships. This was mainly about changing music radio. Young people tuned into these stations bored by the fuddy-duddy nature of much BBC radio output still stuck somewhere in 1943. Why would you listen to crooners when you could listen to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones? However, this was a great period for talk radio and many of the shows that remain classics come from this era, especially when it comes to comedy. This is the time of *The Goons*, *The Navy Lark* and *Round*

the Horne, as well as the early days of *Desert Island Discs* and *Woman's Hour*.



Figure 5.2 BBC Broadcasting House. (Source: Flickr © R/DV/RS)

The UK government passed a law in 1967 outlawing the pirates and only one, Radio Caroline, hung on for a while. In response to the challenge, the BBC did modernize its output setting up new stations, including Radio 1 aimed at the audience that had been listening to pirate radio. It hired a lot of the former pirate radio station disc jockeys. In 1972 the government opened up radio frequencies so commercial companies could set up radio stations. First out of the blocks was London Broadcasting Company (LBC) with its 24-hour talk radio.

Since radio was liberalized in the 1970s it has been a tumultuous experience. It is not an easy business to make money in especially where news delivery is required. The dominance of the BBC also makes it tougher for commercial companies to flourish. On the one end of the spectrum are the large radio businesses trying to reach the largest audiences possible, others like Jazz FM and Classic FM with an expanding niche market, through

to local radio stations and ultimately the not-for-profit community radio stations. The casualty rate is high with radio companies closing down and stations being sold or rebranded constantly.



For a timeline of the history of commercial radio in the UK, follow this link.

Radio is booming in the UK as figures from RAJAR (Radio Joint Audience Research Ltd) show: 90 per cent of the UK adult population tuned in to their selected radio stations in the fourth quarter of 2012. This was up by approximately 340,000 adults on the same quarter of the previous year.

The total number of hours listened to radio is 1.04 billion, up marginally year-on-year. There are over 300 radio stations broadcasting in the UK and most have websites.

Why we like to listen

'I regard radio as the hottest of all mediums,' says Simon Jenkins (2010), the media commentator. 'The power of radio is the power of speech.' He quotes the late media theorist Marshall McLuhan who divided the media into hot and cold mediums. 'McLuhan said if you want to stage a revolution use radio; if you want to suppress it, use television. If you go on radio people listen to what you say. If you go on television they say, what is the colour of your shirt?' Jenkins continues: 'Radio forces the listener to engage. You have to listen, the other senses are set aside. You have to listen, listen to the words.'

According to McLuhan's (1964) theory, hot media usually, but not always, provide complete involvement without exercising other stimuli. Print occupies visual space and uses visual senses, but can immerse its reader. He said hot media favour analytical precision, quantitative analysis and sequential ordering, as they are usually sequential, linear and logical. They emphasize one sense (for example, of sight or sound) over the others. For this reason, McLuhan thought that hot media also included radio, as well as the lecture and photography. Whether this is now true in the era where we

have audiences who are often engaged with multiple media at the same time is an interesting research question.

Total number of BBC national radio stations	11
Total number of regional BBC radio stations	4
Total number of BBC local radio stations	39
Total number of national commercial radio stations	15
Total number of local commercial radio stations	224

Figure 5.3 Radio in the UK in numbers. Source: RAJAR

DECEMBER 2012 RELEASE SUMMARY OF LISTENING								
Survey Period 17th September 2012 – 16th December 2012								
	Survey Period	Adult (15+) Pop'n '000	Weekly Reach '000	%	Average Hours per head	per listener	Total Hours '000	Share of Listening %
All Radio	Q	52352	47015	90%	19.8	22.1	1037158	100.0%
All BBC Radio	Q	52352	35190	67%	10.9	16.3	573178	55.3%
BBC Local Radio	Q	52352	9138	17%	1.6	9.0	82288	7.9%
BBC Radio 1	Q	52352	11091	21%	1.5	6.9	76774	7.4%
BBC Radio 2	Q	52352	15109	29%	3.5	12.1	182948	17.6%
BBC Radio 3	Q	52352	2061	4%	0.3	6.5	13302	1.3%
BBC Radio 4 (including 4 Extra)	Q	52352	11012	21%	2.7	12.7	139456	13.4%
BBC Radio FIVE LIVE (inc SPORTS EXTRA)	Q	52352	6272	12%	0.9	7.6	47395	4.6%
BBC 6 Music	Q	52352	1891	4%	0.3	7.8	14737	1.4%
1Xtra from the BBC	Q	52352	1044	2%	0.1	5.1	5324	0.5%
BBC Asian Network UK	Q	52352	453	1%	0.1	6.8	3078	0.3%
BBC World Service	Q	52352	1462	3%	0.2	5.4	7877	0.8%
All Commercial Radio	Q	52352	33223	63%	8.4	13.2	438978	42.3%
All National Commercial	Q	52352	16244	31%	2.5	8.1	130791	12.6%
All Local Commercial (National TSA)	Q	52352	26410	50%	5.9	11.7	308187	29.7%

Figure 5.4 Radio listening figures from September 2012 – December 2012. Source: RAJAR

News has always been important to radio stations. Stations tend to run on a shoestring. Those of our former students who are now radio journalists, often tell us they run one-person, one-shift newsrooms. To make the sector more financially viable governments have relaxed the rules. In too many cases local radio isn't really local any more as once independent commercial radio stations have been bought by more successful rivals they use the same newsroom and team to broadcast on different stations.

Through the internet we have access to thousands of audio channels at any time. The traditional radio stations are now all on the internet but so are thousands of others.

PODCASTING

Podcasts are pre-recorded programmes which are normally downloaded by the user in MP3 format. This is different to internet streaming where radio stations will broadcast live over the internet. Indeed, some radio stations are internet only – that's to say they broadcast exclusively online instead of via old fashioned FM radio or more modern DAB (digital audio broadcast).

A podcast is a type of digital media consisting of a series of audio files subscribed to and downloaded through RSS or streamed online to a computer or mobile device.

The term 'podcasting' was coined by Ben Hammersley in the *Guardian* newspaper in February 2004. Content can be accessed using any computer that can play media files and not just portable music players. Use of the term 'podcast' predates the addition of native support for podcasting to the iPod, or to Apple's iTunes software. Podcasting is now massive and tens of thousands of downloads are made every day. If you are a user of Apple 'i' devices, you may well have download podcasts through the iTunes store which compiles a top ten chart of the most downloaded podcasts in the country. The BBC, the *Guardian* and *Telegraph* usually dominate the iTunes chart of the most popular podcasts. The fact that relatively few independent providers have found fame through podcasting in the UK is a shame as in the early days many thought that podcasting could allow for a more diverse range of voices to be heard outside the limitations of mainstream media. Great podcasts from independent providers and amateurs are out there and they are well worth seeking out on iTunes.

Duncan Geere (2012) of Business Radio Bunker, citing the UK radio ratings body RAJAR figures released in June 2012, says: '… podcasts are enjoying a renaissance in popularity. 7.8 million people have downloaded a podcast, and 4.2 million say that they listen to podcasts at least once a week.' For example the *Guardian* podcasts Football Weekly and Football Weekly Extra were attracting 300,000 downloads a week each and were becoming attractive to advertisers. According to RAJAR, a third of the UK population listened to internet radio – some 16.9 million people, up 5 per cent since October 2008. The RAJAR data release on radio audience figures as of May 2012 shows that internet radio listening has reached an all-time high with the UK population listening for 42 million hours per week, and 17 per cent of UK adults listening to radio via their mobile phone.

Audio is becoming a force in internet content, well beyond music and radio streaming. SoundCloud CEO Alexander Ljung told the 2011 French internet conference 'Le Web': 'Sound will be bigger than video.'.

Online journalism expert Jim Colgan (2011) says Ljung is most likely right:

> "You might expect those words coming from the head of a company that relies on wide adoption of audio for its business, but his argument was convincing. Recording audio is less intrusive than recording video. Everyone who has a smartphone doesn't just have a camera in their pocket, but a microphone. And unlike video, you can listen to audio you and others create when you're doing other things."

MAKING AN AUDIO PACKAGE

- Do think: 'Theatre of the mind'.
- Do think: 'Let me tell you a story.'
- Do think: 'Let me take you on a journey.'

An important part of learning to make good audio is to listen to how the professionals do it. We have all heard thousands of radio news bulletins in our lifetimes. The important thing to do is stop listening merely as a news consumer and start to listen as an audio professional. The way to start doing this is to record a news bulletin and then listen and make notes (or more simply use the BBC iPlayer). Deconstruct how the bulletin is made. Think

about the subject of each report:

- Why did the reporter make the decisions they did?
- What is special about this news item that makes it easy for the radio listener to hear?

It is hard to over-estimate the importance of deconstructing packages made by the professionals as a method for learning how to make good audio packages. Once you have heard a BBC online bulletin, listen to an Independent Radio News (IRN) bulletin and compare and contrast. Listen to a longer BBC news package. Listen to the way the reporter has put the package together. Now tune into one of the very contemporary music radio stations aimed at listeners in the 16–25 year age group. Listen to their radio news and analyse that too. How long is the bulletin? How many stories does it include? Does it have sport? Does it have weather and traffic at the end? Does it only have a presenter because they do not use reporters' voices? Does it use music?

Top journalists are surprisingly willing to talk about what they do and give early career journalists advice. Catch them if they are visiting your university as guest speaker, or email to ask them whether you might ask for their advice.

Writing for audio

Simon Cadman (2008), former deputy editor of IRN, has a simple formula for success in writing for audio news: 'Tight, bright but not shite, that's my mantra for writing for broadcast.' He says: 'Brevity is at the core of good writing for broadcast, but without any loss of authority. If you lose facts as you write tight then you are failing.'

'Most audio news stories are quite short: just 30 or 40 seconds, so you have little time to play with. Remember that most people speak at three words a second. That makes an absolute maximum of 90 words for a 30-second report,' he says. Cadman demanded high-quality writing from his reporters. 'The writing style should help the listener understand the story. Sentences should be digestible sound bites for the ear,' he says. He points out the word 'that', saying that it should almost never appear in audio scripts. 'It's completely useless, takes up time where every second counts.'



Figure 5.5 Simon Cadman. (Source: Simon Cadman)

Thompson (2007) makes the point: 'Facts have much more power than vague adjectives inserted to try to make the story seem bigger than it is.'

The most important thing to remember in audio production is that your listeners cannot see anything. You are their eyes and you must therefore describe what is going on, provided it adds to the story. If you are interviewing you might describe the interviewee, or what they are doing, or where you are and why they are significant. Or you might describe the scene of an event. You are there to paint pictures in people's minds. That is the privilege of radio – it is the one medium where the audience will readily use their imagination to understand the story. Boyd et al. (2008) say: 'In print, shades of meaning are conveyed with choice adjectives and skilful prose, but the spoken words make use of a medium, which is altogether more subtle and powerful – the human voice.'

Writing and structuring a script for audio is different from writing for other media. You do not have the luxury of being able to edit a piece from the bottom up like when you are working in text journalism. A script must sustain interest, and key points should be spread in the package. Thompson (2007) says stories should 'start by attracting your attention, then quickly develop your interest, and progress to either a conclusion or a question about what will be the next chapter'.

Boyd et al. (2008) say, 'Writing for broadcast can mean throwing away literary conventions, including the rules of grammar, so the words make sense to the ear, rather than the eye'.

Remember: the same principles of accuracy, balance, fairness, impartiality and relevance apply to all forms of multimedia journalism.

TIPS FOR WRITING FOR AUDIO

1. Grab interest in the first line.
2. Write scripts for audio in the present tense whenever possible.
3. Write as you would speak – clearly and conversationally. Use everyday spoken English as if you are talking to a friend, not the more formal style of writing for a newspaper.
4. In audio reports use simple conversational contractions where it feels natural so 'they have' becomes 'they've', 'we will' becomes 'we'll' and so on.
5. Avoid too much alliteration – it can be very hard for you or a presenter to read. Two classic but extreme examples of alliteration are: 'She sells sea shells by the sea shore' and 'Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers'.
6. Use short punchy sentences.
7. Don't use colloquialisms or slang.
8. Avoid using clichés, e.g. 'At the end of the day'. For a list of clichés to avoid follow this link to the companion website.
9. Use active voice rather than passive voice.
10. Don't forget to say who you are.
11. Avoid commas.
12. Don't use the word 'that'.

13 Check your facts.



The cue is also known as ‘the lead in’. For some formats where there is a presenter, the reporter usually has to write the presenter cue as well as their own report. A typical audio package can be constructed as follows.

Getting the intro to a story right is a test of the journalist’s ability. In professional radio bulletins it is tougher because the reporter’s intro should not repeat what the presenter has just said. As with all news writing the first sentence – ‘the top line’ – should sum up the story. The second sentence should give extra facts or a context to enable the listener to learn more about the story or realize the significance of the first sentence. The third (or last) sentence sets up the report that will follow.

It shouldn’t use the same phrases (or even words) as the next piece of sync (recorded voice). For example:

> Presenter: ‘A major oil spill is threatening the coast of Devon after a tanker was in collision with another ship off Plymouth. Emergency services are fighting to contain the leak. Our reporter John Smith is at the scene.’
>
> *Bad practice*: Reporter: ‘An oil spill is threatening the coast of Devon near Plymouth after a tanker was holed.’
>
> *Good practice*: Reporter: ‘The Good Hope, a 30,000 tonne tanker was badly holed in a collision off Start Point last night at about 10 o’clock. An estimated 20,000 gallons of crude oil has spilled into rough seas …’

Remember the job of the reporter is to bring an eyewitness account of events wherever possible. It’s not possible in every case but even when the reporter cannot be on the scene their job is get there and gather together eyewitnesses to give the best possible account of events. It’s because they are on the scene that the reporter is important. This brings authority and authenticity to the report. It also can be a good way to avoid repeating the presenter’s cue.

For audio news online it is likely that you will not have a presenter. You may present and report alone. This is known as a ‘stand-alone’. You might utilize agency clips if your company subscribes to an agency feed like IRN. This means the conventions for the cue can be discarded and you will need

to tell the story from the off, either in your own voice or through the use of what your interviewees say.

Do not use quotes when writing commentary (that's what the reporter says) for broadcasting scripts. If you want your listeners to hear the words as they were spoken, record them and use them as clips. This facility to hear people speak is one of the great benefits of broadcasting.

Also, quotes in broadcasting do not work as they do in print where the readers can see the quotation marks. It is just as effective to turn quotes into reported speech.

INTERVIEWING FOR AUDIO PACKAGES

If you are recording an interview for audio editing it needs pace and concision. The first thing you must do is work out what you need from the interview. You will have a rough list of questions. Then how you are going to handle the interview? You must be in control.

So what do the professionals look for in an interviewee? Experienced radio reporter Sutish Sharma (2012) told us:

> "To me a good interviewee is someone that should tell us something new or should confirm something we are trying to say. I like to give a clip that gives you a bit of a reaction or a headline. A good interviewee has to be a good speaker, they have to be interesting and they have to have some knowledge about what they are talking about."



Figure 5.6 The studio mixing desk. (Source: Paul Lashmar)

If you hand over control to the interviewee then you will not get the interview you want. Empathy is everything. Many people you will interview will not be used to being recorded. Imagine how you would feel in their place. Make them feel comfortable. Offer them a drink if possible. Have a little chat before you start.

Sutish Sharma agrees:

> “I think it is important to offer direction. You must look at it from the point of view of the interviewee. They may or may not be used to being interviewed. They may not have done this before. What you shouldn’t do is tell them what to say. You can offer encouragement and you can tell them why we are interviewing them and why it is important to get their views on board.
>
> I don’t think there is any harm in having a quick chat with them before hand and put them at ease and say – this is the kind of question I am going to be asking. Sometimes the answers you want they have got it but they are not used to being interviewed. They are not used to giving you the answers in a concise form.”

Then start gently. Record. If you are not sure you got a good answer to a question, try again. If they stumble in replying to a question, politely ask it again. If they give an answer that is too long, explain that you will not be able to use it at that length and ask if they could do it again more concisely. Look your interviewee in the eye and engage them in a conversation. You set the pace of the interview. Don’t stick rigidly to your questions if their answers are taking you somewhere more interesting. Listen to what they say and adapt accordingly. Thank them afterwards.

The basics are:

- Tell the interviewee who you are, your job and who you are working for.
- Always take control and be confident.

Questions you should ask in your research include:

- Does this person know about the subject?
- Are they articulate?
- Do their replies tend to be too long or too short?
- Do they have a personal agenda?

- Are they likely to say anything that might cause legal problems?
- Think about audio backgrounds for the interview.

Before you start:

- Understand why you are doing the interview.
- Make sure you know what result you want.
- Make the interviewee comfortable.
- Explain how the interview will be used.
- Think about how you are get the best out of the person.
- Have a rough list of questions.
- Check the audio environment (is there too much background noise?).

During the interview:

- Listen to what the interviewee said.
- Listen to make sure the interviewee gives a succinct answer to the key questions.
- Ask again if the interviewer fluffed a key question.

Afterwards:

- Get a contact number.
- Say when the piece is to be broadcast.
- If necessary get a release form signed.

RECORDING DIGITAL AUDIO

Using a mobile phone to record calls

The iPhone is designed to prevent you recording your calls because there are restrictive laws in the United States and that's the iPhone's main marketplace. But there are a growing number of ways around that and you can find some apps here: www.journalism.co.uk/skills/how-to-record-calls-on-an-iphone/s7/a551745/.

There are also a number of apps for mobile smartphones to allow you to record audio and upload to the web in a couple of clicks.

SoundCloud



SoundCloud is one of the dominant sound applications. Until recently it was mainly focused on music content. But the platform has moved into the spoken word and is keen on encouraging journalism.

SoundCloud is an audio social media platform as it has usernames, contributors to follow, items to favourite and comments to share. The SoundCloud smartphone app is essentially just one big record button that lets you add a title and a picture before uploading and sharing.

SoundCloud is a useful tool for a wide range of users, for example an editor at a major audio programme, looking for new ways to distribute output. The site lets you upload a total of 120 minutes at any one time, but you can pay a yearly subscription for more space (anywhere from £25 to £450 a year, converted).

SoundCloud has emerged as the 'go-to-place for anything audio,' says Adam Curry (cited in Locke, 2012), the former MTV video DJ who created the world's first podcast and founded Podshow, and the start-up that developed the technology for iTunes' podcasting platform.



Figure 5.7 SoundCloud's smartphone app which is used to record audio for easy upload to the web. (SoundCloud)

AudioBoo

AudioBoo is audio equivalent of Twitter to SoundCloud's Facebook. AudioBoo is an app that lets you record short clips and share them on Twitter, Facebook or its website, AudioBoo.fm.

The site is free with the three-minute limit, but for £60 you can get 30 minutes recording time and some enhanced sharing and podcasting features.

You are more likely to find AudioBoo on British news sites like the *Guardian* and regional BBC radio stations; AudioBoo says 53 per cent of 'listens' come from the US.



Figure 5.8 The Audioboo app interface on an Android smartphone. (Source: AudioBoo)

DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDERS (DARs)

It is common to see audo journalists use smartphones to record interviews. The Apple iPhone is particularly popular and you can attach a professional external microphone to it, although you may need an adapter. For the professional it is a good idea to have a digital audio recorder to maximize control over your recording. Currently the Zoom H4N is an excellent recorder (see Figure 5.9). It has a range of recording qualities right up to 24bit/96Khz which is high-quality audio. It's light and has a built-in stereo microphone but also an external microphone socket (and the vital headphone socket so you can monitor as you record). Its strength is that it is easy to do the basics but there are a whole bunch of extra functions available that do not get in the way of simple recording. The display is also very clear.



Figure 5.9 Digital audio recorder Zoom H4N. (Source: Paul Lashmar)

The DAR records either in .WAV or MP3 format onto an SD card. In normal situations, when you want even just a little better quality, it's best to record in WAV format. However, if you're recording outside, you will probably want to record for an extended time. For this situation, MP3 may be best. MP3 recordings are about one-tenth the size of WAV recordings (at 128 kbps).

Recording levels

First set the recording level. For normal everyday volumes, such as interviews, setting the mic sensitivity to HIGH is best. You can do level checks by putting the H4N into recording standby during the pre-interview chatter. Make sure the AGC (Auto Gain Control) is off. This automatically raises or lowers the recording level to match the loudness of the sound but it makes it harder to edit.

To test that you have set the record volume at the right level, enter recording standby mode, then press the record (REC) button while the main

screen is showing. The REC indicator blinks showing the unit is in recording standby mode. Get the interviewee to speak into the microphone. The level meter indicates the loudness of the input.

Adjust the volume

Adjust the input volume gradually by pressing the input level button while the sound is playing.

Wind noise is a major problem if you are interviewing or recording outside. If it is a windy day try to get out of the line of the wind. But if that is not possible try turning on 'low cut' located on the H4N. Because the wind sounds produce low frequencies, you can reduce the noise by cutting out the lower frequencies during recording.

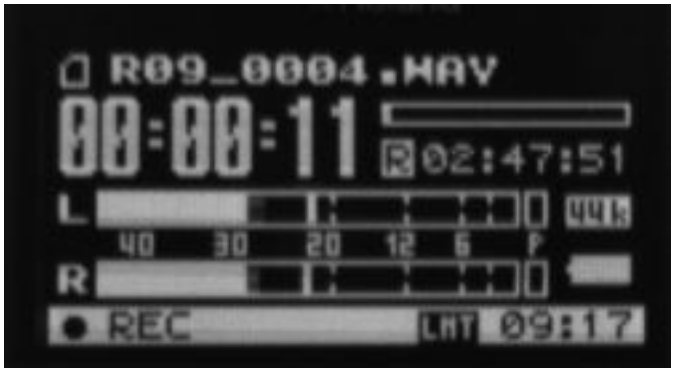


Figure 5.10 Level settings should be the highest input level (volume) that has no distortion.

You can also use a 'wind sock' on your microphone to help reduce wind noise. This is usually a piece of foam designed to fit over the business end of a microphone.

Download your recording

If your computer has a card slot, take the SD card out of your DAR, put it into you computer and drag and drop the recording into the right location for editing. Don't forget to give the file a new name that tells you what it is, e.g. MP interview 30 May 2013.

The DAR can also connect to the computer using a USB cable. When 'Insert the disk for this file type?' is shown on the PC, click on cancel. After a while, the DAR is recognized by the PC, and the USB screen is shown in the DAR's

display.

Select the files to copy and then drag them to an appropriate location.



Figure 5.11 Waveform of a voice. It should not touch the top or the bottom as that will be distorting. (Source: Paul Lashmar)

EDITING YOUR AUDIO USING AUDACITY

There are a range of different programs for editing audio, including Adobe Audition, Total Recorder, Roxio audio and Pro Tools.

Audacity

For editing audio we recommend using the Audacity program as it is free to download and use (its open source). But it is not as good as Pro Tools or Audition, both of which offer free trials. This means that you can download on your own computers and work at home as well as on workplace computers in the newsrooms. Audacity is developed by a group of volunteers and distributed under the GNU General Public License (GPL). To download follow this link.

Audacity is available for Mac OS X, Microsoft Windows, GNU/Linux and other operating systems. Audacity 2.0 was released in March 2012.

Audacity is easy to use. A slight problem with Audacity, as with some of the more expensive programs, is that it does not have proprietorial rights to use either .MP3 or .WAV files. This means it saves files to its own .aup format. These files do not play on other systems. So you have to convert the working file into an .MP3 or .WAV when you finish editing.

> Audacity project files are saved in a special format that only Audacity can open. To open your project in another program or burn it to CD, firstly open the .aup file in Audacity if you have already saved one (if you saved it recently it will be in the File > Recent Files menu). Then use the export commands further down the File menu to save the audio in a standard format like WAV or AIFF.



For general help on Audacity see:



For Audacity manual read online see:



To download in PDF (156 pages) see:

When you have finished your interviews we would recommend the following way to construct your package.

Write a short opening script of say four pars (sentences). Identify what exactly you think the angle is on the story now you have done all the preparation, research and interviews. Summarize this in four to six words and put it at the top of your draft script (this keeps you focused).

Listen through to all your recorded material, making notes. Listen again whilst logging so you know which bit you want and where they are. We would normally expect to hear some interview clip by the fifth par (sentence) of your script. Then edit the clips and put them into a rough order. Just listen through to that – it will give you an idea of how many links you will need. Think whether any other items from the sound palette, background sounds, music or archive would help your package. Now script and record your commentary.

Edit all the parts together. Listen through and tidy up.

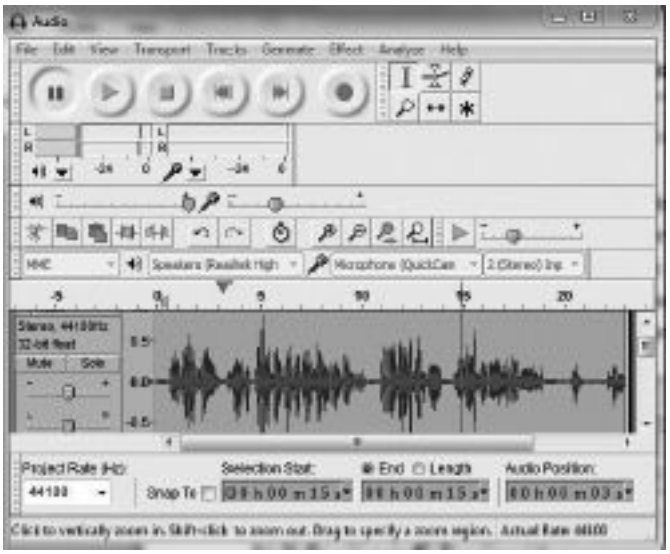


Figure 5.12 Audacity editing screen. (Source: Paul Lashmar)

Choose sections which have a 'clean' in and out, sounding natural and with a natural intonation, falling towards the end. If you are recording an interview consider asking the same question in different ways to obtain a variety of clips. The simplest form of package is some commentary (the link) and an interview (the clip). This is known in radio news as a clip-link. Remember above all that it's important that the reporter acts as the eyes of the listener. Mervin Block (1997) emphasizes: 'No one writes exactly the way he talks or talks the way he writes. So writing for broadcast is a compromise. But keep in mind you're writing for people who can't read your script. They only hear it. And they hear it only once.'

Improving your voice

The voice is a tool and most of us need to train to use our voice to its best potential. We have some tips on improving your voice on the companion website.

TIPS FOR EDITING

1 'Wild track': When you are out on an audio job record lots of extra material. Wild track is the sounds in the background and not of your interviewees speaking. First, it could be something that is happening as part of your story – if there is a street demonstration then record dramatic sounds. Second, record the general ambient background sounds where you did the interview as this is helpful in avoiding sudden sharp edits when you put the package together. Record at least one minute of wild track background sounds in every situation where you record. You can lay the wild track on a separate track in the editing program.
2 Use dead air – where nothing is heard – carefully. You can cut two pieces of sound too tightly, especially if they are interview voices, and make it sound unnatural. Don't forget most of us breathe between sentences!
3 Always use headphones to edit. If you just use computer speakers you will not notice important details and sounds.
4 Cut out as many ums and ahs from your interviewees as you can. Try to remove repetitions as in when people start a sentence, falter and start again.
5 If you rearrange interviewees sync to make the sentences more coherent – make sure you do not change the meaning.
6 Never forget to make sure you have the entire five Ws and the H: who, what, when, where, why and how.
7 When you have finished your script *read it out aloud*. Ted White and Frank Barnas (2002) say that reading aloud makes it clear 'when words should be contracted, which words should be emphasized, how clear the sentences are and how well the copy flows from sentence to sentence … the ear, not the eye, is the best judge of well-written broadcast copy'. Kristina Beanland, one of our former students (and now a professional journalist), reinforces this point: 'I found the advice of reading my work aloud conducive to good copy, and this carried over into my print work as well. Speaking words to hear how the sounds hit the ear was a revolutionary moment in my writing, and saw many sentences that would have been suitable for print in my written script altered.'

INTERVIEW: SUTISH SHARMA, EXPERIENCED RADIO

REPORTER

Sutish Sharma loves making audio packages:

> “The first thing I ask3 myself is, ‘What is the story I want to tell here?’ I think that is important. I’m not a great fan of other styles of package-making where you just go out first, record everything and then decide.
>
> I think as a journalist you should have an idea of the story and what you want to tell from the start. From there I start building it. I ask myself: Who do I need to help me tell the story? What kind of sound effects do I need to put together? Or what kind of wild track do I need to put together? From there I write a skeleton script – which is ever changing right to the last moment. I don’t think a story miraculously appears – you have to have an idea. I’m not a journalist who writes on the back of an envelope. I like something that has a structure to it, a running order. From then on your story starts to take shape. It must have truth behind it – ‘Is this a true account of what the story is about?’ ”

INTERVIEW: CHRIS LEDGARD, BBC PRODUCER



Figure 5.13 Broadcast producer Chris Ledgard. (Source: Chris Ledgard)

Chris Ledgard is a highly regarded audio producer whose distinctive style is naturally intimate. He spent many years as a regional and then national radio reporter working across Radio 4 and Radio 5 Live. He makes great use of tantalizing interview clips to hook his listeners in. He has a gentle and intimate programme style. He is a very modest reporter and only uses his voice when necessary, preferring for his interviewees to tell the story.

As you become more skilled in packaging you can look for different ways of telling the story. Ledgard says don’t always start with a standard intro

and that you should be looking for innovative ways to tell a story if you can. 'It is like when you are teaching little children and you say to them don't always start with "Once upon a time…". Think about whether you start in the middle. Can you start with something dramatic? Then recap.'

Someone once identified the essence of radio by saying: 'Radio is your friend.' It works best as an intimate personal medium. Ledgard says the human voice on its own is what makes audio unique. 'In radio you have the strength of the human voice and of other sounds like music or things happening, but particularly the human voice. Basically it's all storytelling but your weapon is the recorded human voice, which is a strong one I think.' With a greater length you can make greater use of interviews. It's worth remembering that a brilliant interviewee can carry a whole package, while poor interviewees can leave you struggling.

Here's a good example of a strong interviewee with powerful emotional content from the BBC. It's a great example of what can be done in just three minutes. Presenter Zubeida Malik spoke to Joan Almond, the daughter of John Stafford, a British soldier who was left for dead for two days in the Somme before being rescued.

You can also use other sounds more effectively including music. Ledgard is cautious in the use of music. He says: 'Try to avoid the obvious. If it's about the economy, Abba's 'Money, Money, Money' isn't the thing. I've used music many times but don't splash it around too liberally. It can distract people.'



If you are in an environment where the background sounds set the scene for the listener then use it. The simplest is to combine the sound of seagulls with the sound of waves hitting the beach to conjure up a picture of the seaside for the listener. Birds twittering and cows mooing tell us that we are in the country. A creaking door in an echoey room may help us imagine a haunted castle, and the roar of the crowd a sports event.

Sound archive is another tool in the audio reporter's box. Most radio stations have access to archive from past sound recordings. There is some nice archive to be found online but sometimes it needs to be purchased. Ledgard says:

> “I’m a big fan of archive. Textually it’s very nice. It often has a slightly different texture from the stuff you are recording. It gives the listener a nice place to rest for a minute rather than being constantly battered with what you are doing. It helps the listener and gives nice contrast. It’s a good way of doing history without explaining it yourself. It’s a good radio tool, a strong colour in the palette.”

Ledgard describes how you go about making a package in a busy news environment where time is at a premium. ‘Am I making a three-minute piece, a five-minute piece or a seven-minute piece? That makes a big difference. This is obvious but that is the first thing I think.’

He then asks himself the normal journalistic question: ‘What’s the line? What is the line at the top and what are the paragraphs that come underneath it?’

Chris says that too much subtlety in the package may lose the listener. ‘You might put a lot of work into the package and understand why all the elements are there – the person who is listening is doing the washing up or getting the tea for the kids. You have got to make your point clear.’

The ability to have your audience grasp exactly what you are saying in your news package is the skill most admired by experienced audio reporters, says Ledgard. ‘The Holy Grail of all of this is clarity but maintaining your lightness of touch. Trying to make what you are saying really clear but not laying it on with a trowel and making it too ploddy.’

A good example of a programme presented and produced by Chris Ledgard is the brilliant but gentle, multi-faceted *The Poppy Factory*:



Audio



Background information

UPLOADING AUDIO TO THE WEB

When you have completed your package you will want to upload it. In the first instance it depends where you want to keep the file. Uploading an audio file to a website is no different from uploading a digital photo. You will either upload the audio file, which should be in .MP3 format, via FTP or use a web-based file-uploading tool that comes with your CMS. There are many free media player plugins for WordPress and Joomla! that allow your users to play your audio directly off the page.

If it is not part of a news package presentation then it is always a good idea to provide a text link explaining what the audio is. Don't force your users to click on the audio file to find out what it's about.

If you want to run a series of podcasts then using iTunes is a good method. You can upload, and using a RSS allows you to find an audience. iTunes supports podcasts and will help you make your podcast work for you. How to do this is explained here:



>>Summary<<

1 The human voice is a powerful tool when heard without any distraction. It is a fundamental part of being human to react strongly to other people's voices. Use that potential in your audio packages.

2 Radio has been at the birth of audio journalism and through much of its growing up period but audio journalism is now spreading, thanks to the internet, into lots of different and innovative formats. There is strong audience demand for audio news journalism as it can be listened to in places where other news media would be inconvenient.

3 Audio is the theatre of the mind and the only media that allows you to paint pictures in the minds of your audience. You have to become the eyes of your audience. It is very demanding to do well but hugely pleasing if your audience likes what you have done. Writing for audio is different from writing for text or even video. You need to describe what is going on.

4 There is no such thing as silence. There is always some sound. Learn to listen to what is really around you. Then record and use the sounds you hear when on location to give your audience a strong sense of place.
5 Always record your interviewees. You never know when someone is going to tell you something important or emotional and if you have a recording of it, it is great way to deliver the story to your audience. Always check your recording equipment before you start.

EXERCISES

1 Take a newspaper report and work out how you would make a stand-alone news package of the story. Who would you interview? What sounds would you record and use to bring the package alive. How would you script the package for 30, 45 or 60 seconds?
2 Silence may be golden but it's rare. The first thing we do when we teach audio is ask the group to be perfectly quiet for one minute. We would like you to try the same thing. Can you hear anything in those 60 seconds? The answer is usually yes. In most university rooms there will be the sound of air conditioning. There is often the sound of someone drilling a wall nearby. There may be students in a nearby corridor talking and someone mowing a lawn. As your ears' condition to the silence you can hear more. A roomful of computers will have the low hum of their internal fans. Someone will cough and another will open a bottle. Oh yes, there's a mobile phone ringing and the ping of an email arriving on a nearby computer. There is always noise of some sort. Now we would like you to go outside and listen for 60 seconds. We bet that there will be noise! The human ear is very good at filtering background noise when in location. It's amazing how we can hear what someone is saying even if we are in a noisy club. However, if you record someone speaking against a noisy background and then play it back in a quiet place, the ear, mysteriously, doesn't filter out the background noise so well. There is nothing worse than trying to listen to a radio report with a lot of background noise. Try not to record when there are loud variable background noises.
3 Make your own news bulletin – a two-minute bulletin consisting of an

intro, two headlines, six stories and a sign-off. Decide the news outlet and audience you are making the bulletin for. The length of each of the stories can vary. (One might be 45 seconds another might be 20 seconds.) Try to include a interview clip or a vox pop in the bulletin. When you have finished listen to the way you have used your voice and also the pauses between each element – does it sound right and hang together as a bulletin? Is there popping on the microphone? Have you clipped a word in the edit? Listen to the news outlet you are copying and see how your bulletin compares to theirs.

FURTHER READING

Boyd, Andrew. 2005. *Broadcast Journalism*. 5th edn. Oxford: Focal Press.
This is the best basic guide to audio journalism.

Crisell, Andrew, and Starkey, Guy. 2009. *Radio Journalism*. London: Sage.
A guide to the history, current scope and theory of radio journalism.

Crook, Tim. 1998. *International Radio Journalism*. Oxford: Routledge.
An excellent look at how to make audio for an international audience.

Useful links:



This American Life archive. This is our favourite non-BBC audio online site with lots of great stories.



Sound Women. This is a network of over 700 inspirational women working in audio who are committed to raising the profile of the women who work in the radio and audio industry, and celebrating their achievements.

CHAPTER 3

Writing for Broadcast

If you want an instant lesson in the difference between writing for a newspaper and writing for radio, try reading a newspaper article out loud. Don't *imagine* what it would sound like if you were actually saying the words, and don't mumble the text so quietly that the person in the cubicle next to you isn't disturbed. Read it aloud the way you would if, say, you were trying to get the attention of a class of fidgety tenth graders who had more exciting things on their minds.

For example, here's the start of an article that appeared on the front page of the *Washington Post*, chosen at random. The story is headlined, "Bush Takes Responsibility For Failures of Response":

> President Bush yesterday said he takes responsibility for the federal government's stumbling response to Hurricane Katrina as his White House worked on several fronts to move beyond the improvisation of the first days of the crisis and set a long-term course on a problem that aides now believe will shadow the balance of Bush's second term.
>
> "Katrina exposed serious problems in our response capability at all levels of government," Bush said at a White House news conference with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

That first sentence would never make it on the radio, though it works fine in print. It's packed with information; it's got the news right at the beginning; it's grammatical; it's even fairly readable—a practiced radio newscaster would probably have to take breaths after "Hurricane Katrina" and "first days of the crisis," but he or she could get through it. The problem isn't that it's badly written, but that it's not written *for the ear*. It pours out the information faster than most of us could absorb it *as we listened to it*. In one fifty-six-word sentence, the reporter tells us the federal government's response to the hurricane was "stumbling"; that the President took responsibility for that yesterday; that the White House improvised a response during the first days of the crisis; that they are working on several fronts to do better—to set a long term course on the problem (presumably the post-hurricane relief effort); and that the President's aides believe it (again, presumably the relief effort, but maybe the stumbling response) will "shadow" the balance of the President's second term. Whew!

A reader who becomes confused at any point in that sentence or elsewhere

in the story can just go back and reread it—or even jump ahead a few paragraphs to search for more details. But if a *listener* doesn't catch a fact the first time around, it's lost. So when the NPR White House reporter wrote the same story, he dispensed the information in bite-size chunks:

> President Bush says the buck stops with him, and he takes responsibility for whatever mistakes the federal government made in its response to Hurricane Katrina. N-P-R's David Greene has more from the White House.
>
> GREENE: After days of insisting this is no time for a "blame game," the President shifted his tone a bit. Standing alongside Iraqi President Jalal Talabani at the White House, Mr. Bush took a question on Hurricane Katrina, and answered by saying he takes responsibility for the federal government's actions. He said he wants to know how to better cooperate with state and local government in the future. He did qualify his remarks, by saying he takes responsibility only to the extent that his administration did anything wrong. He's been saying for some time that the question of which level of government is at fault for the slow response to the hurricane will come later. The White House announced the President will be in Louisiana Thursday to deliver a prime-time address on the aftermath of Katrina. David Greene, N-P-R News, the White House.[1]

Now if you're reading that report silently, the writing may seem unsophisticated, almost juvenile. Many of the sentences are short and their structure is simple. They almost overlap one another—one says the President "shifted his tone a bit"; the next two sentences tell us more about what he said; the sentence after that paraphrases the President's statement; and so on. Several sentences begin with the same pronoun: "He said," "He did qualify," "He's been saying." But read the text out loud and you'll hear that this simplicity allows us to take a sort of mental breath between sentences. We can register what the reporter is telling us and get ready for the next statement. If a listener misses the intro—after all, since there are no headlines on the radio, the intro is our first clue to what the story is about—the information is amplified in the body of the news report.

This is how we write for broadcast. You have to give out information at the pace and in a form that allows people to absorb it. Successful radio writing—at a minimum—has to be intelligible to people who are *listening*, not reading the newspaper or watching TV. (TV reports on this same story *showed* the President standing next to the Iraqi President in front of rows of reporters; a certain amount of information is transmitted on television even when the sound is off.) There are many ways to make acceptable radio writing better, but at the very least it has to be comprehensible the first time a person hears it. For most listeners, there isn't a second time.

Write the Way You Speak

Remember: when you are on the air, you are communicating with one person at a time.

That's how people listen to the radio, after all. When they tune in to *Morning Edition* or *Weekend Edition Saturday* or any other program, they are usually making breakfast, or behind the wheel of their car, or at their desk in the office, or in front of their computer. They are listening one at a time—or at most, two or three at a time. They are not sitting in a concert hall, along with thousands of other listeners, much less the millions that listen to many public radio programs.

So we have to learn to write as if we were talking not to thousands or millions of people, but to one person; we should communicate to that archetypal listener much the way we actually talk to our friends or family. "When we speak on the air," longtime *All Things Considered* host Robert Siegel says, "we are aspiring to be heard as someone who is describing the world—the stories we've decided to pay attention to—to someone we feel pretty close to, whose intelligence we respect, whom we like, and whom we're helping to explain things to."

And we have to remember that—as far as that listener is concerned—we are indeed *talking*, not reading. People listen to radio news with the same set of ears they use when they listen to their spouses, children, colleagues, and friends; as much as possible, we should speak to them as we would if they were sitting across the desk or dinner table from us. Presenting stories orally requires what Siegel describes as "a kind of reverse engineering." When you write for radio (or TV, or podcasts for that matter), you need to think about what you sound like when you *talk*, and then *write* your stories with a similar vocabulary, cadence, syntax, and grammar. "The script should be like a theatrical script, a dramatic script," Siegel says. "We know it is there when we go to the theater—we know this has been written down and they're reading it—but when it starts to intrude, when we actually think people are reciting the script, the theater is failing. It's the same with us. When we sound like we're speaking to one listener at a time, it's working. When they hear us following a script, it's not working."

Playwrights know that dialog is not the same thing as transcribed speech. In real life, we stammer, and hem and haw, and forget what we're saying, and repeat ourselves. So playwrights give us dialog that *mimics* the style of the spoken word, without the imperfections of everyday banter. It's speech that's been washed and ironed.

It's the same with writing news. The goal is to write the way you *wish* you

could speak—or the way you speak on your best day, when you've had just the right amount of caffeine and sleep. Great hosts and reporters write in their own voices—using words and sentence structure and phrasing that come naturally to them. They write in such a way that they can "perform themselves" authentically and convincingly.

One way to find out how you speak is to record yourself when you're talking to your friends, and then write down what you said. See what your own speech looks like. Or look at almost any transcript of an NPR interview—especially one with a regular person, as opposed to a politician or pundit or other professional speaker. Here's an excerpt of a report in which *All Things Considered* host Michele Norris spoke to Belinda Bruce—a woman from New Orleans who had escaped Hurricane Katrina. She was suddenly homeless, and living in a shelter in Baton Rouge:

> BRUCE: I really can't explain it, except just say maybe it was for the best.
>
> NORRIS: For the best.
>
> BRUCE: Yes, because I'm more happier when I can stay homeless.
>
> NORRIS: Help me understand that. You're sitting at a shelter. Your house is most likely underwater. And you're happier here than you were back home.
>
> BRUCE: Because there was so much going on in my neighborhood. Even though I was comfortable in my house—in my house—blocks up where the kids went to school, it was horrible. They always had shootouts. They just didn't respect the kids. They were selling drugs. The good thing is I'm away from that with my kids. And maybe they'll get into a better school, a better neighborhood.

This exchange should remind us that real people don't talk the way newspaper reporters write. They don't pack everything they've got to say into one long, dense sentence. Like Belinda Bruce, most of us use relatively few adjectives when we speak. We use sentence fragments. ("Because there was so much going on in my neighborhood.") We add force to what we're saying by speaking in short, repetitive sentences. ("They always had shootouts. They just didn't respect the kids. They were selling drugs.") We begin sentences with "and" or "but." ("And maybe [my kids will] get into a better school.") We don't do this consciously; it's just how people talk. So it shouldn't surprise us that Norris speaks the same way in her question. ("Help me understand that. You're sitting at a shelter. Your house is most likely underwater. And you're happier here than you were back home.")

If you understand how people talk, you can learn how to write scripts that sound like speech. With enough practice, you can sound as good as Belinda Bruce.

How to Sound Like a Real Person

Good broadcast writing often requires us to unlearn many of the ways we learned to write in creative writing classes or in graduate school—or while working at newspapers or wire services.

FIRST, AND FOREMOST, *SAY* YOUR SENTENCES BEFORE YOU WRITE THEM DOWN; OR AT THE VERY LEAST, SAY THEM OUT LOUD AFTER YOU'VE WRITTEN THEM. "This is one of the most commonly offered pieces of advice that we give in every writing workshop," Robert Siegel says, "and it's one of the most commonly ignored." As you write, ask yourself: Would I ever say this sentence in my regular life, when I am not writing a news story? If the answer is no, change it.

Consider the beginning of this story, whose grammar and syntax are identical to those of an item that ran on a news wire: "A Supreme Court increasingly concerned about how individual states' authority fares when pitted against the federal government's power is studying a property rights dispute from Connecticut that could yield a key states-rights ruling." There are many things wrong with this sentence, but let's start at the top. Would you ever actually *say* something like, "The judge was nominated to a Supreme Court increasingly concerned about how individual states' authority fares when pitted against the federal government's power"? Even Laurence Olivier couldn't have pulled off a line like that! A radio version of the story might begin something like, "The Supreme Court has agreed to consider a case that could eventually redefine states' rights. The case has to do with hotel owners in Connecticut, who claim . . ."

Remember, expressing your thoughts in short, declarative sentences doesn't require you to eliminate any of your ideas—just to ration them out. You aren't sacrificing anything by writing less convoluted prose.

DON'T USE WORDS ON THE RADIO YOU WOULDN'T SAY AT OTHER TIMES. Many words or phrases were added to the news lexicon by headline writers: to save a few letters, they turned an "increase in the unemployment rate" into "rise in the jobless rate," though no one actually says "jobless" outside of the news business. And when was the last time you actually described a robbery as a "heist"? Or, for that matter, referred to snow as "the white stuff," as weather forecasters often do, since the word has no natural synonym? "There are a lot of words that have died in spoken language and simply live on in news copy," Robert Siegel says. "It's toxic to good writing. We should be striving for originality."[2]

And that goes for adjectives, as well as nouns. Good writers avoid the sort

of hyphenated adjectives that show up only in news stories—phrases like "rebel-held," "mineral-rich," "storm-weary," and "tech-heavy" (as in the "tech-heavy NASDAQ"). "It's hard to process an adjective like that," says Renee Montagne, the *Morning Edition* host. "Like 'crime-ridden neighborhood—it's not natural speech." And things get even worse when a writer in search of a synonym combines a hyphenated adjective with a hyphenated noun. One reporter referred to Motorola on second reference as "the suburban Chicago–based high-tech gadget-maker"—a phrase that would never crop up in real life. ("Great news, Dad! I just got a job with a suburban Chicago–based high-tech gadget-maker!")

DON'T USE SYNTAX THAT DOES NOT OCCUR NATURALLY. News stories frequently begin with phrases like "President Bush today told members of Congress" or "Heads of state tomorrow meet in Geneva." But we never say "I today went shopping" or "My wife tomorrow plans to throw me a party." The story above described "a Supreme Court increasingly concerned about . . ." But you wouldn't ever utter a phrase like "I'm planning on painting my garage increasingly showing signs of wear and tear."

Whenever you write a sentence to say on the air, think about how you'd say an *analogous* sentence in your daily life, and adopt that more colloquial word order. That will often mean writing two shorter sentences to replace one long one.

USE PRESENT PARTICIPLES—THE "PRESENT PROGRESSIVE" TENSE—TO DESCRIBE THINGS THAT ARE GOING ON AT THE MOMENT. Many reporters will depict scenes in a rather literary manner: "It's the beginning of a new shift at the observatory. A clock strikes midnight. Two astronomers sip coffee as they begin their shift. Behind them, a technician looks at photographs from the previous night's observations." Often the reporter is consciously trying to avoid the verb "to be" by using more colorful verbs ("strikes," "sips," "looks"), or is attempting to achieve a dramatic effect. This style of writing can be effective in print, but it isn't really the way people speak; we use "to be" all the time as an auxiliary verb when we're describing ongoing events. Imagine you were the reporter on the scene at the observatory talking over a cell phone, and someone asked you, "What does it look and sound like?" You might say the clock "is striking midnight," the astronomers "are sipping" their coffee, the technician "is looking" at the pictures. The lesson here: if you're inclined to use the present tense to describe scenes, try doing so the same way you would to an imaginary person on the phone—using the "present progressive."

DON'T PARAPHRASE ACTUALITIES AS IF YOU WERE READING A QUOTE FROM THE NEWSPAPER. Newspaper reporters generally put the attributions at the end of their quotes, as in this fictional example:

> "The advantage of being part of an international trading community is that your increased exports can make up for a weaker currency," said Charles Gold, who was a domestic policy advisor to President Bush and now lives in Chicago.

Read that passage out loud and you'll see how ill-suited the construction is for radio. In normal conversations, when we relate what someone has said, we put the attribution at the beginning—e.g., "My boss says I have to get this piece done by midnight," as opposed to, "I have to get this piece done by midnight, says my boss."

Similarly, newspapers frequently invert sentence structure—tacking together a string of prepositional phrases—in a way that sounds bizarre in speech:

> "I'm confident we can get the job done," Smith said last week at a ceremony marking the transfer of the fiber optics initiative and the new technology project from the Commerce Department to his control.

Don't do this in radio scripts.

KEEP YOUR SENTENCE STRUCTURE SIMPLE. Remember, time goes in only one direction; listeners can't go back to try to figure out who or what you were talking about at the beginning of your voice track. Read this sentence out loud: "Growing up in southern Massachusetts during the First World War, when prejudice against Germans or people of German extraction was still widespread in the United States, Helmut Kleinfelder had a difficult life." For three quarters of the sentence, the listener doesn't know who we're talking about.[3] Keep it simple; allot a sentence to each idea, and wherever possible put the subject at the beginning of the sentence. In this case, it would be better to say something like, "Helmut Kleinfelder had a difficult life. He grew up in southern Massachusetts during the First World War. At the time, many people in this country let their feelings about the war color their attitude toward German-Americans."

Other Newswriting Tips

There are a few other tenets of radio news writing to keep in mind, whether you're writing forty-five-second reports for a newscast, an intro for a host to read, or your own story.

AVOID GENERALITIES AND PLATITUDES. Listen to the radio long enough, and

you'll hear introductions and pieces that start with phrases like "Many people think," "It's widely accepted," "You may not be aware of the fact." All of these reflect assumptions on the part of the writer. They're often unsupportable or untrue. (We would balk at a blanket statement like "Mexicans are a very happy people," but for some reason we seem confident about asserting, "Most Americans have never heard of folksinger Tom Paxton.")

AVOID MEANINGLESS ATTRIBUTIONS. Beware of the overused terms "officials," "analysts," "critics," and "experts." "I have spent a lifetime trying to pull 'officials' out of *All Things Considered*," says Robert Siegel. A writer can often replace "officials" with "executives," "politicians," "military officers," "labor leaders," and so on. Better yet, attribute the idea or statement to a real person. Siegel also suggests "good old-fashioned metonymy, of having places and institutions speak." Again, this is in keeping with making scripts reflect colloquial speech. People really do say things like, "Ford says it's coming out with a new hybrid car"; they don't say, "Ford *officials* say they're coming out with a new hybrid car."

USE TITLES SPARINGLY. If you're at a dinner party, you would not expect someone to greet you by saying, "Have you met United States Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John D. Holum?" So don't introduce him to listeners that way. Instead you can say, "John Holum is a U-S diplomat [or Under Secretary of State, if you have to use his title] specializing in arms control."

KEEP SENTENCES SHORT. Avoid run-on sentences, whether you're writing for yourself or for someone else—"no longer than one or two lines," says NPR host Liane Hansen. The desire to pack in information often results in sentences larded with clauses that separate the subject and verb. "The biggest complaint I have about leads I have to read from other people is too many dependent clauses," says host Scott Simon. When you write a sentence like "President Bush—fresh from his meeting yesterday with Democratic Congressional leaders, the first such meeting in eighteen months—said today the United States . . . ," it takes so long to get to "said" that it's easy to forget whether we're talking about the President or Democratic Congressional leaders.

WRITE IN THE ACTIVE VOICE. If you're old enough, you may remember that President Ronald Reagan, speaking of the Iran-Contra scandal, used the passive voice when he said, "Mistakes were made." He pointedly avoided saying by *whom*. That may be good politics, but it would have been bad

journalism. Using the active voice[4] ensures that the reporter will attribute actions to someone or something. Instead of saying "The administration is being criticized for its stand," he has to explain "Democrats are criticizing the administration"; in place of "The paramilitary groups were ordered to kill," he's obligated to be more specific and say "Serbian soldiers ordered the paramilitary groups to kill"; instead of "Students have been told to report sexual harassment," he has to identify who did the telling—"Teachers and principals have told the students to report sexual harassment." The active voice also helps the listener create a vivid *picture* of the action. When we hear, "The paramilitary groups were ordered to kill the women and children," we can imagine the paramilitary forces and their victims, but we don't see anyone giving the orders. Rewriting the sentence to put it in the active voice brings the picture into focus.

DON'T USE RHETORICAL OR HYPOTHETICAL QUESTIONS. Starting an intro or piece with a rhetorical question is all too common because it's so much easier than coming up with a real beginning. Think how many times you've heard someone on the radio or TV open a story by saying, "Have you ever wondered . . . ?" (Usually the honest answer is no.) Sometimes the question is also vague and a cliché—a hat trick! One NPR intro included the line, "But what about America's love affair with the automobile?" Well, what *about* it?

DON'T BE OVERCAUTIOUS. It's fair to say something "may be the largest" of its kind, or that a person is "one of the most famous," or that a vote "could be a setback." But often news writers go a step further and say it "may be one of the largest" or that the person is "perhaps one of the most famous" or that the vote "could be a potential setback." Too many qualifications essentially rob the sentence of any meaning. Robert Siegel recalls one story from a reporter in Africa that ended by referring to "a war that—at least for the moment—appears to have no end in sight"—a quadruply modified statement! "We would have probably considered it editorializing if he'd spoken of a 'war without end,'" Siegel says. "But I don't know why we felt that 'it appears' to have no end 'in sight'—when those are basically the same statement. And that's 'at least for the moment'!"

REMEMBER THAT A RADIO AUDIENCE CONSISTS OF LISTENERS, NOT VIEWERS. When you write for radio, you can easily emphasize the aural nature of the medium: "Coming up, we'll *hear* from the woman who broke the story" or "We'll *talk about* why zoning ordinances have become such a hot topic in Maryland." When a newly elected Virginia governor gave the Democratic response to a Republican President's State of the Union address, Robert

Siegel described him as "a new voice" for his party—not "a new face."

WATCH OUT FOR GRAMMATICAL ERRORS. "I see pronoun misreferences, singular-plural problems—basic grammar school stuff," says Stu Seidel, who has been editing at NPR for years. This is another consequence of sentences that are filled with dependent clauses and parenthetical phrases. Writers often get misled by sentences like, "The letter sent by the four Nobel Prize–winning economists—three of whom teach at the University of Chicago—say they are . . ." If you're in doubt about what form a verb should take—whether it's singular or plural—read the sentence without the parenthetical clause: "The letter sent by the four Nobel Prize-winning economists *says* they are . . ." Or rewrite the sentence to juxtapose the subject ("The letter") with the verb ("says").

REWRITE AWKWARD PHRASES, EVEN IF THEY'RE "CORRECT." There is a sort of grammatically fussy writing that results from too much education. But anything that gets in the way of the meaning of a sentence will break the listener's concentration. You want people to hear *what* you're saying, not focus on how you're saying it. So generally, if it sounds wrong on the radio, it *is* wrong—even if the grammar books say otherwise.

AVOID NEEDLESS REPETITION OF WORDS. It not only sounds dull to say something like "A dozen *workers* were at the site this morning, *working* in the freezing cold," it also doesn't tell us very much about what they were doing. Yes, workers work, and voters vote, and drivers drive, but you can almost always find stronger, more focused verbs to eliminate the redundancies: "A dozen workers were at the site this morning, digging post holes for a new fence in the freezing cold." (But keep in mind that some words have no obvious or natural synonyms—"gold," for example, or "snow." And it's probably better to repeat the word "rain" a few times than to say "precipitation"—or worse, "precipitation activity.")

RECOGNIZE CLICHÉS AND LOOK FOR ALTERNATIVES. Most people know what's wrong with clichés, but unfortunately they immediately come to mind when news writers are under deadline pressure. Some broadcast writing—sports reporting, for example, or business news—often consists of nothing *but* clichés: "The Bulls were stampeding on Wall Street today. Blue chip stock prices skyrocketed . . ." Many reporters often use military metaphors to heighten a sense of tension: "Democrats and Republicans are battling over welfare reform." There are almost always more colorful and precise ways to express the same thoughts.[5]

AVOID UNNECESSARY JARGON, ACRONYMS, AND INITIALISMS. A lot of jargon and

arcane language creeps into radio scripts because the people we interview use it. Sometimes it's a sign of a reporter's lack of confidence; if he doesn't really understand physics, he may leave a phrase like "adiabatic change" in an actuality out of fear of scrambling the speaker's point by defining the term incorrectly. But often the audio can be edited to avoid words, phrases, or acronyms that would be unintelligible to most listeners; if it can't, the reporter may be able to elegantly define terms we're going to hear in the actuality. Before a sound bite of someone mentioning "the AIR meeting," for instance, the reporter or host can sneak in the definition of AIR: "The Association of Independents in Radio—or AIR—has been around since 1988. At this year's AIR meeting, producers plan to discuss . . ." The listener should never be forced to try to figure out what a word or expression means. While he's trying to parse the last sentence, he's missing the rest of the story.

DON'T OVERWHELM PEOPLE WITH TOO MANY NAMES AND NUMBERS. As a *Morning Edition* host, Steve Inskeep says he often has had to deal with overburdened intros; he advises, "Specific names and numbers should be the essential ones. Others should be salted into the piece, or dropped altogether." It's easier said than done. When we know a lot about a subject, it's often tempting to try to give the listener an earful of facts. But we can be too smart for our own good. Nigeria may have 130 million people, and the new President may have been elected with 63 percent of the vote, and only 40 percent of the eligible voters may have cast ballots—but all these numbers almost certainly obscure what's really important in your piece. Ask yourself why you're including the numbers, and then see if there's another way to make the same point: "Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation . . ."

LISTEN FOR TONGUE TWISTERS, RHYMES, AND OTHER ODDITIES. Jane Smith may be Mr. Fister's sister, but you probably don't want to identify her that way in your script. (If you don't know why, go back and read that sentence out loud.) Similarly, you don't want to end an intro with, "Wayne Corey has the story" or "Richard Dorr has more." And beware of unintentional alliteration. (Beware of too much alliteration of any sort; no one thinks it's clever.) If you're inclined to start a scene by telling us that "Fred Fishkin is foraging for fungi," you might want to say he's "looking for a few good mushrooms" instead.

STEER CLEAR OF GIMMICKS YOU'VE HEARD ONLY IN OTHER NEWS BROADCASTS. You may have heard TV anchors hyping a story by holding back the subject—teasing the viewer for a few seconds to try to generate curiosity. "It will be one of the biggest events this city has ever seen, and organizers hope it will

draw tourists from around the country. And it won't have any sponsors, or celebrities, or even free give-aways. 'It' is the first annual kite-flying festival . . ." Mentally healthy people do not talk this way. ("It was a total surprise when I came to work this morning. It involved the secretary, the producer, and the vice president of news. 'It' was an announcement that we would all be getting pay raises . . .") Whatever effectiveness this device may once have had has surely been worn away by decades of overuse. For the same reason, you should be careful not to overuse the verbless, headline style of lead sentence you hear all the time on the radio and TV: "In Albany today—a sixty-one-car pileup." This can be a forceful way to get into a subject once in a while, but it's hardly colloquial. ("On the subway today—a crowded car and a kid playing music too loud.")

KNOW HOW TO PRONOUNCE FOREIGN WORDS AND UNUSUAL NAMES AND PLACES, AND INCLUDE THE PRONUNCIATIONS IN YOUR SCRIPT. Even if you think you know how to pronounce "Llangollen," for instance, when the moment comes for you to say it on the air it you'll be glad to see the reminder "lahn-GAHKH-lin" in your script (which is probably as close as an American can get to the real name of the Welsh city). And pronouncers are essential whenever you're writing for someone other than yourself, such as a program host.[6]

CHECK FOR TYPOS, MISSING WORDS, AND OTHER CLERICAL ERRORS. Every writer and editor should think of his or her script as being ready for broadcast; in a pinch, it may end up on the air—or on the Web. Don't assume that someone else will correct your mistakes and expand your idiosyncratic abbreviations. For instance, an intro shouldn't use the reporter's initials rather than his name; after all, the host is not going to say, "LG has this report." And don't count on a computer's spelling or grammar checker to do your work for you. As Stu Seidel points out, even small errors suggest a lack of attention to details—not a good trait in a journalist. "If you have 'their' where it should be 'they're' or 'there,'" he says, "it makes me worry about every aspect of the piece."

CHAPTER 6

Working with Video

INTRODUCTION



The potential power of mobile-phone journalism was shown during coverage of the 2011 London riots. Using just an iPhone, Sky News journalist Mark Stone captured some of the most striking footage of the riots. His confrontations with the looters engaged viewers and the impact of his work was immediate: his footage led bulletins on Sky and was used by rival TV networks across the globe. Online he was trending on Twitter within an hour of the video being filmed. Within 24 hours his video material had been viewed by nearly a million people online. You can see his video at:

Stone's reporting earned him a lot of admiration. Here are some of the Twitter responses to his reports:

- 'Have to say, what a great job Mark Stone is doing tonight. Very courageous journalism' – @skynews via @HayleyRockss
- 'Mark Stone is super brave. He's reporting from all over with his bike and camera phone' – via @6inchstilettos
- 'Love it, my colleague @stone_skynews is currently trending worldwide on Twitter for his reporting' – Mark Stone via @fieldproducer

In this chapter we look at how to put video news online. To work effectively with video you need to bring a range of skills together. You need to be able shoot video, record sound effectively, record a 'piece to camera', script,

voiceover and edit. Most importantly you need to bring words and pictures together to tell the story in the most compelling and informative way.

While production standards in video outside the mainstream national media are often quite low we encourage you to adopt a high standard in your video-making as there is no doubt this is the way the news industry is going. To be a competent video journalist (VJ) takes a lot of effort, but the reporter with good video skills opens many career opportunities. Not only is the ability to make a video news package essential to working in TV news, it also opens the way to current affairs, documentary and factual programming. Researchers for TV are expected to have good video skills.

Learning the TV news model – those well-established practices that make television news eminently watchable – is the most effective learning method for the VJ. Watch and analyse how TV journalists deliver the news engagingly with a synthesis of words, pictures and sound.

>>OBJECTIVES<<

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

1 use a video camera;
2 record sound for package including voiceover;
3 write to pictures in a script;
4 use a video-editing software program;
5 include user-generated content.

VIDEO JOURNALISM FOR ONLINE

> “There is no doubt that video is an incredibly engaging format for information, news, and entertainment – well, for anything really. A video can much easier explain a complex topic than text alone as people can see and repeat what you do. You can show instead of just telling or hoping people read what you painstakingly wrote. (Christian Heilmann, Mozilla, 2012)”

In the UK we have some of the highest professional standards for producing video news in the world. Look at any news programme on a major channel and you will see brilliantly made news packages.



Figure 6.1 A video camera is best held on a tripod to avoid shaking. (Source: Dreamstime)

Online video journalism versus TV journalism

There is a running debate about online news websites copying the TV model. The American new media guru Jeff Jarvis (a visiting professor at London's City University) (2012) says that online sites should not copy TV. He believes they should innovate with new forms of video delivery:

> "I think they are still making a big mistake in trying to imitate old time TV. They are trying to do stand-ups. They are trying to do B rolls [the supplemental footage intercut with the main shot in an interview or documentary] and establishing shots because TV did it. There is no reason to."

The basic concept of the VJ is of a reporter who goes out on their own, with a camera, and shoots, scripts and edits their own work. News teams working on websites tend to be smaller than their equivalent in traditional media. However, the introduction of video journalism online has been gradual. It is mainly a resources issue as most websites operate on very tight budgets. Even with modern hardware and software a video package takes longer to prepare than its text or audio or even a photo-gallery equivalent. It also requires some training and this has deterred many local newspapers.

The rise of the VJ

About ten years ago the video journalism revolution in the UK started in the traditional media – in the then well-funded BBC TV news. The BBC believed that one person making news packages could be more flexible and productive. It began training reporters to be video journalists, mostly on regional news teams for TV news. Hundreds have now been through the training scheme. Some journalists became video journalists as they found making their own videos was the best way to persuade news desks to broadcast the stories they covered. Many video journalists love the freedom of working on their own. David Heathfield (in Heathfield et al., 2011) from NATO TV says: 'I like to work myself and camera, making the whole thing from start to finish.'

Karen Thayer, Multi Media Journalist and Change Manager at the BBC (in Heathfield et al., 2011), says: 'Where I'm coming from, video journalism is about the storytelling and unless you have something to say don't pick up the camera. The more difficult thing is to work out what I have to say, what is the story I want to tell.'

Connected TVs arrive in the living room

One thing is certain: video will become more and more important as audiences become more and more interested in visual delivery. We are witnessing the rise of digital streaming media players – using digital set top boxes, such as Apple TV, games consoles and a new breed of smart TVs. These allow users to watch online video on their living-room TV sets from sites such as YouTube, Vimeo, BBC iPlayer and Channel 4oD, which mean there will be more demand for content in video format. We are also witnessing the rise of specific title video channels. The US-based *Wall Street Journal* now has a very effective video channel featuring high-quality business news. The video journalist might also be delivering text, photographs and audio versions of the story, and may also provide stories by social media as well as online. Sometimes the video will be the only medium used to deliver the story. On other occasions the journalist might decide not to use video at all.

By comparison to TV news, the quality of video on the websites of most regional and local papers is still often average and sometimes very poor, consisting of a wobbly interview shot by a reporter on an iPhone with barely audible sound. A growing number of newspapers like the idea of using a

fuller interview on a video as part of the online presentation of the news story if only a few quotes were utilized in the actual news piece. The interview gives added value to those members of the site's audience who are really interested in the story.

Editors are very conscious of low professional standards of the video on their website and are requiring new reporters to have video packaging skills. It is worth noting that the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) – the body which sets the training standards for reporters based on industry requirements – now has a video for online unit in its new diploma. These modules require aspirant reporters to be able to shoot, script and edit a news package that achieves a standard very similar to what one might find on a regional TV news bulletin. There is convergence of the newspaper reporter and the VJ of regional TV news. In both cases the reporter is a one-man band who has to record, script and edit as well as deliver a purely text version of the story.

We were told by the then head of the *Guardian*'s multimedia team, Tom Happold (2012): 'I am sure that if you are applying for a job on the *Guardian* as a news reporter and you have the ability to shoot and edit video, this will give you the edge in getting the job. It is important to us.'

User-generated video content

Video news doesn't just come from staff and freelance journalists. Members of the public will offer video to you. Members of the public frequently film dramatic events and this is known as user-generated content (UGC). If you watch any of the numerous 'fly on the wall' documentaries about policing, for example, you will notice at any late-night fracas bystanders busily capturing events on their mobile phones. They are very often happy to share their video with you. Steve Punter, a freelance VJ (in Heathfield et al., 2011), says: 'I think we are about to enter a golden age of new media, but whether it is TV, I doubt it. It will be mobile, it will be on the web, it will be pro-am and completely disruptive of ownership.'

HOW NEWSPAPERS USE VIDEO

There are a growing number of sources of video material to use online. There are agencies that supply basic clips of any event. ITN is one of these.

The staff journalist can then use the material and edit it into a package. There is a wide range of different types of footage online. At its most simple the reporter might edit and upload footage shot by a member of the community without any voicing. For many news reports, the reporter simply writes and voices a script to the pre-supplied pictures.

Here is an example from the *Southern Daily Echo* where the reporter has written a script to pictures supplied by the local emergency services: www.dailyecho.co.uk/video/87129/.

Another example of scripted footage from one camera is: www.dailyecho.co.uk/video/87076/.

One of the simplest versions of a package is a short script that the newsreader or presenter reads 'out of vision' to accompany a sequence of shots. In TV this is known as 'an OOV'. They are often used for scripting 'found' footage. This is footage provided, for example, by the police as in a piece of CCTV of a crime taking place or by a reader. It may also be a jolly, if embarrassing, piece of video in the spirit of 'You've been framed'. Here's an example of CCTV footage from a shop recording a theft: www.dailyecho.co.uk/video/107716/.



Figure 6.2 A reporter at the *Daily Telegraph* newsroom presents a video report. (Source: Steve Hill)

CCTV footage works well for local newspapers as it is cheap and often very popular – particularly footage of bank robberies and late-night pub brawls.

It also allows local newspapers to 'cross-promote', for example from a text report in a newspaper to an associated video on its website. It's an increasingly common practice.

Another technique used on online sites is to link to free pre-packaged content on YouTube or similar hosted site. This takes little effort on the part of the journalist. This video content is often very popular with users, even though it is not at all exclusive content. It is sometimes more popular than painstakingly produced video packages made by a journalist.

With the proliferation of CCTV and the ubiquity of mobile phones there is a wide range of video available and much of it is free. If you are working on a news desk the editor will expect you to be able to create and utilize video to enhance the website and grab the attention of users. The news editor will want you to make sure that the footage belongs to the person who is providing it to you. They will also want to make sure you consider privacy issues – for instance was the video recorded in a private place and did the person who recorded it have permission to be there. Here's an example of a high-quality piece of a trainee journalist's work that has been used on a professional newspaper site: www.buckinghamshireadvertiser.co.uk/south-buckinghamshire-news/local-buckinghamshire-advertiser-news/2012/03/14/why-people-feel-so-strongly-about-hs2-82398-30535893/.



Figure 6.3 Emergency services rescue crane driver after crane collapse in Southampton docks. (Source: *Southern Daily Echo*)



Figure 6.4 Man threatens to jump from 120 foot high crane. (Source: *Southern Daily Echo*)

FINDING THE STORY

Finding a story is a skill. We know at first, many trainee journalists find this hard. Often student journalists lack confidence and find it hard to speak to people they do not know. With effort that reticence is overcome. First, think through what is the most topical aspect of an event and what is the best way to tell the story. Something has happened but there will be different 'angles' to the story. An 'angle' is the particular way you choose to tell the story. You want to tell the one that is most topical, or is most important or is most dramatic. But you must not bend the truth to get your angle. Accuracy is a keystone in good journalism. Think about it.

WRITE TO PICTURES

Writing for video is different from audio and pure text. The same basic rules of news-writing apply as we detailed in the early chapters. But writing for broadcast (known as writing to pictures) is a synthesis of words and pictures. You still have to deliver the basic news information. The pictures can do a lot of the work and reduce the need for everything to be explained in the words. Like all news, every video story needs a different treatment but there are some basic rules. These rules are well proven and if you want to break them you need a good reason to, and you should be sure that you have found a better way of telling the story. Writing for video is not a question of writing a script and then adding pictures. Neither is it a case of just getting pictures and then writing the words. It's about creatively bringing the two elements together to the best effect. That takes a bit of getting used to and is a matter of practice.



Figure 6.5 The police will often supply CCTV footage to local newspaper websites. It is a good way of catching criminals and generates traffic to the website. (Source: *Southern Daily Echo*)

Sometimes the picture does most of the work and you need few words. For example, a story about a train being derailed at high speed with pictures of the derailed train lying on its side does not need a script that says 'a train has been derailed', because it's obvious to anyone viewing. Use what you write in the script to complement the pictures. Tell the audience who was injured, how many were in the train, how fast it was going, where it was travelling from and to. Use your script to add information, not to repeat to the audience what they can already see.

A very simple example of writing to pictures was on the BBC1 10 o'clock TV news on 26 April 2012, in an item about Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt's controversial links with News Corp over the BskyB bid. It opened with a picture of Cabinet Minister Hunt who was out jogging. The commentary started: 'He can run but he can't hide.' Simple but effective writing to pictures.

Video lends itself to the great interviewees. Sometimes rather than the reporter opening the piece with their intro lines setting the story, the

interviewee does it better. Starting with the interviewee in this way throws the viewer right into the story.

One major difference between TV news and online video packages is the way they are introduced. Think of all the TV news you have watched. On screen throughout the news you will have one or more studio-based presenters. Their job is to introduce the news. Typically they will introduce a story with two or three sentences, ending with something like 'Our reporter Jane Smith is at the scene'.



Figure 6.6 Luke Karmali's video. (Source: Trinity Mirror)

CREATING PACKAGES WITH DIFFERENT LENGTHS

For most online reports the video will be stand-alone, delivered by the reporter alone. This means the reporter has to find a way to explain the

story from the start. There is no help from a presenter. As a reporter working for the main TV channels you will be required to produce 'reversion' – a range of different format packages from one story. Say you are sent out to cover an armed robbery. You may be required to make the following versions:

- A 90-second version for the main evening news TV bulletin. This will need a cue written for the presenter. This might include one piece to camera (PTC).
- A three-minute stand-alone version for the online site. This might include two pieces to camera.
- A 45-second version for a short news bulletin.
- An audio version for radio news. This might be 30, 45 or 60 seconds.
- The reporter will also have to write a short text link for the online page to encourage browsers to watch the video version.

While the reporter can use much of the same information, each package will need to be scripted slightly differently and a range of editing decisions made. The experienced reporter will know that they are likely to have to re-edit their story for a range of formats so they will think carefully about how to make sure they have all the right material available. They will do this before they start filming. The professional might shoot too much material to give themselves room for manoeuvre.

As a journalist you need to learn to make packages of different lengths. You should be able to make packages of one, two and three minutes. In our experience, one of the biggest problems trainee journalists give themselves is not recording enough material rather than recording too much.

If you are asked to cover a news event and produce a video package there are a range of possible basic ingredients:

1 interviews;
2 vox pops;
3 general views (known as GVs) – shots that show the place or person at the centre of the story;
4 commentary (known as COMM) – this is the reporter voicing the story;
5 reporter talking on screen ('piece to camera', PTC) – this is another

method of delivering the script;

6 found footage – someone might have recorded dramatic footage of the event you are reporting; and

7 graphics.

Remember the job of the reporter is to bring an eyewitness account of events wherever possible. It's not possible in every case but even when the reporter can't be on the scene, their job is to get there and find eyewitnesses to give the best possible account of events. The reporter's 'piece to camera' at the scene is important as it brings authority and authenticity to the report.

INTERVIEW: KURT BARLING, BBC LONDON REPORTER

Kurt Barling is a highly experienced reporter working for BBC London News. His main outlet is television but he also services other platforms. 'BBC London News has 1.5 million viewers a day and so that has to be our paramount focus.' He has access to other London BBC platforms. 'Quite often you will see a good line coming off the television item which could be used as a talking point on the radio station 94.9FM.' He will do a radio package from his material. Then he looks to online. 'If the story has more layers and can afford more context you might also do something online like a 750-word treatment for online, and the benefit of online is that you give your television work a secondary market.' Kurt likes the fact that once you get a video package online, 'It stays there in perpetuity', unlike the ephemeral nature of television. He often gets feedback on packages he made online from people who have only just seen it many months later. As a BBC reporter, he says, 'You are always alive to the possibility that your piece can thrive and survive across all three platforms.'

How does Barling choose his stories from all those that come into the BBC London news desk every day? 'First thing you ask is whether there is a story there. Sometimes a story comes in and you look at the lines and there is no story there.' But every day there is a story that will work. He used as an example the on-going story of the shooting of the young north Londoner Mark Duggan by the police in controversial circumstances which sparked off the 2011 riots. 'An obvious public interest story, an obvious story for me to do because I have very good connections in London's minority communities. It is an area in London I know particularly well as I have done

a lot of work there in the last 25 years. So it's a natural place for me to go and look at the story.' What does he do next? What questions does he ask himself?



Figure 6.7 BBC reporter Kurt Barling. (Source: Kurt Barling)

> "What are the lines of the story? Well the obvious lines of the story are the who, what, when, where, why and how of the story, starting off with Mark Duggan. Who shot him? Where did they shoot him? When did they shoot and why did they shoot him? And trying and explore all those fundamental questions. And in order to animate those questions you have a number of different potential sources. Clearly you have a number of official sources although in a shooting like that the officials will clam up pretty quickly and just give you the official line.
>
> Then you might find yourself with eyewitnesses in the community who can offer you some insight into what they saw. So you're reporting directly what they saw in the incident. Then you can turn to other people in the community who have their own pathways of intelligence. They can give you a little bit more insight into who saw what and when although you would have to be careful how you report that because it is not necessarily 100 per cent accurate. You will go to the scene and gather pictures of the scene, of that incident from whichever vantage point you can get to. In the end television is about pictures. No pictures – very difficult to tell the story."

Barling says it is very hard to keep a video story alive if you don't have

fresh pictures.

> “The one thing you had with Duggan is that you constantly had fresh pictures. You could go to the family to get a new line. You could get the family at the coroner’s inquest for a new line. And that new line was constantly pushing that story along. The inquest was a fresh line.”

He summed up the method:

> “In terms of going out and gathering material, though, you identify the key lines of the story, the key characters who are going to animate that story and get their story on tape. Any story for television needs pictures, that’s self-evident. I would hasten to add, many times, it doesn’t stop a story because you don’t have fresh pictures, but the story gets tired very quickly if you don’t have pictures.”

LEARN TO REALLY SEE

In Chapter 5 we emphasized that you have to learn to listen to make good audio. With video you really have to learn to see. When you are filming, what is it you really see? What will your pictures really say to the viewers? What is the background?

Have you seen video footage where the interviewee appears to have a lamp-post growing out of their head? This happen when we don’t look carefully and think ‘What does this say to the viewer?’ and ‘Does this look OK?’ If you are recording someone on screen, avoid situations where something distracting is going on in the background.

Be careful not to let the words and pictures contradict each other. You might be writing a story saying that a council fell behind with rubbish collections over Christmas causing a build-up of rotting rubbish in some streets. If that is true, don’t show just a couple of bags of rubbish in the street as that undermines your story-line. You need a large pile. Don’t show refuse collectors picking up the rubbish as that will contradict visually what you are saying in the commentary. If you are talking about a hosepipe ban being introduced because of a drought don’t start your package with a reservoir of water. You can bring that in later in the story, perhaps to explain that the reservoirs are only half as full as they should be. But don’t

use that shot at the beginning. At the beginning you need something that signposts drought – perhaps cracked earth or grass that has gone brown or crops that are dying.

For example, if your editor tells you to produce a video package about a council that has withdrawn subsidies to a rural bus service, you will need the following video material:

General views (GVs) of one of the bus services that are threatened as a result of the cuts. This footage should make it clear that the bus is a rural service. So a good shot would be a shot that swings around from fields to a bus stop as the bus draws up.

Interview 1: perhaps with a family from an outlying village that relies on the bus to get them to the nearest major town and will be cut off without it. It might be a mother and son. The boy might tell you he uses the bus for school and to see his friends at weekends. The mother might say she cannot afford a car. A good place to film the interview would be on the bus.

Interview 2: optional – perhaps with an elderly person who relies on the bus to take them on weekly visits to the hospital or to do their shopping.

Interview 3: with the councillor who is responsible for the decision to cut the subsidy. This is important to make sure the story is correct and to make sure that it is balanced. The council may be under tremendous financial pressure to cut back and would have to cut back other vital services if this subsidy is not cut.

Interview 4: with a spokesman from the bus company, who might explain that without the subsidy the service is not financially viable. They might have some surprising information perhaps disclosing that only a handful of passengers actually use the bus service in question.

Vox pops: You might get some vox pops from people at the bus stop.

Piece to camera (PTC): A sense of authenticity will be conveyed if the reporter reports from the scene. A good place to report would be from the moving bus where you can see the background is of the countryside. You would prepare some script for the piece to camera so you can learn it and deliver it. On the BBC College of Journalism site, reporter David Shukmann (Shukmann, n.d.) says he does not write and learn the script. He writes some rough notes and then records a spontaneous piece to camera. He believes this makes his PTCs very easy to listen to and prevents them from

sounding rehearsed. We think this is great, but only for the experienced reporter or for the reporter who finds talking to a camera very natural. Most people don't at first and a script is generally the best way to look and sound professional.

When you come back to the newsroom with your recorded video you are looking for the best way to tell the story. You will have written the top of the story – the intro that outlines the story. That might be:

> "Rural bus services in the West Darley area are likely to be severely cut following the council decision to remove £1m worth of fare subsides. Arriva – the bus company running the services – say that at least ten routes will have to go if the subsidies are withdrawn.
>
> A spokesman for the council says they were necessary in order to protect the provision of elderly people's care."

You then develop the narrative. You might choose to broaden the story to other cutbacks in transport in the whole area. Or to explain which other cuts they may be considering.

SIGNPOSTING

Certain shots are what we call signposting shots. A signpost shot reinforces the words and is a visual representation of a key point of the story. The first shot is often known as an 'establishing shot'.

If you are talking about cutting back bus services it is usual to show a bus.

CHOOSING A VIDEO CAMERA

A journalist should always carry a video camera even if it is just your mobile smartphone. As we have seen with Mark Stone's riot footage, the video camera feature on a smartphone can produce gripping content. This material was technically not really broadcast quality but was used for broadcast as they were the only images from the scene that were available. When you are in this situation, sound quality and camera shake are likely to be your two biggest problems.

A suitable video camera will have manual settings – especially focus and exposure. This enables greater control in difficult conditions such as poor light. We have all been in rooms where blinding natural light floods in and yet some parts of the room remain relatively dark. Manual exposure helps you keep the image in a constant light. Automatic exposure may dim and brighten making the video difficult to watch.

In busy streets an automatic focus camera may respond to an event peripheral to your subject. It might try to focus on a bus moving behind your interview subject. Sticking to manual focusing really helps.

The iPhone 5 is capable of video recording HD (1080p) up to 30 frames per second with audio. This is a great improvement and other smartphones are very good. Camera phones are OK but because of their thin size lack the ability to give a good depth of field (DOF), as well as some other important features. Depth of field is the distance between the nearest and farthest objects in a scene that appear sharp and clear in an image. Although a camera lens can focus at only one point in the distance at a time, the decrease in sharpness is gradual on each side of the focused distance, so that within the DOF, the lack of sharpness is imperceptible under normal viewing conditions.

In some cases, it may be desirable to have the entire image sharp, and a large depth of field is appropriate. In other situations a narrow DOF may make for a more powerful image, emphasizing the subject while de-emphasizing the foreground and background.

Flip cameras are also improving. These look like mobile phones but are dedicated cameras using the extra physical space (not having to have telephone electronics) for additional features. They have many of the elements that more expensive video cameras have. Phones and flip cameras are not good on stability. If you are going to use a camera phone – for interviews – we recommend you buy a camera stand. It will make a significant difference to the quality of the video you capture.

We strongly recommend a reasonable quality dedicated camera. Canon DSLRs are very good, and in particular the Canon EOS 600 DSLR at around £500. This has a much higher resolution than a mobile phone and is capable of capturing good-quality HD video as well as superb 18 megapixel digital still images. It is important that the camera has an external microphone input and headphone socket so you can monitor the sound. It is also

important that the sound quality is good. You will know from audio recording that it is important to get the microphone close to the source of the sound. When interviewing, the microphone needs to be close to the interviewee's mouth – usually a few inches below.

Stability is a key issue. A larger camera is easier to hold steady and fit onto a tripod. There is a very good guide on how to shoot and edit video for the web when using an iPhone, iPad or iPod out in the field or covering breaking news on Journalism.co.uk (www.journalism.co.uk/skills/how-to-shoot-and-edit-video-on-an-iphone/s7/a545443/

Before you set out there are a number of things you need to do. Make sure the equipment is all working properly. Are the batteries in your equipment fully charged? Do you have spare batteries? Is the microphone working? Are the leads working well? A dodgy microphone lead can ruin your sound. Professionals still find themselves with equipment problems. It is almost a rite of passage for a trainee video journalist to come back and discover that a vital interview was not recorded because of a flat or low battery.

CAPTURING GOOD VIDEO

Video rules are very similar to those for using a stills camera in Chapter 4. If outside, don't film into the sun.

Rule of thirds

If interviewing use the rule of thirds to frame the interviewee. You make sure the person's eyes are located in the place one third from the top and one third of the width from the side. It can be either left or right but it is good to have interviewees on different sides.

When recording a piece to camera, it is usual to place the reporter in the centre. But when you film an interviewee you should offset them to the right or left. Their eyes should be one third from the top and one third from the side of the frame. Alternating interviewees right and left is very useful in editing to keep the video visually interesting. The interviewee should be looking at you – slightly to the side of the camera – and not looking directly at the camera.

As Stephen Quinn and Vincent Filak (2005) explain, the rules for video are

similar to that for stills photographs: 'You should usually avoid placing the subject in the centre of the frame. People read left to right so their eyes are conditioned to naturally go to a point about two-thirds up the page.'

Allow yourself some footage to play with in the edit so let the camera run for a few seconds before you or your interviewee speaks – likewise at the end.

When you start filming keep the camera still – don't start panning or zooming until you have practised and can make this type of shot work.

Know where your material is going to appear

If it is going to be a small format, low-resolution online format or for mobiles, shoot close shots especially of interviewees. The closer the shots are, the better they'll look on a computer screen as wide scene-setting shots tend to get lost on a small screen.

Camera techniques: distance and angle

Wide shot (WS) – shot which shows all or most of a fairly large subject (for example, a person) and usually much of the surroundings.

Medium wide shot (MWS) – with an interviewee, the lower frame line cuts off his feet and ankles.

Medium shot (MS) – in such a shot, presenter of interviewee and its setting occupy roughly equal portion of the frame. In the case of the interviewee, the lower frame passes through the waist. There is space for hand gestures to be seen.

Medium close shot (MCS) – the setting can still be seen. The lower frame line passes through the chest of the interviewee.

Close-up (CU) – a shot that shows the interviewee's face so that it fills the screen.

MCU (Medium close-up) – head and shoulders.

BCU (big close-up) – forehead to chin. Close-ups focus attention on a person's feelings or reactions, and are sometimes used in interviews to show people in a state of emotional excitement, grief or joy.



Figure 6.8 A range of distance shots. (Source: Paul Lashmar)

Camera moves

A pan or zoom can be visually very effective. You might have a vicar talking about his church – you can pan down the church and move to him as he speaks and that is a much more interesting shot than a static frame. When you pan and zoom you need to work out the timing of what is going to be said in that shot. You should always begin and finish statically. Cutting into a moving shot when you edit is ugly and unprofessional. Don't jerk your body around when filming. If you decide to pan, use a steady motion so you aren't giving your audience a headache. As you become more skilled you can use movement shots. It is generally agreed that viewers like dynamic news footage. Even where the story does not lend itself to moving shots you can inject energy by panning and zooming. If you are shooting piles of rubbish in a street try to have some movement, even if it is of passing cars or

pedestrians. White and Barnas (2010) say about filming, 'avoid zooms and pans unless there is some important reason to zoom or pan on to something … it is better to cut from one shot or another'. Avoid 'hosepiping' – do not move your camera backwards and forwards or shoot and move. Movement shots should start statically, move evenly then stop. When using a camera which has an electronic zoom, use your body to zoom in. Don't use the actual zoom unless you absolutely have to as the footage gets more pixelated the more you zoom in.

Why that shot?

When you shoot think about how you are going to edit the video footage. Think about editing and about creating sequences so the footage works together and has a harmony.

EDITING

At the simplest level there are a range of very basic video editing packages like Apple's iMovie, or Windows Movie Maker. Sometimes they come pre-installed on your computer. One of the benefits of using iMovie is that it has pre-settings for both YouTube and Vimeo uploading. They are for the home-users and lack some elements that we feel are important in a professional context. We have found accurate editing can be difficult and frustrating.

There is a range of high-quality editing programs on the market for a reasonable price. Very popular is Final Cut Pro which is only for Apple computers. Another is Pinnacle Studio. Pinnacle has incorporated the Avid system which is well regarded in the TV industry.

It is often worth getting some basic training on these programs. They appear dauntingly complex but for most news packages you only need a few functions.

The first move is to upload your footage onto the computer so that your editing software can access the material. View the material and log your best material. If GVs, which are good clear stable shots? Which are useful for signposting the story? What are the timings on your pans and zooms? Once you have the pictures logged, look at any interviews – what are the good quotes? Draft a rough on the basis of what you have seen.



Figure 6.9 Pinnacle editing screen. (Source: Paul Lashmar)

When editing you should know that every story needs a different approach. There are rules but you need to develop the confidence to know when to break them. Always think – what is the best way to tell the story?

The sequence

A news video package will consist of a number of sequences. Where you need to use a range of images to tell a distinct part of a story you might construct a sequence. (A sequence expresses one of the thoughts that together make the story.) You need to think in sequences to plan your shots. For instance, the reporter may be at the opening of a new sports stadium. You will want to shoot video that shows them moving through different parts of the building. They may be reporting to camera but talking about another part of the stadium. You need to shoot video of that part of the stadium so you can put them together to tell the story well.

Example of sequence

If we take the West Darley bus service cuts story – one sequence will be about the family we are interviewing. So our sequence might be:

1 Camera on path in front of bus stop. Wide shot: bus pulls into bus stop family gets on board.
2 Camera on bus. Wide shot: family getting into bus and finding seats.
3 Medium shot: interview with family.
4 Camera outside at town bus stop. Wide Shot: family gets off.

Cutaways

You will also need some shots to act as cutaways for when you edit the interview. These shots allow you to cut interviews without nasty jump cuts. What you do is edit out what you don't want. This usually means joining two sentences. To hide the edit you use a shot that 'bridges' the sound edit. One important rule of cutaways for editing interviews is that you should not be able to see the face and especially the mouth of the interviewee. Typically, you video them from the back or perhaps you shoot a close-up of their hands gesticulating. Never 'clip' a sound edit – that's where you cut into a word. Sound edits should always be clean – between words.

Make every shot count. BBC guru Vin Ray (2003) counselled, 'never use a shot – any shot – as "wallpaper". Never write about pictures as though they weren't there'.

Captions

The caption should usually be located across the bottom quarter of the screen and be big enough for the viewer to read easily.

SOUND

Recording the voiceover is quite a simple process and is essentially the same as you learnt in Chapter 5. Most editing packages have the capability to record sound so all you have to do is plug the microphone into the computer, check your levels and record the commentary of your script. This is often referred to as a voiceover. When you are using a mix of voiceover, interviews, general views and pieces to camera it does get more complex. The better-quality editing programs usually have four or more audio tracks so you can put the voiceover on a different track which makes it easier to edit.



Figure 6.10 How a caption should look. (Source: Steve Hill/Solent University)

An important don't: when you cut between shots it is often a good idea not to allow the sound to cut so dramatically. You might let it run for a fraction of a second into the new shot. Or you might run some 'wild track' across the edit to smooth out the sound.

Wild track

As with audio you should always record at least 30 seconds of wild track. This is recorded at the end of filming at each location to get the background sound or ambience and is an important tool for smooth sound edits. Wild track can also be recorded sound that 'places' the story, e.g, the sound of Big Ben to suggest the House of Parliament or seagulls to suggest that the story takes place at the seaside.

Sound effects can be useful to develop a story. There are a number of places online where you can get sound effects free. We list a number on the companion website, plus some useful links explaining how they can be best used.

GRAPHICS

Graphics can help. In the case of the bird-watching story the reporter uses graphics to help liven up the story. Bear in mind this is a BBC breakfast news programme so it can be quite light-hearted. The reporter turns to his

advantage the fact that he has no footage of the rare bird by getting the graphics people to superimpose the graphic of the bird wherever he goes: in his hand, in the local pub and local grocery store where businesses have boomed since the bird arrived. The reporter is having fun.

Graphics, used with care, can help visualize a story in all sorts of ways. You might use the occasional graph or fact or quote. Typing large screeds of text onto the screen is a no-no. Keep it simple as in the example below.

UPLOADING VIDEO TO THE WEB

When you have finished editing you will need to 'render' your edit. This brings it together as a finished package to either upload online or to broadcast. The usual choices are usually either to use .avi format or .MP4. The .avi uses a lot of bytes and is high quality. Mp4 uses compression (see below) to reduce the amount of bytes used and is good if you need the material to be seen on iPhones. Part of the decision will depend on how your media organization presents video online. Some use YouTube or Vimeo to act as a remote server. You then take the link offered and embed it into a news page, so it appears alongside any text or still images you have. If your organization hosts video on its own server then you will need to upload onto the server and link onto the page. It is always better to use a system that has the video immediately visible on screen rather than requiring you to click and download before viewing.

Embedding your video

Most online news sites need a text caption on the page explaining what the video is about. Search engines can't read the content of the video itself, so you will need to describe what is in the video. Embed tags – these could be names of people interviewed, places, etc. – in your web page to explain what is in the video. These text tags can be read by search engines and are easy to create in popular CMSs.

The latest versions of Final Cut Pro (this is version 10 or X as we write this) and iMovie include the best settings for a range of video outputs (including YouTube, Vimeo, mobile, tablet computer or TV). These can be found under the 'share' heading in the main toolbar. It is normally best to stick with these headings.

If you want the option to be able to show your video at full screen you will probably need to render to high quality .avi. Unless you have a very powerful computer and fast broadband connection, optimizing for the web and then uploading even a relatively short video to YouTube can take up to 30 minutes. YouTube is a popular site and at busy times videos can take another 30 minutes or so to appear online.

If you want to host the video on your own server and keep it simple – use Quicktime or Adobe's Flash. Flash has been hampered by the dispute between Apple and Adobe – which means that it does not work on iPad. This is a problem for news outlets that use Flash.

The great thing about YouTube is that it is very simple. You can choose whether you want all or some YouTube viewers to see your video by selecting the suitable privacy controls. If you want viewers only to see it on your media site you can use the private setting.

The downside of Flash video

One of the reasons that online video news has been slow to take off is that it has had a negative reputation – mainly because it was often slow to load and choppy. Flash video, embedded on the page, certainly made things easier. But Flash of course needs a free browser plugin (the Flash Player) which needs constant updating.

HTML5 looks promising, and includes new ways to stream video for mobile. In November 2011 Adobe announced that it will discontinue development of Flash for mobile devices and reorient its efforts towards developing tools utilizing HTML5.



HTML5 may do away with the need for any extra browser plugins, and video will be much simpler to watch. You will know if your package works. If the story flows and the words and pictures work together you will feel a great sense of professional delight that you have done the job well.

>>Summary<<

1. Video journalism is a dominant form for delivering the news. Mastering video skills is vital for anyone entering the news industry. *Guardian* reporter Paul Lewis (2012) emphasized the importance of video for all media. The *Guardian*'s coverage of the London riots in 2011 won awards. Lewis says it was the two news videos of the riots the *Guardian* placed online that had the greatest impact with their audience.
2. You can't make one video news package and expect to be a video journalist. Video journalism is a complex set of skills that need a lot of practice. Repetition is everything in learning journalism skills.
3. Writing to pictures is not a case of writing a script and then adding pictures. Nor is it a case of laying the pictures and interviews and then writing words to match. You need a synthesis of words and images that work hard without repeating. Ask yourself: What is the best way I can tell this story?
4. In Chapter 4, we reminded you of John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*. It is easy to get complacent about the familiar and fail to notice things we can see. Ask yourself: What do I really see?
5. Never go out without a camera. Know the rules but be prepared to break them and innovate. That stimulates your imagination, keeps you creative and is what makes being a journalist such great fun.

EXERCISES

1. Filming: Find a friend or classmate and record an interview with each other outside on a subject of mutual interest. You should record enough to get a good one-minute sequence. Make sure you get some cutaway shots and some 'wild track'. Then look at the footage and listen to the audio. How professional is it? Now edit into a one-minute video.
2. Filming: There has been a huge rise in scrap-metal thefts as prices rise. To get used to filming general view shots, film a wide range of metal street furniture including bollards, manhole covers, war memorials, cables and so forth. Try to make the pictures as interesting as possible.
3. Package: Find a local scrap-metal story. You should be able to use the

footage you recorded in Exercise 2. The minimum you need is:

- a scrap-metal story with an example of theft, preferably recent and topical;
- at least one interview with someone key (e.g. a person who has suffered a theft, police, British legion rep, local) – you need expert opinions, so do not interview a student or a friend;
- a drafted script; and
- a piece to camera with you as reporter.

FURTHER READING

Boyd, Andrew, Stewart, Peter and Alexander, Ray. 2008. Techniques of Radio and Television News. Sixth edn. Oxford: Focal Press.

This is the best basic primer for making video news.

McAdams, Mindy. 2011. Reporter's Guide to Multimedia Proficiency: www.jou.ufl.edu/faculty/mmcadams/PDFs/RGMPbook.pdf

This free download has useful practical tips on all forms of online video journalism.

Ray, Vin. 2003. ***The Television News Handbook***. London: Macmillan.

This book is very orientated to television, but is written by one of the best exponents in the BBC.

Thornburg, Ryan. M. 2011. ***Producing Online News***. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

This guide to multimedia journalism has an excellent section on online audio and video.

BBC College of Journalism: www.bbc.co.uk/academy/collegeofjournalism

This BBC training site has video tutorials and plenty of advice on good news package technique.

3
Classification of Digital News Packages

The first step in wisdom is to know the things themselves; this notion consists in having a true idea of the objects; objects are distinguished and known by classifying them methodically and giving them appropriate names. Therefore, classification and name-giving will be the foundation of our science.

—Carolus Linnaeus, *Systema Naturae* (1735), trans. M.S.J. Engel-Ledeboer and H. Engel (1964)

On December 20, 2012, visitors to the *New York Times* website noticed something they hadn't seen before. It was a new type of article, teased on the front page, titled "Snow Fall: The Avalanche at Tunnel Creek." The story instantly became a watershed moment in the online news industry. In an entirely new way to display a story, the *New York Times* employed a mix of technological and design conventions like autoplaying background videos, embedded photos and videos, graphics that changed as the user scrolled down, and a curtain effect, in which new sections of the story seemed to cover previous parts while the user scrolled. The package redefined the notions of how a news article could be presented on the Web and focused attention to new visual and interactive multimedia embedded throughout the story. Although news stories contained complementary multimedia elements like videos, photos, and interactive graphics for many years prior, there were only sparse examples of such a tightly integrated and seamless experience where the multimedia elements were embedded into the story itself; in a way, they became the story.

In the years since, story packages like these have become increasingly popular in newsrooms. Nearly every week as of the writing of this book, we find examples of media outlets experimenting with big in-depth multimedia news packages. Journalism schools now include these dynamic displays as part of the curriculum and regularly dissect examples of these packages to

better understand their nature.

It's easy to acknowledge the innovative potential of this new approach. These packages typically have slick designed interfaces, incorporate sound and visuals, and are presented in an almost cinematic-like fashion, using title pages and credits. While these sporadic examples of tightly integrated multimedia garner much attention from within the news industry, there are enormous logistical hurdles to creating these packages. Most are custom tailored, designed, and coded for specific stories—a process that is antithetical to the workflows and business practices of current newsrooms, which typically adhere to content management system (CMS) or templates.

But taking a step back, one must ask: How do these in-depth news packages best convey information? And, divorcing the glamor of new and inventive technologies found in many of these packages from the content, one also must ask whether they truly aid the end goal of imbuing readers with a story's essence and not just add visual gimmickry for its own sake.

As the publication of these news packages became more frequent, it was also clear how disparate were the approaches being taken by different organizations. Some of these stories were clearly a more linear, or narrative, experience. Others stories were divided into multiple sections with no predefined path through the story, giving users more control to decide how they wanted to consume the story. Some were cinematic-like experiences—as if you were watching a movie or playing a video game.

One person who thought a lot about online news presentation back in the 1990s was Leah Gentry, formerly with the *Orange County Register, Chicago Tribune*, and later LATimes.com. Some of her ideas were described in the 2002 book *Journalism Online* by Mike Ward,[1] and later in an interview we did with Gentry, who now works in digital marketing and social media. During several keynotes, including one in 1997, Gentry talked about the nature of Web news as a nonlinear platform and the importance of leveraging different media forms to best tell different parts of a story. Nonlinear storytelling was a crucial part of communicating on the Web back then, partially because it mimicked our natural tendencies to want to jump around a story in a lean-forward mode, such as using a computer, versus a lean-back consumption mode, such as sitting on the couch reading a book or watching a movie.

"I used to use the analogy of talking with my mother on the phone because my mother—like everyone's mother—starts stories in the middle, and then skips back to the front and then skips to the end and then come back to the middle. And that's how natural conversation works," described Gentry in a Skype interview. "But it's also how people's brain works. I thought, how would it be like if we'd organize this story that way using hypertext—and so that's how the first nonlinear storytelling project came to be and was the fertility doctor scandal at the University of California, Irvine."[2]

The fertility fraud story won the Pulitzer that year for the *Orange County Register*. Designing the online component—particularly in respect to how to organize all of the many parts of the story—was a big part of discovering the nature of the medium, described Gentry. Later, when multimedia like photos, interactive graphics, and videos were possible on the Web, Gentry formalized a process of how to think about the structure of online stories with respect to leveraging multiple mediums. She espoused a process of "deconstructing and then reconstructing" a story to better understand its components and makeup. A single story is really multiple stories, each with a component part and possibly a different medium. Separating these component parts allows for the creation of a nonlinear story where the user had complete control over how, and in which order, to consume the story.

Another person who has thought a lot about the nature of online news packages with more contemporary examples is Wes Lindamood, a senior interactive designer at National Public Radio (NPR). This was a particularly important part of working on the project "Planet Money Makes a T-shirt."[3] His team based much of their early planning of their project on analyzing other news packages and trying to categorize them along a spectrum. The categorization he arrived at compared the level of user interaction that was required in a project versus a lean-back-and-watch narrative experience.

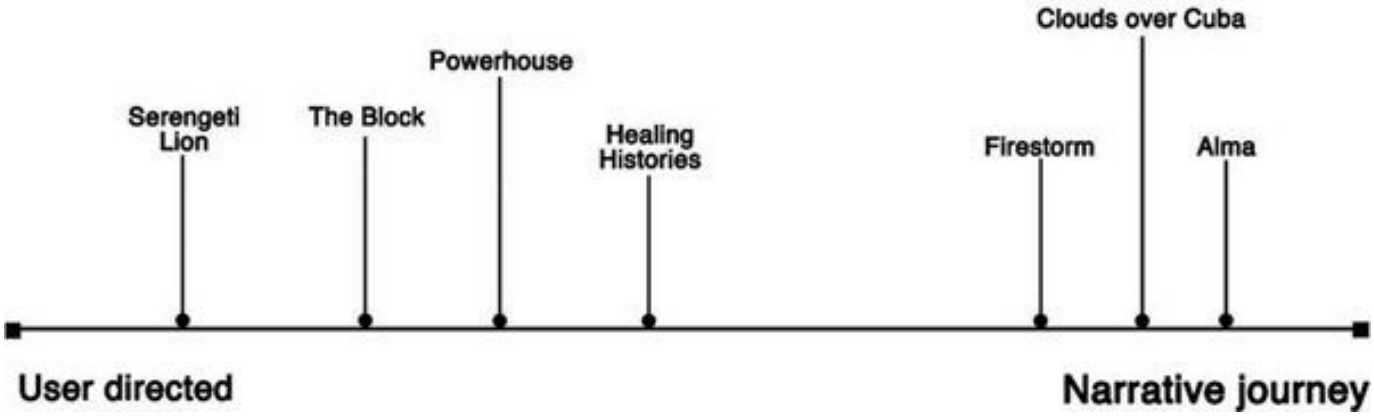


Figure 3.1 Story structure diagrams that helped the *Planet Money* team developing their T-shirt project design, Knight-Mozilla OpenNews Source (reproduced via CC-BY 3.0), 2014. Credit: Wes Lindamood/NPR.

Lindamood created a graphic charting the different stories along this spectrum to determine how much interaction was required from the users as they consumed the story—more specifically, how much power they had to jump around or make choices that would affect either the pacing or direction of the story. In some examples, like a news package designed by *National Geographic* called "The Serengeti Lion," the user has ultimate control to move about and decide which parts of the story they want to consume—and in whatever order they choose. In the "Serengeti" package, each section is labeled with a moniker; and the user moves about using arrow keys on the keyboard to jump from section to section (the order is randomized and different for every user), and the user can view more information about that specific part of the story. A small index link will display all of the available sections, also listing which ones the user has already visited. In his graphic, Lindamood described the "Serengeti" project as more user directed rather than discrete narrative, as the user has complete control over which sections to view and is able to carve out a path through the story as they see fit.

On the other side of Lindamood's spectrum is "Alma—A Tale of Violence,"[4] which is an example of a story package that is more of a narrative experience. The "Alma" project is a self-described Web documentary and is distributed by Arte TV, a Franco-German TV network in Europe. The online film part of Alma is a single 40-minute interview with a former Guatemalan female gang member, Alma, as she vividly describes on camera how she killed another woman as part of her gang initiation. She then goes into

describing her life and the gang experience, and then ends the story with how she was shot and paralyzed when she tried to leave the gang. The film is very much a confessional with gripping accounts, particularly when she describes one of her victims crying out for her children as Alma stabbed her to death.

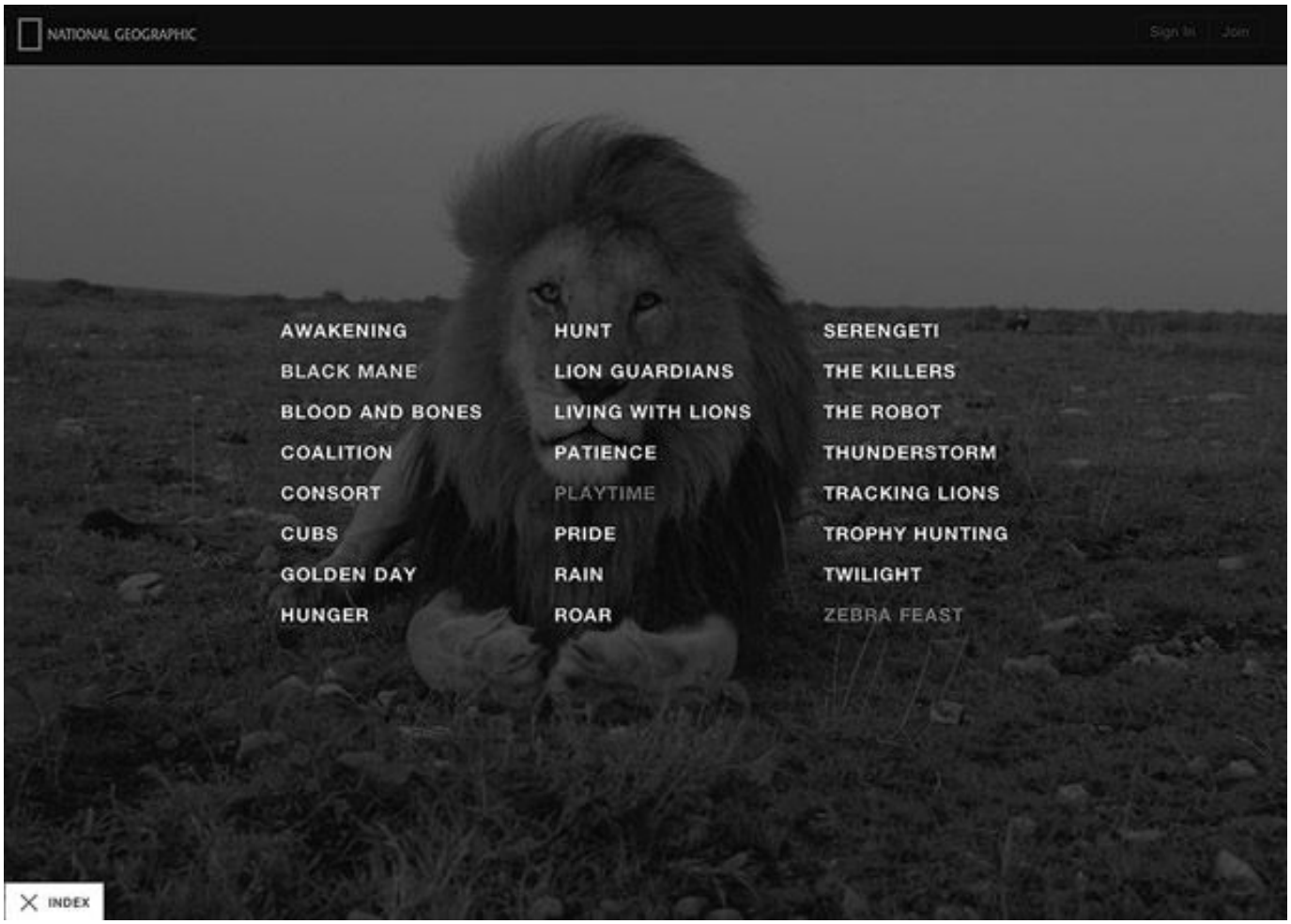


Figure 3.2 **"The Serengeti Lion," *National Geographic*, 2013**

The "Alma" story package is split into two branches: a 40-minute Web documentary, and secondarily what Lindamood describes as "information modules"—separate sections that give background information on the story if the user scrolls past the documentary. Because the main focal point of the piece is the documentary, Lindamood categorized this as a more "narrative journey" requiring less interaction from the user. While a user is watching Alma's video interview, the user has an option to move the entire video frame up, as it plays, to see some background footage (called b-roll in the broadcast world) of scenes corresponding to the narration. As Alma

continues to talk and give her interview, the secondary window shows b-roll scenes of Guatemala and background footage that a video editor might have placed over the narration of Alma in a more traditional format of the film. But in this online version, the choice is given to the user either to watch Alma describe her story or to view background images while listening to the narration. Although this interactivity is available, it doesn't change the direction of the piece, nor is the user given choices that affect the path of the story. This narrative journey is akin to a documentary film, but it allows people to stay engaged with the piece in an online medium by permitting them to interact with it as they listen to the narration.



Figure 3.3 "Alma—A Tale of Violence," Arte TV, 2012

This notion of a spectrum separating linear from nonlinear stories very much led our initial approaches to defining a taxonomy of story packages. The challenge in categorizing news presentations was finding clear demarcations that could separate one package from another. In many instances, there are overlapping characteristics. Was the *New York Times*'s "Snow Fall" a narrative story? Yes. Does it have videos and photos throughout the story? Yes. Does the user have control to jump around the story? Yes. But you could also say the same thing about numerous other projects, such as *National Geographic*'s "Serengeti Lions" or the *Guardian*'s "NSA Files: Decoded." However, when one views these projects, it's clear they are very different approaches to online storytelling and needed to be identified using a different set of characteristics. What were the most common themes separating one story from another?

The Grabowicz Taxonomy

Our approach to this taxonomy of digital news packages really started with Paul Grabowicz, a senior lecturer at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. In 2013, Grabowicz published a first attempt at classification and taxonomy of multimedia news projects on a school-related training website.[5] There were two parts to this taxonomy: The first was describing a series of approaches to packaging multiple forms of media into a cohesive experience, and the second was describing individual novel media types (e.g., interactive videos, games, graphics, etc.) that could be included within a larger news package. In the spirit of Leah Gentry's early work, Grabowicz divided stories into a linear versus nonlinear spectrum. Linear stories generally follow a directed path through the story, while other stories were nonlinear and gave the viewer lots of control to jump around the story at their own discretion and in their own order. Linear stories were more *narrative* in nature—consisting of a beginning, middle, and end—while nonlinear stories covered more of a topic and were more *informational* in nature. Nonlinear stories could also have parts embedded that could be mini-linear narratives or single-media types like a video or graphic. For example, one section of a nonlinear story package might be short profiles of characters in the story, whereas another section would be background information.

Grabowicz also came up with descriptive labels for different types of published news packages. One, called the "Christmas Tree," is a form where multimedia elements would be "hung" off to the side of a text story, similar to ornaments on a tree. The term is originally attributed to Regina McCombs, formerly of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and later Poynter Institute.[6] Other descriptions included terms like "embedded multimedia," used to describe the *New York Times* "Snow Fall" piece, where multimedia was embedded directly within the narrative of the story. "The Kitchen Sink" is used to describe story packages that cover a general topic rather than a single story, sometimes exhaustively, where the organization of content into a hierarchy becomes a central challenge (the kitchen sink problem). "Immersive Multimedia" was a catchall for projects that were usually interactive documentaries or video-game-like experiences, using three-dimensional representations for users to explore a space.

This approach to the taxonomy evolved over time. The shortfall with this approach was that it wasn't systematic enough and didn't give each package

a common enough identity in order to compare it with others on a more granular scale (and later plot it on a graph). However, the Grabowicz taxonomy was the precursor to later versions and identified most of the structures and elements that we later included in our own work.

First Attempt at a Biological-like Taxonomy

While working on this book, we met a UC Berkeley visiting scholar and science writer, Caterina Visco, who was intrigued by our use of the term "taxonomy" and by applying these ideas to news. Visco had studied biology in Rome and thought it would be an interesting challenge to classify news stories in the same way biologists classify life forms.

In 1735 Swedish scientist Carolus Linnaeus published *Systema Naturae* and brought to the world its well-known Linnaean taxonomy (i.e., kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species), which many might recall from high school biology classes. This was a rank-based system that categorized all organisms of the world into a hierarchy. At its highest level of classification, the original Linnaean taxonomy put the broadest possible form of organism at the top—the "kingdom." In 1700s, the kingdom rankings Linnaeus chose were animals, vegetables—and minerals! As discoveries of new forms of life were made over the years, the kingdoms have evolved and expanded to include microorganisms, like bacteria, and even fungi, whose cellular walls made them unlike plants in the most elementary way, so they were given an entire kingdom ranking of their own. Also, newer top-level categories above kingdom were defined: "domain," and even above that, simply "life." Interestingly, there is still much disagreement around the world regarding the precise labeling of these terms, since the sub-categories are not always pure biological descendants of top-rank descriptions. This biological ranking has been an iterative process over the centuries, changing many times, as recently as 1998.[7] As it stands now, since 1998, the current kingdoms of all life fall under these basic classifications: Bacteria, Protozoa, Chromista, Plantae, Fungi, and Animalia. There is a lot of fluidity in the precision of systematizing something as amorphous as life forms.

Much like the Linnaean classification, our process of trying to come up with a taxonomy of news packages was an iterative process. The first step we

took was to define a classification of the different types of story packages, similar to a biological classification. This consisted of first identifying the characteristics of a database of more than 400 in-depth digital news packages we collected (these would be considered the very-bottom-level "species") in order to better understand their characteristics, and grouping them into a few well-defined categories. As it would be impossible to study all the species living on Earth without a system that gives them some order, so it would be difficult to study such a variety of news stories without grouping them in categories based on common characteristics. This process provided a way to understand their structure and to derive conclusions about their scope and impact on the user.

A "Linnaean Taxonomy" of News Packages

- **Domain** → Storytelling
- **Kingdom** → Non-fictional Storytelling
- **Phylum** → Non-fictional Online Storytelling
- **Class** → Digital News Package
- **Order** → (based on structure) → Linear, Shell, Immersive, Comprehensive
- **Genus** → (based on main element) → Text, Visual, Audio, Games, Data
- **Species** → Christmas Tree; Embedded Multimedia, Charticles,…

As shown in this chart, we attempted to identify elements of story packages in the pattern of a Linnaean taxonomy. We used the entire scope of storytelling as our "domain," non-fictional storytelling as a specific "kingdom" (to differentiate it from other types of creative fiction), non-fictional *online* storytelling as "phylum," and a news package as "class." These specific hierarchies set up an initial framework for categorizing news stories.

The main taxonomical classification really begins in the next rung down, with the four named "orders," which are based on the structure/narrative form of the projects. We chose linear, shell, immersive, and comprehensive.

Linear describes more lean-back, read/watch types of stories, where the user would consume the story with little direct interaction, except perhaps scrolling. The structure is linear, with a predetermined order of how to

consume a story—from beginning to end. These stories typically have one primary medium (like text or a video), which drives the whole package, and various other media assets (like photos, graphics, or videos) are integrated throughout the narrative—directly or peripherally.

Shell is a term coined by Jane Stevens of the Reynolds Journalism Institute. Partly as a response to Adobe Flash projects, Stevens trained journalists to think about how a multimedia presentation could be wrapped in a packaged "shell."[8] The lesson included training in a workflow that consisted of storyboarding a project first—similar to what is done in cinema and also exhorted by Leah Gentry—by dividing the project into component parts and choosing the best media for each respective segment. Story shells were generally nonlinear by nature. A consumer can choose to consume the story in any order they want. Upfront, consumers are typically presented with numerous topics or sections in the form of some type of central navigation that allows them to move around the different pieces of the story. As a standard design convention, shells typically have a unified title for the entire project, which helps maintain cohesiveness to the multiple sections of a presentation. Adobe Flash shells were particularly useful at a time when users often hesitated to click links away from the story and load an entirely new web page. Flash made it easier to visit each section, was a much quicker process, and maintained continuity throughout the story. Later, this would be seen as a poor design convention as broadband proliferated and web page loading times became nonissues.

Comprehensive is a derivative term of the "kitchen sink" coined by Grabowicz, essentially capturing news packages, which cover topics rather than a single news story. But Comprehensive became a broader catchall term for this. Comprehensives are similar to shells in their nonlinear structure. Consumers can go through the story in any order they wish. However, instead of a Flash shell, Comprehensives were more akin to a topic page or a single-issue vertical. Some examples were the "Empty Cradles" series by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.[9] The *Journal Sentinel* published numerous multimedia pieces—charts and graphics, interactive panorama, text stories, video pieces—on a single topic. This type of package wasn't linear, although there are some narrative anecdotes within the piece. But each is designed for a specific purpose to illustrate a different part of the story.

Immersive is a classification that is also from Grabowicz; it aimed to describe stories that were similar to a video game or 3D environment. A number of stories, particularly ones by the National Film Board of Canada (NFB), are heavily sophisticated projects technologically and usually take up the entire screen. It gives the feel of a video game—in fact, one could even consider these a type of video game in many of the examples. These are often described as interactive documentaries, partly because NFB, who spearheaded much of this storyform, is a documentary film–focused institute. Another pioneer of Immersive stories is Nonny de la Peña, who works on immersive installations that transport users into environments. One of her early influential projects was "Gone Gitmo," in which Guantanamo Bay prison was reconstructed in the virtual world Second Life. Through the project, users could experience being a prisoner through virtual reality and thus gain empathy with prisoners' plight.[10]

The next rung of the taxonomy is the "genera," identified by individual media types: text, visual, audio, games, and data. This is designed to describe the primary medium of each of the previous packages. For the last category of the taxonomy, the "species," we used some specific examples identified by Grabowicz, such as the Christmas Tree, embedded multimedia, charticles, and others.

But as we began to deconstruct various stories into this model, it was clear these formalized patterns didn't fit into such a rigid structure. While this model was a noble attempt to classify Grabowicz's taxonomy, it didn't allow for classifications to overlap or intersect among the main categories, nor did it allow for a multiple intersections of types. Online news stories are simply too amorphous for such rigidly defined orders.

But there was a silver lining in this process. During her work in applying a biological classification, Caterina Visco did start to drill down on the four "orders" that served as the basis of further work. Despite the number of hours Visco dedicated to this process, she was especially motivated by a quote from Isaac Newton: "Truth is ever to be found in simplicity, and not in the multiplicity and confusion of things."[11]

In the next phase, we started with a large database of journalistic news packages collected by Bobbie Johnson, co-founder of *Matter* magazine. Johnson wrote a blog post on Medium highly critical of the *New York Times*'s

"Snow Fall" model. At the end of the piece, Johnson created a Google spreadsheet asking the public to contribute links to examples of large immersive news packages similar to the *New York Times*'s "Snow Fall" piece (he called them "Snowfallen" stories).[12] Visco took this crowdsourced spreadsheet and appended several hundred additional story links, resulting in a list of more than 1000 news packages similar to "Snow Fall." This began a process of identifying common characteristics of each package: checking off which had videos and analyzing the various mediums that composed each story—specifically the media forms of the main element that drives each story (e.g., video, audio, photo, or text). All of this data ended up in a new spreadsheet that also noted information about each package, such as the main element driving the narrative, other complementary elements in the package, and the level of interactivity required of the consumer to experience the piece. Visco also listed a column for "narrative form," using an expression from Grabowicz's taxonomy, but evolved the meaning to better reflect the *experience* the consumer gets. The narrative forms she settled on were Straight, Immersive, Comprehensive, Shell, and Intersections.

	Text	Video	Audio	Animation	Data	Games	Map	Timeline
Straight								
Immersive								
Comprehensive								
Shell								
Intersections								

Figure 3.4 The authors started with a simple table to deconstruct the multimedia packages into their separate elements

This grid, even if basic, helped us to understand that there were two different possible classifications that had to be examined individually: one based on the narrative structure, and the other identifying media forms that composed each package.

Classification Based on the Narrative Structure

The text iteration of a taxonomy focused on five terms that identified the narrative structure of the packages: Straight, Immersive, Comprehensive, Shell. The fifth, Intersections, is a term that describes any stories that intersect two of the previous forms. We created a square diagram to better visualize it.

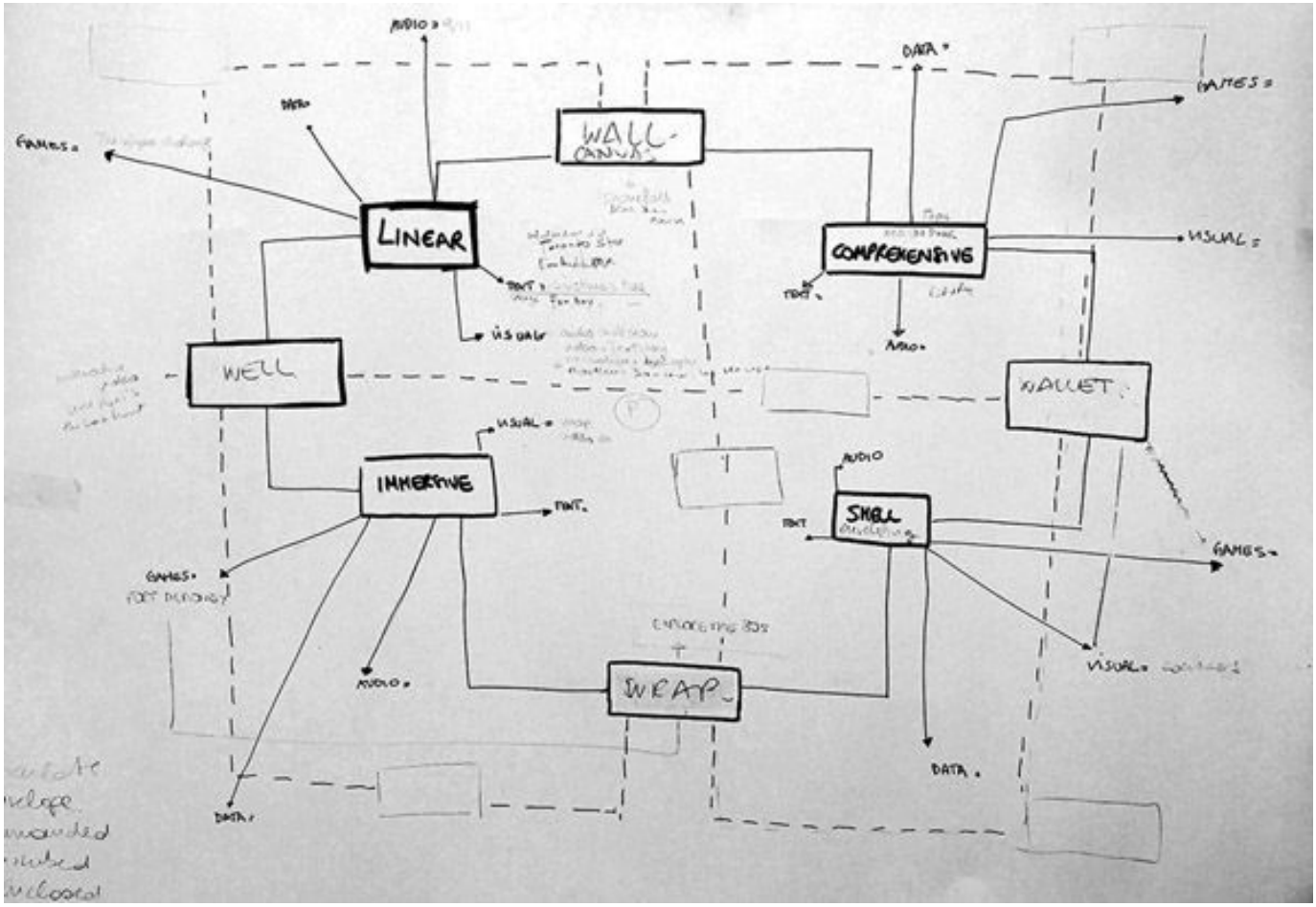


Figure 3.5 **The "square" diagram, with intersections**

The framework for this grid meant that stories could be placed along the lines of these spectrums. The linear designation was renamed to "Straight" with the understanding that linearity of a story was too simplistic a description; even immersive 3D games were linear, for example. Straight stories were more traditional approaches, where one primary medium led the story—text, video, or graphics—and other multimedia were complementary.

Some stories were clearly defined in these four categories: Straight, Comprehensive, Immersive, and Shell. But sometimes a story could be two of the categories. Stories that could not univocally be identified as one category would reside in one of the four Intersection segments, which were a cross between two categories. We also identified a difference in the naming of each Intersection, depending on which name came first. For example, a "Linear-Immersive" and the reverse, "Immersive-Linear," would differ in meaning depending on which form was more prominent in driving the story.

This model was a clear improvement over earlier structures. It was nimble enough to classify something as amorphous as an online story, and allowed for flexible definitions in order to draw conclusions about the nature of these stories. The key was settling on proper category names. Shell and Comprehensive were both very similar categories; their definitions differed only by the technology and presentation used to display them. Shells were presentations embedded on a page, usually with Flash or a similar technology acting as a container. Comprehensives were more akin to a topic page, with multiple stories or sections giving an exhaustive coverage of a single topic or story. We decided to merge the two in later iterations. It made sense, as Flash is a deprecated technology in online storytelling. Some packages, such as "Explore the '80s" published by *National Geographic* in 2014,[13] were among the few stories we found that exhibited an intersection of both Comprehensive and Shell. *National Geographic*'s "The '80s" is a Comprehensive-Immersive project that allowed the user to pick out various story segments in a 3D space. The project is contained within a single presentation, and each segment plays within the same frame (rather than going to a separate page). Analyzing this project proved that we didn't need to separate Comprehensive and Shell into two distinct categories.

The square diagram has many other issues as well. It prevented intersections, or mixing, all of the four categories in a simple way, as the intersections could only comprise two of any four categories. We would have had to add two more intersection categories—Straight-Shell and Comprehensive-Immersive—reaching a total of ten different groups. This was simply too many to serve our original goal of a clear and simple classification. The categories also seemed not to be clearly distinctive one from the other.

The Triangle: Categories Based on Narrative Form or Experience

To solve the issues just described, we needed to further simplify our model. Taking a reductive approach, we merged Shell into Comprehensive, and what resulted was a triangle diagram. The triangle shape also allowed all categories to intersect in a more elegant fashion. We even debated the need for the third prong—Immersive—the elimination of which would have resulted in a simple linear–nonlinear spectrum, similar to Wes Lindamood's model when investigating the *Planet Money* project. However, it was clear the third category was essential to differentiate an entire swath of projects in our database, such as interactive documentaries that were clearly not traditional linear stories (Straight) and not Comprehensives (Shells) and yet not a combination of the two. These immersive 3D-like interactive documentaries arguably needed a category of their own.

The triangle was an elegant solution to graphing all of the stories and discovering commonalities in story types. At the top corner of the triangle is the Continuous category, which we renamed from the older "Straight" designation. After much discussion about the specific naming of this category, we felt Continuous better represented the experience users get from these types of stories. Other names we tested were "Traditional," which felt pejorative, even when it describes some of the most powerful and compelling stories we found. "Linear" was too broad, given that many immersive stories are also linear. And "Straight" had too many other connotations in the English lexicon and could bring up a sense that the category was unadulterated or even possibly associations with a sexual orientation, which weren't our intentions at all.

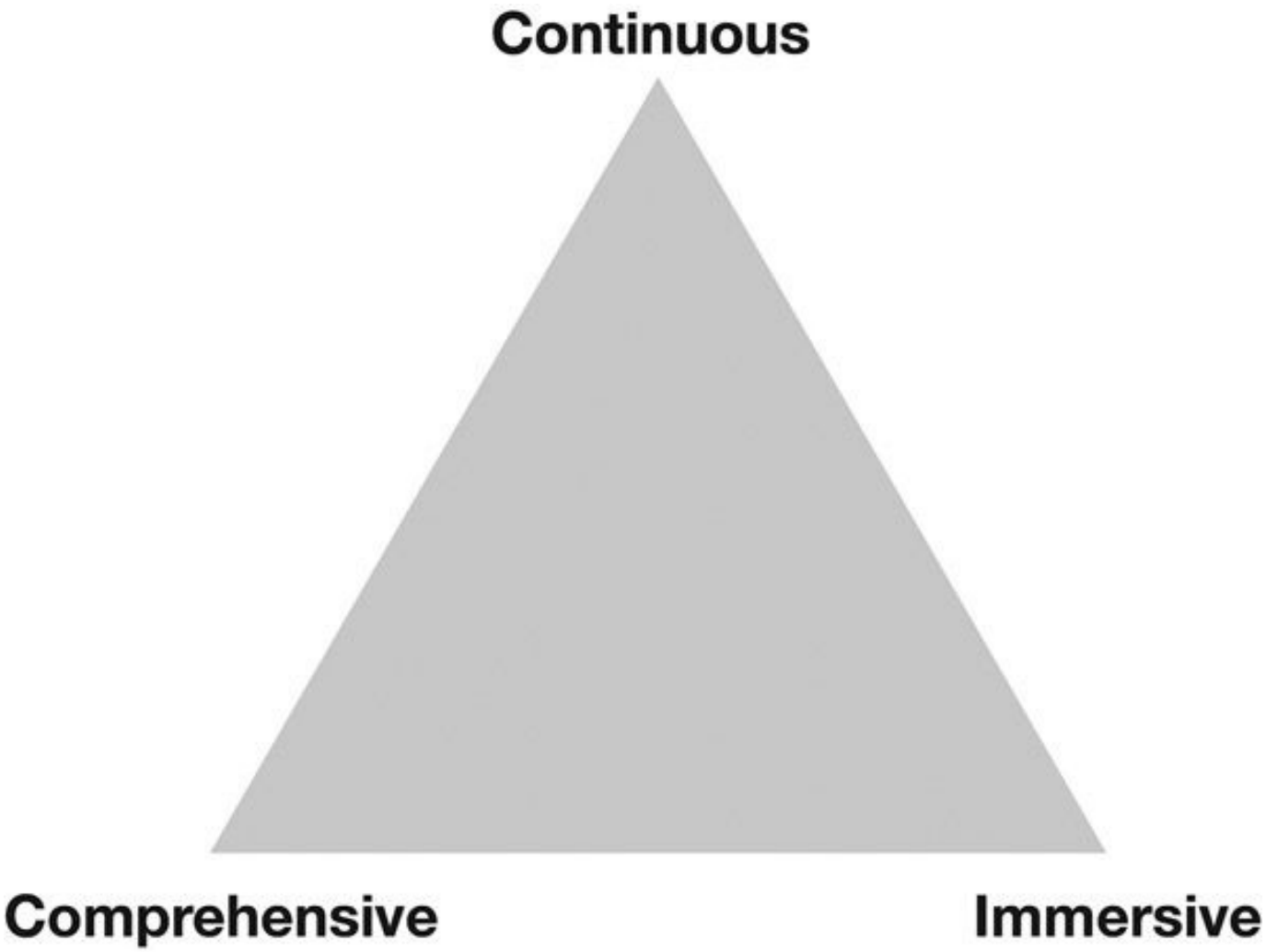


Figure 3.6 **The first triangle diagram**

On the left corner is the Comprehensive category, which is any nonlinear project that aims to be multifaceted, tackle a topic, or serve as more informational than strictly narrative. On the right corner is the Immersive category, which describes cinematic-like interactive projects that take up the whole screen and present themselves like an interactive movie or video game.

We also maintained the ability for stories to encompass multiple categories, but instead of having strict borders where elements could serve as an intersection, such as Continuous-Immersive (or vice versa), we decided that the triangle diagram would plot stories *within* the triangle. This worked especially well because it offered an enhanced level of flexibility for stories to comprise characteristics of each of the three categories at different levels of granularity.

To plot stories within this triangle diagram, we came up with a series of nine survey statements—three per category of the triangle—to test the news package against. The answers would determine where the story would be plotted in the triangle. Each survey statement tests a single characteristic of the categories, with the user giving a scaled answer of one to five, five being the most accurate description of the story being surveyed. In an early version of the triangle, we started with 12 survey statements and considered weighting each, based on how crucial it was to the category. But we later discovered discrepancies in the data because many of the original statements we came up with overlapped with multiple categories. We later reduced the number of statements to nine and tried to devise more definitive statements that would be more diametrically separated among opposing categories.

To properly gauge the efficacy of the triangle diagram, we set up several stories as our control. Through our research we knew where we believed certain stories belonged on the triangle and the most quintessential examples of each of the three corners, as well as of the three intersections. We applied our question set to survey these stories to see if we could plot them in the proper markers around the triangle perimeter. Then, going through our database of more than 1000 stories, we had participants view a news package and answer the survey regarding the package. What resulted were markers distributed across our triangle diagram. This allowed us to view where similar story types congregated and eventually to draw conclusions as to their nature.

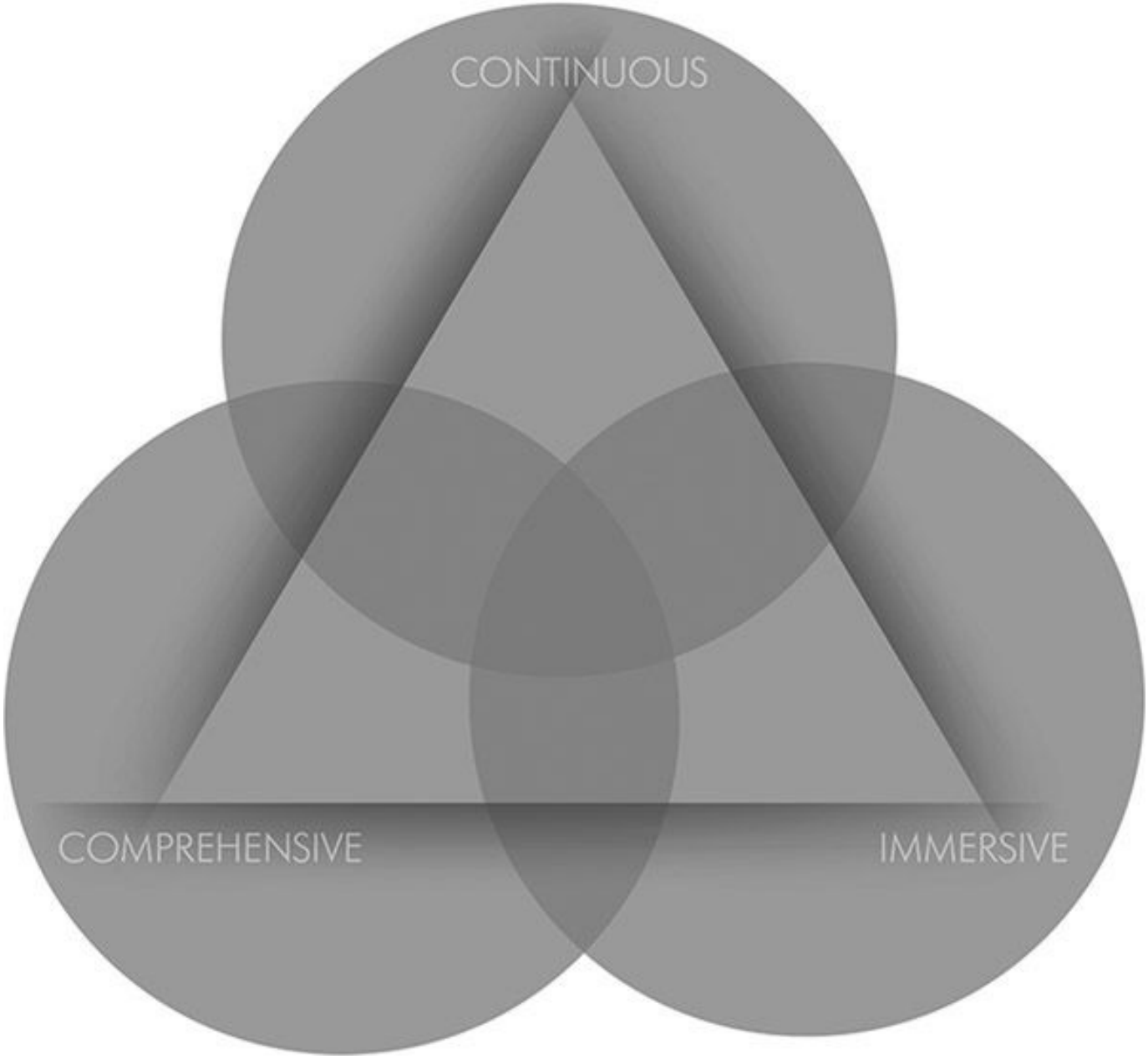


Figure 3.7 The latest triangle model, with colors to show the intersections. Each dot is a package and shows where that project falls in the spectrum.

Continuous Stories

Story packages that are continuous in nature are characterized by a traditional narrative structure with a beginning, middle, and end to the story. Thus, they are also consumed in a linear fashion, meaning it is not intended for the consumer to jump around to different parts of the story out of order. Interestingly, this intention was often challenged in numerous

projects that we initially thought might be Continuous, including “Snow Fall,” where the story is separated into user-clickable chapters. This theoretically could encourage people to jump around the story before finishing a particular chapter, but the sequence and intention of the chapters is for them to be consumed one after another. Determining linearity can become nuanced in some story packages we found, where each chapter is separate enough from the whole narrative that it can be consumed by itself without losing context of the whole story. In these situations, the project can border on our Comprehensive category, whose chief characteristic is being able to jump around and consume segments of a story based on the user’s own preferences. The benefit of answering question on a one-to-five scale allows us to determine these levels of nuance in a granular way.

Continuous stories also require one primary medium driving the story. We felt this was a necessary characteristic to describe this category, and the data we collected reaffirmed this notion. If there were too many media forms (e.g., text, video, graphics) of equal weight, the story seemed to change characteristically into a more Comprehensive or Immersive story. There were few exceptions, most commonly in stories done by the Atavist platform, where videos would be interpolated throughout the text narrative and become an integral part of the narrative. The primary media form driving the news package doesn’t necessarily have to be text. We felt some projects that were video driven fit into the Continuous category. “Alma—A Tale of Violence” is an example of this. The project is a single linear interview with some interactivity and other multimedia accompaniments, but it is essentially a traditional continuous narrative.

Another characteristic we determined of Continuous stories is that they are arguably more “lean-back” in nature, meaning there was often less interactivity than Comprehensive or Immersive stories. The idea is that the story is consumed mostly by reading or watching. The more a user interacts with the content—by clicking, scrolling, or making decisions—the more the narrative form is interrupted by user choices, thus changing the nature of the story. Interactivity seemed to work better on informational stories, where the user learned about a topic, and we felt they were more antithetical to Continuous stories, which are narrative driven and in which interactivity was more of a distraction.

We did find some exceptions to this interactivity rule, particularly on stories that were linear "lean-back" experiences that required some interaction to advance the story, such as scrolling. Mike Bostock, a *New York Times* graphics editor, wrote a blog post extolling the use of scrolling as a narrative device, since it's grounded in a linear form (up being reverse, down being forward).[14] It also gave users an experience superior to clicking, because it seemed less disruptive and more natural.

Another new form of storytelling has emerged that is sometimes described as "Scrollytelling" (a term trademarked by Nick Jones of NarrowDesign.com). It uses a design convention called "parallax scrolling," where various elements on the page can move at different speeds. One example of this technique is "The Jockey" from the *New York Times*.[15] As the user scrolls, a video comes into view and becomes fixed on the page for a moment and plays. If the user continues to scroll down, the video stops and reattaches to the page and will scroll out of view. Because we felt this genre of storytelling still fit within the rubric of the Continuous category, we weighted the survey question about interactivity as a nominally important characteristic of the category.

We also included a question on our survey about the use of a CMS template in creating the news package. In a blog post, the former associate managing editor of digital at the *New York Times*, Aron Pilhofer, made the case that "Snow Fall" would not have been as effective if it appeared in the *Times*'s standard CMS template;[16] his argument was that design played a crucial role in the story. This was important in that it allowed us to realize one of the differences between traditional Continuous stories and Comprehensive or Immersive ones. In the latter two, we nearly always saw situations when the story broke the mold of the publication's CMS and was given special treatment. Yet, because the use of CMS template is not a differentiating factor of the Continuous category, it also carries relatively nominal weight on the overall plot on our triangle diagram.

As we outlined in the introduction, our goal with this taxonomy was to identify stories that were of a special nature—in-depth stories, or the digital equivalent to a longform story in print. These are packages that get some kind of special treatment to enlighten readers with analysis, anecdote, and depth, rather than simply inform the public of the day's news. As we

aggregated stories for this taxonomy, we found numerous examples that were borderline in this respect, particularly in the Continuous category. We often asked ourselves if the example was a special feature "news package" by the publication or just a run-of-the-mill news story.

These are the survey statements we used for determining whether stories fall under the Continuous category, answered on a scale from one to five, with five being the most accurate statement and one being the least accurate description to the story in question.

- This project is mostly one continuous narrative.
- This story has one primary media form (e.g., text, video) driving the narrative.
- This project is more of a "lean-back" non-interactive experience.

Comprehensive

A Comprehensive package presents an in-depth environment that contains multiple separate elements of a story under a common umbrella, like a topic page. Instead of a linear narrative that drives the users through a singular experience, the story is broken up into sections. A story package may include segments such as profiles, background information, history, or future implications—some of which can be individually narrative. But each segment is unique, and in many cases each section is told in the type of media most appropriate for the content in that segment. For example, a video is used for a segment of a story in which there is a lot of action or emotion, and graphics for a section that is informational or requires visual aids to explain complex subject matter.

The very nature of a Comprehensive story nearly demands that stories be topical and informational. One of the early examples of this is "Touching Hearts" by Joe Weiss of the *Herald-Sun* in Durham, North Carolina.[17] In 2000, Weiss went to Nicaragua as a photographer to cover a story about a group of doctors who were lending medical assistance to ailing children. When he returned, he naturally decided to construct a Comprehensive story in Flash. The story is separated into three parts: Mission, Stories, and People. The first segment, Mission, is a linear animation that explains the story and the purpose of the trip. The second section contains a series of emotionally

powerful photo slideshows about the individual children, who are suffering from a range of heart conditions. The third is an informational section with more data about the doctors and the children. The choice to construct this story in segments rather than one linear piece is an almost natural approach, in part led by the capability of the technology. (Later, Weiss used his programming skills to construct the Soundslides platform.)

The main characteristics of these kinds of packages are the variability of elements as much as the absence of a predefined path—the user gets to choose how to navigate the story by selecting the segments of most interest. This gives the consumer a high level of control over the navigation of the experience. In fact, these packages are better suited for informational than narrative stories. There is no one story to tell, but a big body of information to give to the user in the most efficient way possible. This also offers the ability for users to personalize the story based on their own understanding of the subject matter, or their own interest in the topics presented, and then carve their own path through the story.

Some of the packages included in this group are more exhaustive than others (the package "Empty Cradles,"[18] published by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*), while others are more restricted and framed (like "Planet Money"[19] by NPR), but all of them give the user some liberty and choice. They also usually present a medium/high level of interactivity.

The following are the survey statements tested for this category:

- This project is more about covering a topic than a single narrative story.
- This project is divided into sections or parts, intending for the user to jump around.
- This project is informational in nature.



Immersive

Several of the subjects we spoke to during the research for this book took issue with the name "Immersive" being restricted to a single category, as all narratives aspire to be immersive in some respect. We felt this name best represented this category because the design conventions employed aim to

stimulate many of the senses. Stories in the Immersive category create an environment, a space for the user to explore, and through this exploration the narrative unfolds itself. It's an environment that is very engaging, and there is a high level of interactivity between the space and the users.

Interestingly, linearity is not a prerequisite for this type of storytelling. We found numerous examples where the level of control the user had in directing the experience varied. Some Immersive news packages were like video games or choose-your-own-adventure stories, where users made choices that would determine their own experience. The experience varied from user to user based on the decisions made. Others packages were a very structured experiences with little more than a "next" button to advance the narrative through a unified path.

Narratologists have often described forms of storytelling that are non-chronological, or told out of sequence—such as those experienced in Quentin Tarantino films like *Pulp Fiction* or *Reservoir Dogs*—as "non-sequential" or "disjointed." Immersives can also be organized in this way. But when a narrative is interactive, it can be what is described as "branching," or sometimes "ergodic,"[20] where the paths through the story are decided by the consumer. Technology of the Web allows for stories to be dynamic as the user interacts with them, a complete departure from the traditional media form in journalism, such as print, television, or radio, where the delivery mechanism was static and unidirectional. We considered adding a question about the linearity of a story to describe Immersive but removed it later as we discovered such a variance in examples. This is advantageous, because the linear nature of the news package will be better determined by the Continuous–Comprehensive spectrum.

"Cinematic" is a term often associated with this category, and it makes sense. A striking commonality found in these projects was that most had some sort of initial start page displayed up front with a title, background information, and more importantly a button or link requesting action to initiate the experience—similar to a DVD/Blu-ray start menu. This analogy is interesting, because when a consumer clicks "play" on a DVD, they are initiating an experience: the start of a movie. In a similar fashion, these projects give the sense of embarking on an experience similar to a video game or movie. These start pages are less often seen in Comprehensive or

Continuous stories. While this is a subtle design convention, its presence was a clear indicator of this archetype, so this is a question on the survey and it is given a moderate to high weight on its effect on the marker's position on the graph.

Immersive stories also generally contain multiple media forms, like interactive video, animation, graphics, and background music. Rarely is there ever one single media form driving the whole experience, as seen in a Continuous package, where there might be a single video or text story. The seamless integration of the multiple media forms is very natural and almost opaque to the user. Text comes up as instructions but appears as if it's a title slide in a video. This is noticeable in choose-your-own-adventure-style experiences like "Journey to the End of Coal,"[21] made by a French projection group called Honkytonk Films. The story places the user in the role of a freelance journalist exploring the crude conditions of coal mines in Datong, China. The user interacts and even interviews subjects. These are based on real interviews conducted by the filmmakers. The user chooses where to go and which questions to ask during the interviews, and text narration appears on the screen to explain the context and background of the story. The whole time, the user is presented with a combination of videos, photos, and text that are so natural to the medium, many people forget the different media types in play. Unlike a web page with a YouTube video and some type of play button to initiate the experience, Immersives offer a much more seamless continuity from section to section.

Another important characteristic of Immersives is the fullscreen layout. When these types of stories are initiated, they demand a certain presence in the browser and nearly always go edge to edge. This is a subtle design effect, which disconnects the users from their own reality to transport them into the scene of the story. Fullscreen was a convention that originally began with Adobe Flash, a browser plug-in. When the fullscreen setting was initiated, the experience seemed to pop out of the browser and display a piece of media, like a video, using the entire monitor screen, beyond the chrome of the browser application. Later, browsers would initiate their own mechanism to do this without Flash, using HTML5, as Flash became a deprecated technology.

Another role of Immersive stories is the ability to leverage numerous

technological abilities that might seem awkward on more traditional stories. Such experiences as choose-your-own-adventure-style narratives would likely feel misplaced in a Continuous text story, or even a Comprehensive. But in an Immersive, the ability for the consumer to participate in the story gives a sense of role play and helps build empathy with the story's subject matter. This was seen in the first-person interactive documentary "Fearless" by Avni Nijhawan, a lecturer at the Sorbonne in Paris and a former graduate student at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism.[22] In "Fearless," the user plays the role of a woman in Mumbai, India, as she tries to commute to work using various modes of transportation. Crowded buses and trains are hotspots for women being sexually harassed in India, forcing many women to either walk or take expensive pedicab taxis to work. Nijhawan used point-of-view (POV) cameras like Google Glass to take a journey using various transportation methods. The user walks in the shoes of a woman trying to get to work and is presented with choices on how to react to situations—all in an effort to better empathize with the scenarios many women endure. Other experiences, like "Fort McMoney," are played in real time by users using interactive game elements to develop oil sand reserves in Alberta, Canada. The choices made by users, such as voting on referendums or answering surveys, affect the game for others who play.[23]

The survey statements we tested to best identify Immersive stories are as follows:

- This project is similar to a video game experience requiring lots of interactivity and/or takes up the full screen of the browser.
- This project begins with some type of launch-like element, like a play button, to initiate the experience.
- This project uses audiovisual media to create an immersive environment.

Intersections

The beauty of the triangle diagram lies in its approach to plot stories on a graph with granular values. There were few stories that could be described entirely as Continuous, Comprehensive, or Immersive. Instead, there were nearly always varying degrees of each of these forms found in each story.

The more fascinating discoveries of this graph were found in what we describe as the Intersections of two archetypes: Stories that were both Continuous and Comprehensive, Comprehensive and Immersive, or Immersive and Continuous. Unlike earlier iterations of our graph, the ordering of names doesn't matter in the triangle diagram since it's easy to plot the degree to which a marker is near a particular corner of the triangle. Partitioning our triangle into these quadrants, one can spot which stories ended up in the various quadrants of the graph.

Let's see some examples for each category:

Immersive-Continuous

The *Guardian*'s 2013 package "Firestorm,"[24] about a bushfire in Tasmania, is an excellent example of this kind of intersection. This package tells a story from beginning to end of a devastating fire that nearly wiped out the town of Dunalley.



Figure 3.8 **"Firestorm," *Guardian*, 2013**

It begins with background information on the prevalence of bushfires in

Tasmania, then recounts one family's near-death experience escaping the fire. The entire piece is displayed on a single web page that takes up the entire browser screen. Unique to this presentation is some special code in the background that affects the way the page scrolls, creating a friction so that as the user scrolls, there is a brief pause on certain sections. This forces the piece to be partitioned into multiple, digestible chunks. Some sections have a brief paragraph of text with background images, others play pieces of audio, and some show a short video interview. The experience from section to section is seamless, and multiple sections are grouped together in chapters. The story was published after "Snow Fall" and was compared to it in numerous blog posts[25] and industry articles.[26]

At its core, Firestorm was a linear narrative story, told from beginning to end. But its unique multimedia integration, along with the fullscreen immersion, also made it characteristic of our Immersive category. There is a start button to initiate the experience, which is rarely seen on traditional Continuous stories. This was a prototypical example of a Continuous-Immersive package.

The "Firestorm" experience is separated into chapters, which a user could theoretically use to jump around, but this is not the intention. The chapters are designed to be consumed sequentially; when clicked they do not navigate to a separate web page—rather, the page will scroll down to the section of the story where that chapter begins. It's clear the intention is to view these chapters one after another. This made the package less like a Comprehensive, which are informational pages.

Comprehensive-Continuous

The *New York Times*'s "Snow Fall" is our prototypical Comprehensive-Continuous story—and it makes sense. The story began as a traditional text-only story, and only after most of it had been written was it decided to turn it into a multimedia story package with videos, photos, graphics, and a short documentary film. The Continuous nature of the story is apparent in the fact it's a singular 16,000-word linear narrative text story. The story is separated into six chapters, which are designed to be read one after another, but each is separate, with a title page and a unique topic of the story. The narrative is informational at parts, giving lots of background information,

including about avalanches and some of the tools used by skiers to mitigate getting trapped under snow. The piece is designed with several media forms, including a shortform documentary at the end. When applied to our triangle diagram, we found "Snow Fall" fit closer to a Continuous narrative, but many qualities fell under the Comprehensive rubric.

Immersive-Comprehensive

National Geographic's "The '80s" is a story package built to complement a six-episode TV miniseries of the same name. The project displays a neon 3D wireframe, drawing inspiration from movies like *Tron*. Displayed floating in space are boxes with topics related to various 1980s nostalgia. The user can navigate from left to right to view additional modules, or click or scroll forward to go through time to different years in sort of a virtual time line. When any of the floating boxes are clicked, a window pops up and offers some multimedia—text, videos, photos—about that particular item. Some of the boxes are related to specific episodes covered in the TV miniseries.

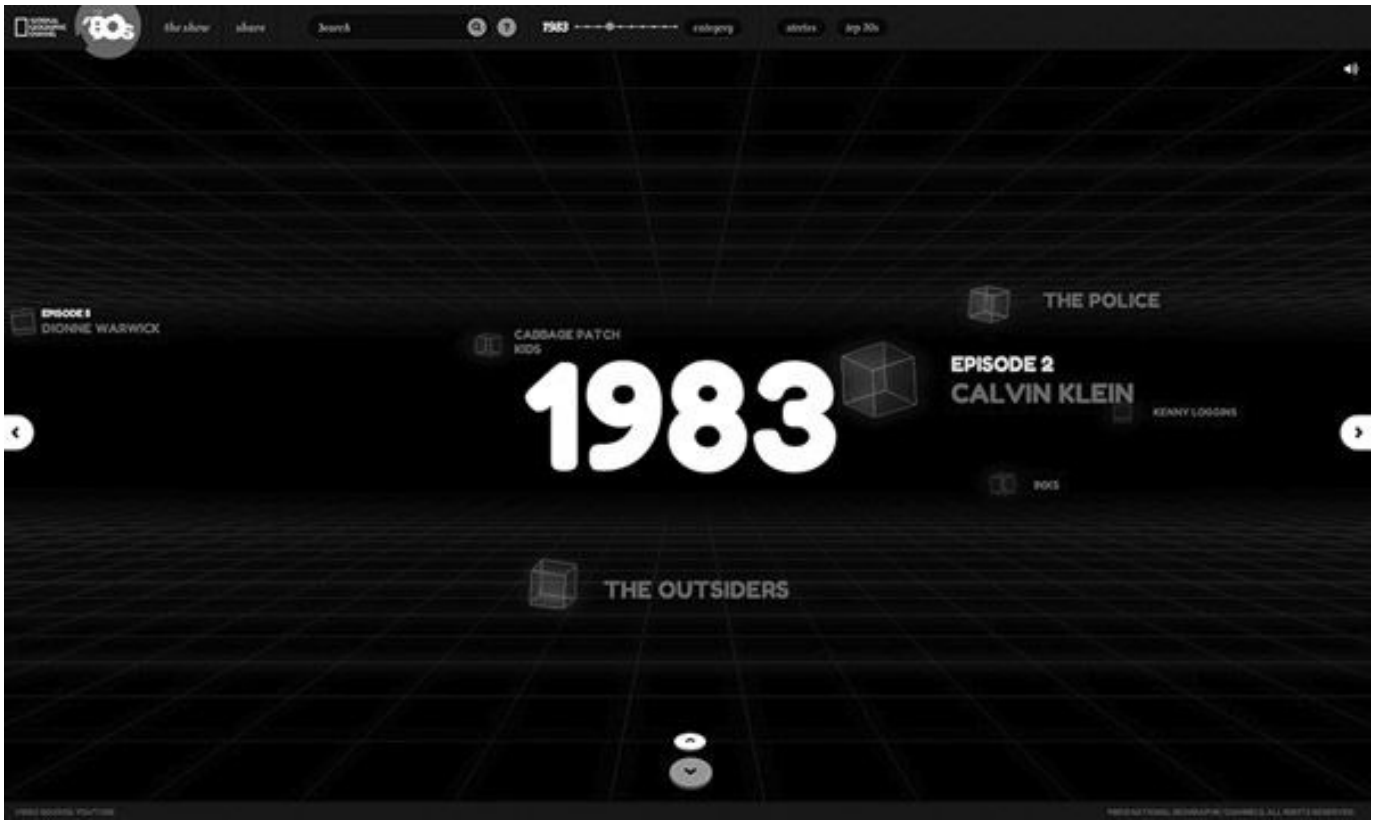


Figure 3.9 **"The '80s," *National Geographic*, 2014**

While the project initially presents itself as a clear Immersive-category story package, it does include the ability to navigate around different topics, rather than go through a linear narrative. We decided to define a true Immersive archetype as requiring some type of narrative experience, even in situations when the user could direct the narrative, sometimes described as a branching narrative. In "The '80s," there is no singular narrative; rather it's a Comprehensive display of information modules that the user can jump into and out of. In fact, it's unlikely most users will see every part of the project. The intention is that a user will click on only the modules that interest them most. In a project that effectively unleashes a strong sense of nostalgia, the ability for a user to create their own path through the story makes the most sense in this respect, picking out items they are most familiar with or those that pique their interest.

Conclusions

While we were writing this book, people in newsrooms all over the world were constantly experimenting with news packages, developing new narrative forms. In the near future we will probably need to add more categories to our classification. This is a framework—a starting point for a discussion that will eventually lead to an improved and adopted classification and taxonomy of digital news packages. There is much room for change. We know these attempts are our own representation of the reality—one that is constantly changing and evolving. The community can adapt the criteria we selected. They might have to be changed or rearranged to form other categories and perhaps a new type of visualization. We welcome any discussion, any proposal, and any falsification of our model. As theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli suggests we "keep the door open to doubt," and we "…will be ready to shift to a different point of view if better elements of evidence, or novel arguments emerge."[27]

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9

When you hear “data,” you might think numbers. You might also think, “I got into journalism to avoid that kind of thing!” Believe it or not, though, you’re more familiar with managing data than you might think. If you’re cleaning up your room after a long time, there’s a lot to go through. First, you decide what to keep (possessions) and what to discard (garbage). If the “keep” pile is large, you can sort it into more manageable groups: Clothes, books, office supplies and electronics. These may have subcategories: Clothes are dirty or clean; books are yours or borrowed, and so on.

With your piles sorted out, you make conclusions. The books need to go back on the shelf, to a friend or to the library. The clothes need to be washed or put away. Office supplies could go into the drawer you always check for something to write with. Further, you might make larger realizations. Perhaps you find you have too many red T-shirts, that you use a lot of blue pens or that you rarely read the books you borrow from the library. These revelations, in turn, might translate into a change in your actions.

Congratulations, you’ve just managed some data! Taking a bunch of things, sorting them and using them to answer specific questions is what data journalism and information architecture are about.

This chapter is largely written for newcomers, but it will contain jumping-off points throughout for those with a little more expertise. We’ll talk about data journalism in four stages. First, we will explore what data is and why it matters in journalism. Next, we will discuss how to identify, isolate and access the specific data you need when faced with a world of data points. Then, we will examine how to make that data coherent and meaningful. Finally, we will discuss some basic data visualization techniques that can help you tell a compelling story.

Thinking with Data

Data is a collection of facts. It might be numerical, but it might also consist of words like names or political parties. You might find it organized into a detailed and well-formatted spreadsheet, or it might be encased in paragraphs of narrative text, waiting to be extracted. If you’re dealing with a series of values that can be listed, counted or compared, you’re dealing with data.

Types of data

At the broadest level, data can be qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative data describes the qualities of something: Its name, flavor, color and so on. Quantitative data is numerical, such as the weight of a child or the number of robberies in a month. You can also see this distinction in the different levels of how we categorize data.

There are other types of data within these two, as our room-cleaning example showed. Categorical (or nominal) data, for example, is a typically qualitative type that consists of mutually exclusive (non-overlapping) categories – in your room, an item can either be in the "possession" category or the "garbage" category, not both. Another is ordinal data, which describes rank – an example would be the range of grades (from "poor" to "gem mint") of those baseball cards you found under your bed.

Numerical data can be either discrete or continuous. Discrete data consists of whole numbers with gaps – the number of shirts you find, for example, is discrete (you won't find 3.7 shirts, unless you have a poorly trained dog). In continuous data, all values in a range are possible – the pens you find might be completely full of ink (1), completely empty (0), half full (0.5), a third full (0.333) or any other value.

Data Journalism

Data journalism exists in asking questions of data. The questions you ask determine both which data you seek and what you do with the data. One cold January morning, you might think, "This winter seems colder than usual." To determine if this supposition is true, you must identify the data you need. You can identify the variables (measured items that can have different values) associated with this topic: "Winter cold" and "the past few years."

Right now, these variables are abstract and can mean a variety of things. "A few years," for example, can mean the past three, five or ten years. You need to operationalize your variables by defining them in a specific, measureable way. Since you made your original observation in January, you might operationalize "winter cold" as

the average January temperature. If you decide that you only want to study the years in which you have lived in your current state, you could operationalize your term in that fashion.

Once you know what data you want, you must find it. Let's start at the top. A reliable source might be the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which in turn is host to the National Climatic Data Center (www.ncdc.noaa.gov). This organization's site "provides free access to NCDC's archive of historical weather and climate data." After specifying your location, date range and desired data (average temperature), you can download a spreadsheet with this information.

You now have data in hand, but raw data can't answer questions on its own. In a data set displaying only the past 10 average January temperatures, it's fairly easy to see which is lowest, but many data sets are much larger. Using a spreadsheet, you could apply a formula to determine which temperature is the lowest, or one that calculates the mean of these temperatures. If this year is the lowest, you have just found some support for your original assumption.

The above example is just a sample. You can find many ways of asking and answering this kind of question. Interrogating the data meaningfully, creatively and thoroughly is necessary for good storytelling. First, however, you have to *get* that data.

Getting Data

Data is everywhere today. We can see it all around us – in the social media we use, the purchases we make and so forth – but that doesn't mean we know how to get at the data. In fact, so much data exists that deciding on some tiny slice of it to use can feel quite daunting. As with any journalistic story, it is important to determine which story you want to tell.

For example, let's say you want to write a story on arrests made in your town. Your first stop is going to be the police department. Once you decide if you are interested in city police, campus police or state police arrests, the next question is what information each organization has available. Some police stations now save all records to a publicly accessible database, although others still rely largely on ink and paper. As a reporter, you may hope for the most

convenient format, but you should plan for the worst-case scenario.

Working with Paper Data

Regardless of the wealth of information seemingly available at our fingertips, there remain many times when you just need to get on your feet, get out of the door and do some in-the-flesh reporting.

In our example, let us say you decided that you want to report on campus crime and then identified the questions your story should answer – "Have thefts increased?" "Are public drunkenness reports changing?" After identifying your data needs, you head to the campus security headquarters and request all theft complaints and public drunkenness reports from the past five years.

The desk officer informs you that these records are available only as handwritten documents sorted (more or less) by date. The good news is, they can readily point you toward the years you want. The bad news is, you need to sift through all of them on your own. In addition, the records may not leave the office, and the police won't make copies for you.

Most police departments today use digital tools to some extent in their record keeping, so there's a good chance records exist in PDF or even spreadsheet form. The point of this scenario is that it could happen, either in part or in whole, and that means you will need to put forth some serious transcription efforts. Your tools in such a case are, at minimum:

- A laptop computer or tablet (because you need to be mobile)
- A spreadsheet or database application (such as Excel) with which you are familiar
- A notepad and pencil for recording observations, possible trends, and new questions that arise while you're immersed in the data

Using paper and pencil may seem old-fashioned, but one strength of that approach is that it allows you to take notes in a separate place while entering hard data on your laptop. Another reason is that the end product of your work will likely be visual – perhaps a table or chart – so you want to be able to sketch out visualization ideas as they occur to you. Having a place to take loose, free-form

notes complements the structured format of your spreadsheet.

Digital Data

The previous section addressed how to deal with analog data, but it's increasingly likely that the data you want will be digital. In acquiring such data, the first steps are the same, but where and how you look will be different. In the digital world, you can go looking for data in the format that you prefer. This section addresses three areas of digital data acquisition: Running searches, writing scrapers and filing FOIA requests.

Searching

Even if you know how to use a search engine, you probably haven't had much experience using one to find specific data. You can limit and filter your search to seek certain objects, to exclude others or to examine only certain web pages. The more precise you are, the more precise your results can be.

Make your search as specific as possible, identifying particular phrases, domains and file types for the search engine to seek. Much of the process will be trial-and-error. If one search does not turn up useful results, you can modify or remove restrictions, one at a time, until you find a search that works.

Scraping

A scraper is a computer-based tool used to examine some part of the Internet for specified data. That part could be an application such as Twitter or a specific part of the Web, such as a government agency's statistics page. Building something like this might sound intimidating, but if you can conduct a search or use a spreadsheet, you can write a simple scraper. Unlike a search, which is a one-time entry, a data scraper is a dedicated tool.

USING SEARCH OPERATORS

Search operators are commands used to narrow or broaden the range of a search. The operators identified below are common

but not universal (most will work in Google), so test them out on your search engine to be sure (also note that operators using a colon (:) cannot have a space after the colon).

Including and excluding results:

- Exact matches. When you type more than a single word into a search engine, it will typically seek those words as a phrase but also as individual words. To search only an *exact* phrase, put it in quotation marks ("flying fish of the Pacific Ocean").
  - Alternative 1. Use the "AND" operator to return only hits with all specified terms – "ham AND eggs".
  - Alternative 2. The "+" operator signifies certain mandatory terms among several – "green +chinese +pottery" would require Chinese pottery results but be lenient about the color if few involved green.
  - Alternative 3. The "allintext" operator does essentially the same thing, but only looks within the body text (not the title, link, or URL) of a site – searching "recipe allintext: eggs turmeric cinnamon" would only return recipes including all three of those ingredients.
- Excluding words or phrases. Sometimes you're searching for a term or something with a meaning that isn't the most common use of that term. "How to clean a bass," for example, would primarily yield results for the fish, but that's not helpful if you meant the musical instrument. The "-" (or "NOT") operator excludes unwanted results: "how to clean a bass-fish" provides information that's more in line with what you seek.
- Either-or searches. Use the "OR" operator to find any results that have at least one of the specified terms ("franks OR beans").
- Synonyms. Use the "~" operator to include results that have similar meanings to the specified term ("~ugly").
- Incomplete words or phrases. If you know some but not all of the search term you need, use the "wild card" (*) operator.

  - When seeking a particular phrase, it is most effective to

pair this operator with quotation marks ("Ask not what your * can do for *").
  - This operator can be used to seek a particular file type ("*.pdf"), but using "filetype:" is preferable (see below). The wild card operator is useful if you want all cases of a file type that include a particular word (e.g., "*crime*.pdf").
- Compound queries. Mix AND, OR and NOT (Boolean) searches by using parentheses ("theft AND (property OR vehicle)").

Dates, numbers and file types:

- Numerical ranges. Use the ".." operator between the top and bottom ends of your range. Searching "25..35 mpg" would yield results for cars within that range. Use only one value to limit only the bottom (30..) or top (..50) of your search's range.
- Specific dates. Use "daterange:" followed by a six-digit numeral in year-date (no hyphen) format. The search "Boston daterange:201303" would return only results from March (month 03) 2013.
- Searching within a specific site or domain. Use this if you want data from a specific domain – "site:.gov" – or site – "site:snopes. com". You can also add search terms to this as usual – "tenure site:.edu".
- Searching for a particular file type. Use this to seek data formats that fit your needs. If you're planning to do the work in an Excel spreadsheet, which uses the ".xls" extension, you can use "filetype:" to seek only results of that type – "crime rates filetype:.xls".

In many cases, if you can read it, you can scrape it. Web scraping, for example, is focused specifically on information from websites. It is based on recognizing elements of markup languages such as HTML and extracting the information contained within specified tags.

OUTWIT HUB

> A more complex but still accessible option is Outwit Hub (outwit.com), a tool that scrapes websites and breaks them down into their structural components to get at the information you seek. According to its creators, Outwit Hub lets users "harvest data elements, documents or media from virtually any public (and legal) source of content." It exists as both an add-on to the Firefox browser and as a standalone app and has free and paid versions.

Coders develop complex, powerful scrapers using languages such as Ruby and Python. Learning such skills and languages is a demanding but rewarding path. However, developing these language skills is not the only way to create scrapers. Sites such as ScraperWiki provide simple tools for scraping Twitter for data to return as a spreadsheet.

How to write a simple scraper

Google provides spreadsheet capabilities via its Drive application.

One of its handiest tools is a function called ImportHTML that allows you to import tables and lists from websites. Some other spreadsheet applications have their own means of importing Web content, but ImportHTML will serve here as a quick illustration of scraping.

Once you find a data table online you want to use, first check to be sure you can use it (for more on this see the next section on the legal implications of scraping) and that it's not already available for download. If it checks out, you can start scraping. We'll use publicly available government data (see the discussion of public vs. proprietary data below): An unemployment rate table from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

You need the site's URL (including "http://"), the data's format ("table") and its number (2). The data's "number" will be based on how many similar elements exist on the page. For example, if you want to scrape a table's data and three other tables are above it on the page, you would use "4" in the index spot listed below. With that information, create a new spreadsheet in Drive. Enter the following function in the first cell of the spreadsheet:

=importHTML("URL", "format", index)

Each of your parameters should be included in the appropriate place. Don't forget to include quotation marks around the first two, which are string (rather than numerical) values – this will be discussed further in this chapter's section on spreadsheets. The Bureau of Labor Statistics data we are using is monthly unemployment rates from 2004 to 2014 and is the third table on the page, so the formula would read:

=importHTML ("http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000", "table", 3)

If it doesn't work, check first for syntax (those quotation marks, commas and parentheses really do matter), and try adjusting the index of your table (if 1 didn't work, try 2). Once successful, you can work with the spreadsheet in Drive or download it (File > Download) to your computer.

The legal implications of scraping

Just because something is on the Web, it does not mean you are free to use it for your own purposes. Some sites address scraping in their terms of use, although these are not always enforceable. On the one hand, U.S. legal precedent holds that facts are not copyrightable because they "do not owe their origin to an act of authorship" (Feist Publications Inc. vs. Rural Telephone Service Co. (1991)). On the other hand is the reality of proprietary data, an organization's internally generated data that allows it to compete. Using a for-profit organization's proprietary data without consent takes away from that organization's ability to profit from its own work and, in most cases, doing so oversteps both legal and ethical bounds.

For journalists, scraped data has two acceptable origins: Official government/public sources and proprietary data that has been provided with the consent of its originator. The data you use must be either publicly available or you must have permission to use it. Anything else – for legal and ethical reasons – is off limits.

FOIA requests

One approach to gathering data that straddles the old and new is the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. Established in

1966, FOIA establishes any American's right "to obtain access to federal agency records, except to the extent that such records (or portions of them) are protected from public disclosure by one of nine exemptions or by one of three special law enforcement record exclusions" (foia. gov). This right can be made for any non-exempt record, and it is enforceable in court.

According to foia.gov, an FOIA request has three requirements: "[It] must be in writing, reasonably describe the information you seek, and comply with specific agency requirements." That last point can vary widely, although the site says most agencies today accept electronic requests. A list of details for federal agencies is available at www.foia.gov/report-makerequest.html.

FOIA does not require agencies do any new research, answer specific questions or create the records you want them to have. They must only provide the records they actually have. You need to have a clear and specific idea of the kinds of data you're seeking in advance of making the request.

Working with Data

After you make your request for data or engage in some legal scraping processes, you still have some work to do before the data set is usable. Your information is likely in a raw (or primary) form. This means that the data currently exist only in a massive block without context or formatting. Raw data is problematic on its own because it doesn't provide the necessary information for comparison, and meaningful comparison is at the heart of data journalism.

In any data-based narrative, the central question must be "Compared to what?" A massive database is not useful without some meaningful comparison that allows the reader to understand what seven of X or a million of Y means. To that end, this section will cover the topics of normalization and formatting.

Normalization

If you wanted to track murders in the United States, for example, you likely would find more murders in Texas, California and New York than in North Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming. It does not,

however, mean that you are more likely to be murdered in the first group of states than in the second.

Reporting the raw numbers is not valid because you haven't converted the data to a form that can be meaningfully compared. By normalizing the murders against a value such as state population – dividing the first by the second – we can find the murder rate per state resident. A state with more people may have a higher raw number of murders but the same (or even lower) rate as a much less populous state.

Other comparative factors come into play here as well. Illinois, for example, includes the city of Chicago and its surrounding regions, which the FBI reported had 500 murders in 2013. It may not be that murders are as common in the rest of Illinois as they are in Chicago.

CHICAGO CRIME

This is also a great example of why we need to interrogate data closely. In 2013, the FBI released its annual crime statistics for the previous year. The dataset placed the city of Chicago at the top, with 500 murders. Fox News Channel reported on this as "FBI: Chicago officially America's murder capital," with the number of murders almost 70 greater than the previous year (New York, it noted, saw almost 100 fewer).

Chicago reporter Mason Johnson took Fox News to task for this, explaining that the Chicago area's murder rate was 7.1 per 100,000 residents, lower than the Detroit, Philadelphia, and Baltimore areas but also Alabama's areas of Montgomery, Mobile, and Birmingham. The use of "area," he explained, includes a much larger region than the city proper (Chicago's city homicide rate alone is 18.4), but this is the region by which the FBI classifies all such metropolitan areas. He also added that even the FBI had "cautioned against using these statistics for ranking purposes."

The Fox News story *did* acknowledge the idea of the murder rate, but only to say that Flint, Michigan, had a higher rate than either New York City or Chicago. Sometimes the headline isn't the real story.

Source: Johnson, M. "Chicago not actually 'murder capital' of, well, anything." http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2013/09/26/chicago-not-actually-murder-capital-of-well-anything/

Formatting

In addition to normalizing the data, you need to format it. If you receive data in a less convenient format, such as in hard-copy form, you will need to do considerably more work to make it manageable. In almost all cases, cleaning and formatting will be necessary.

Clean entries

This is the first and last thing to check with any collection of data. This item is in many ways the simplest, yet it's also the easiest to disregard. A misspelled item, for example, is an item that won't be counted, and that's an error. A good first step to avoiding this is running the spelling check application, but this can't be the only step you take. Any report will be laden with jargon, terms specific to the field but less familiar to readers. You should scan your data visually to look for errors. Ideally, a second party will also have a look, especially if you entered the data yourself.

We will use our campus crime example to illustrate this. Many crime reports involve issuing a citation, so you might expect to see this word often. But, every so often, your fingers (or those of the reporting officer) might slip, turning "citation" into "citaiton." Perhaps one officer records as "Theft (Property)" what another records as "Property Theft." Without correcting idiosyncrasies like these, your data will be incomplete. It might seem less significant when dealing with a spreadsheet containing thousands of entries, yet every absence is an inaccuracy that can lessen the credibility of your reporting.

Crime Title
ACCIDENT (NON REPORTABLE)
ACCIDENT (PARKING AREA)
ACCIDENT (PARKINGAREA)
ACCIDENT (REPORTABLE DUI)
ACCIDENT (REPORTABLE)

Figure 9.1 *Although all of these things might be the same to you, they are all different to data-analysis programs. Make sure you standardize the items in your data set before you analyze it.*

Clear categorization

In our campus crime report, we would need the date, time and location of crimes. We want to know what kinds of crimes were committed. It might be important to know the "who" as well here, but in many cases that information is not available.

The above examples are fairly universal: A thing happened at a time and place and involved specific people. In some data sets, categories can be more specific to the particular group. As an example, let's add a column to our example: "Disposition." In police jargon, this refers to the status of the case. A case may be listed as "open," "closed," "cleared," or "arrest." "Open" and "arrest" may seem fairly straightforward, but you might not know the difference between "closed" and "cleared." Before you decide to combine these categories, you should determine how meaningful this distinction is to your research.

Consistent formatting

This goes hand-in-hand with cleaning, but is a little more involved. Even if you obtain data from a highly professional and reputable organization, you can't assume it is free of error or contradiction. For example, if the department switched from reporting on a 12-hour (a.m. and p.m.) system to a 24-hour one, you will have problems comparing all the data values within the set.

In our campus crime example, consider the "Location" category. One of your reporting interests is thefts at the Student Recreation Center. However, you notice that this is logged differently depending on the reporting officer – some list it as "Student Recreation Center," some as "Student Rec Center" and some as "SRC." This is a significant concern because it puts you at risk of incomplete reporting, so you need to fix it before you analyze your data set.

Using Spreadsheets

Unless you work with a small amount of data, you will need an application to help you keep track of it all. Applications like spreadsheets and databases store your data and let you sort and calculate it.

For the purposes of illustration, this section will use two widely used spreadsheet applications: Microsoft Excel and Google Drive. Excel is part of the Microsoft Office package, a common fixture in many newsrooms and university computer systems. Drive is part of the Google suite of applications, and you can use it for free if you have a Google ID.

First, know how many variables you will need. Each category will have a column, so it's important those categories be designated as clearly as possible (a header row is strongly recommended). Each row is a single entry, such as the date, time, type and disposition of an individual crime report (see Figure 9.2).

Date Occurred	Time Occurred	Case Number	Crime Title
8/25/2011	12:04:00	11-0011264	THEFT (BUILDING)
8/31/2011	17:03:00	11-0011687	ACCIDENT (PARKING AREA)

Figure 9.2 *This is a simple breakdown of crime data based on a few key variables.*

When all the entries have been entered, you can seek the answers to your questions. Simple sorting is a good first step. Depending on the focus of your questions (time, location, etc.), try sorting the data by those criteria:

- In Excel: Data > Sort, then select the column to sort by (e.g., "Date") and ascending (low-to-high) or descending (high-to-low) order.
- In Drive: Select the column you want to sort by (e.g., Column B), then select Data > Sort Sheet by Column B.

Patterns could emerge from your data set after this sort. Perhaps Thursdays appear more frequently than other days, or perhaps a particular dorm building seems like a hotbed of activity. At this point, you are only doing a visual check, but doing so first gives you an idea of where you might want to focus.

Bringing in formulas

Once you have an idea of where you want to go, you have to start counting these records. One way to do this is with a pen and paper, counting each relevant entry individually. This is slow, inflexible and subject to human error. A far better solution is the use of formulas. A formula is a statement in a spreadsheet that begins with an "=" sign, telling the application what you're up to.

There are two parts to a formula – the function and its parameters:

- Function: The component that immediately follows the "=" sign and tells the spreadsheet what to do. Examples are SUM, AVERAGE, MAX and SUMIF.
- Parameters: The conditions that must be met and what happens if they are (or are not). They are contained within the parentheses following the function. Parameters may involve:
  - A single cell (e.g., "A1" or "F17")
  - A range of cells ("A1:A100" or "H7:H12")

The SUM function, for example, adds all the cells in a given range of cells. If you wanted to add the values from cell A1 to cell A10, you would select the cell where you want this sum to appear and enter =SUM(A1:A10). In this example, the colon (:) indicates the entire range of cells between the two cells you've selected. More complex formulas involve two or more parameters and can even call other functions within their parameters.

USEFUL FORMULAS

These formulas are a good set to begin with. Every formula must begin with an "=" sign to work. Another common problem is forgetting punctuation such as commas, quotation marks or closing parentheses. If something is going wrong, check the punctuation first.

- COUNT(range): Counts the number of values in a range (e.g., "A1:A10").
- SUM(range): Adds up the values in a range.

- AVERAGE(range): Averages the values in a range.
- MAX(range): Identifies the largest value in a range. There is also MIN, which finds the smallest value.
- DAY(cell): Returns a numeral 1–31 for the day of the month in a cell that contains a date such as 8/25/2011. There are similar functions for WEEKDAY (1–7), MONTH (1–12), and YEAR, as well as for HOUR (0–23), MINUTE(00–59), and even SECOND (00–60).
- Conditional ("IF") functions are more complex but also more powerful because they allow greater sorting and comparison of data.
- IF(logical test, value if true, value if false): Checks another cell's value against some criteria. If it passes (true), one value is reported; if it fails, the other is. For example: IF(A1>0, "YES", "NO") would report YES if the value in cell A1 is greater than zero and NO if it is not.
- COUNTIF(range, criteria): Counts all the values that pass a test criterion. Examples might be "TRUE" or "Democrat" or ">10".
- SUMIF(range, criteria): Sums all values that pass a test criterion. Tests are similar to those for COUNTIF, but this function can only be used on cells with numerical (not string) values.

AN EXAMPLE WITH COUNTIF

If you wanted to find the number of Thefts in your crime data quickly, you would use the COUNTIF function. This function counts all the cells in a selected range that match a value you determine. It has two parameters – range and a test criterion. Be sure your data is clean, clear and consistent because the function will only recognize cells with the *exact* value you enter.

For the range, we will assume that the times of crime reports are in column D, and there are 100 entries in total, so the range will be D2:D101 (it doesn't begin with D1 because there is a header row). The test criterion will be "Theft" – the quotation marks are necessary because this is a string (non-numerical) value. The final function will look like this:

```
=COUNTIF(D2:D101,"Theft")
```

To count all crime types, you can apply the COUNTIF formula to each crime type you'll be visualizing, using their different names. We'll do

this in the visualization section later in the chapter.

COUNTIF is useful for tallying single variables, but even more useful is the ability to count up the values that match more than one variable test. For this, use the COUNTIFS function (don't forget that "S"). This function uses a range-criteria pair like COUNTIF, but it counts up values that meet multiple tests rather than just one. If you wanted to only count up thefts from October, you would test for two criteria: Crime type ("Theft") and Month ("October"). If Months were in column H, the final function would be:

```
=COUNTIFS(D2:D101,"Theft",H2:H101,"October")
```

Further, if you had multiple years of data but only wanted October thefts from 2012 (with years in column J), you would add an additional range-criterion pair, resulting in:

```
=COUNTIFS(D D2:D101,"Theft",H2:H101,"October", J2:J101,"2012")
```

Once that data has been sorted and counted, it needs to be presented in an understandable format. Doing this requires visualization, which will be discussed in the next section.

Visualizing Data

Understanding nonlinearity is key to much of data journalism. "Nonlinear" is a term which here means "not in a straight line." This stands in contrast to a traditional text-focused narrative that is (intended to be) read from start to finish. It is difficult to start a text narrative at a paragraph or sentence of your choosing, but, with a data narrative, that is often exactly what the reader is expected to do. The complexity with which this is made possible, however, ranges from simple analog formats like the table to highly structured digital approaches. Before data can be visualized, however, it must be structured in a format meaningful to readers.

The LATCH approach

One of the most common approaches to information architecture is

LATCH, an acronym information architect Richard Saul Wurman coined that stands for Location, Alphabet, Time, Category and Hierarchy. Each describes a different way of classifying information. A good choice is one that adds a layer to the data through the comparison it provides. A poor choice does not add value, and may even confuse readers' ability to read meaningful comparisons.

- Location: Where are the individual values in your data situated? For example, if you're working with U.S. Census data, much of it will be linked to states and municipalities, allowing comparisons of their populations, demographics and so on. Crime data might be tied to specific street addresses that can be shown on a map. An effective location-based structure is one that tells the reader something more about the sets of locations the data describes. It is based on a story whose central question is "where?"
- Alphabetical: This approach is often the default, but in most cases it is the least informative way to structure data. Unless your interest is in designing a list, such as a phone book, this approach is arbitrary and adds little to the data. Think about it: Although a number of words in your database may start with "A," does this mean they have anything in common?
- Time: Just like place, information can be pegged to a particular time. If the story you want to tell deals with many points in a particular period, time may be the structuring element you want to consider. A time-based story is focused on questions of "when?" or "how long?"
- Category: This element examines how data points group together around a single consistent factor. This approach to data can involve existing types, such as gender, race or religion, or new types that the observer creates based on the data.
- Hierarchy: This refers to the magnitude of the data. Hierarchical data may be ranked most to least, largest to smallest and so on. The ordinal data type discussed above would be a clear fit for a hierarchical structure.

Applying the LATCH structure to your narrative allows you to focus on an area. Will your readers be most interested in finding

their state? Use Location. Would your readers want the most recent numbers? Apply Time ordering. Do you think they just want to see the highest or lowest scores? Use Hierarchy as your guiding principle. Each one creates a different narrative. With this in mind, we can now consider the format in which the data will be presented.

VIEW FROM A PRO

GRANT SMITH

Grant Smith's job is all about finding patterns. As a data reporter with The Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tennessee, his job is to collect and corral the data into meaningful stories, asking what are the trends, omissions and revelations in a data set.

"I get to have my hands in lots of different cookie jars," he said. "I think a data reporter is essentially a beat reporter, but instead of covering city hall, I cover and interview data. Of course I talk to real people too, but my beat is data and all the trappings that come along with that."



Figure 9.3
Grant Smith.

Smith said his job requires the ability to see patterns in the world, not just in data. His job relies on the scientific method, which starts with

formulating a question, not being handed a spreadsheet. A database of crimes committed in an area, for example, initially presents more questions than answers: Are these numbers higher than expected? Lower? How should the numbers be compared? What should be reported? It's also important, he said, not to get too attached to your initial ideas: A data journalist must be able to form hypotheses and predictions about the world and be willing to disprove them.

A data journalist's job is not identical from day to day, but, in a typical cycle, Smith might have to update data (e.g., salaries, homicides or crime trends) on the Web, work on public records requests and work on his own stories. In addition, he said, "probably half of my time is spent working with others," so his job often involves talking to reporters about their projects to see if he might be able to contribute reporting or interactive data elements. Somewhere in there he also tries to commit time to longer-term projects.

One such major project is The Commercial Appeal's homicide tracker (www.commercialappeal.com/data/homicide). Part of their website's Data Center, this ongoing project uses Google Fusion Tables to present an up-to-date picture of homicides in the Memphis region. When Smith adds a homicide, the tracker updates the page's data breakdown about homicides, their resolutions, their locations and the means by which they were committed.

The process, he said, is one of ongoing development: "First we had to acknowledge that we had an unfilled need; check out what other folks have done; figure out what data fields need to be collected; explore technology that would work; and then actually build it, an hour here, a couple hours there.... In addition to being a great resource for the community, it's also a dataset we never had before."

There's no specific list of tools a data journalist must know, but learning readily available ones such as Excel and Google Fusion Tables is a good start. For the next steps, Smith recommended R-Statistics, Javascript and MySQL, as well as Web development tools. More important to the job, though, is the ability to learn new skills quickly. "Keep abreast of new tools. If a job is best done with Python, learn enough Python to do that job."

Visualization formats

Only at the end of the process does a data journalist decide on a format for the data. The needs of the story should dictate the visual form you use. The realm of information graphics is more fully covered in Chapter 7, but here we'll touch on three common forms for visualizing a complete data narrative.

- Lists: A list visualizes data based on a single variable in a vertical format. It is quick and easy, but it is also the most simple of displays. For example, you might list the states' populations alphabetically or hierarchically (most to least). The phone book is, in essence, a list – functional but not revealing of much depth.
- Tables: A table is another simple form of nonlinear narrative, but you have far more potential in that simplicity. A table is a matrix of rows and columns, each representing a variable, and each individual cell is a particular interaction. Those values can be quantitative numerals (numbers of votes for different candidates x individual districts) or qualitative strings (different issues x candidates' stances on them).
- Charts: Charts deal with quantitative data. They are more complex to create, but provide a more visual and focused narrative. If your story emphasizes the "how much?" question, a chart may be appropriate. Most charts are based on area (e.g., pie charts) or an X-Y axis (bar or line charts). An area chart can show a proportion or parts of a whole; bar and line charts can show differences across time or location. Going back to the types of data discussed at the start of the chapter, a bar chart deals in discrete numbers over time or place while a line chart shows continuous data, single numbers that change over time (such as temperature).

We can consider visualization using our campus crime example. Let's say you wanted to examine the frequency of police reports throughout the year. (See Figure 9.4.) The type of visualization you use depends on the story you want to tell. The simplest visualization would be a list of reports by month, which is a good place for your spreadsheet's =COUNTIF function.



Months	Crime Totals
January	320
February	312
March	302
April	286
May	149
June	90
July	121
August	260
September	337
October	261
November	237
December	201

Figure 9.4 *A frequency table that outlines crime data in a month-by-month approach.*

This format, organized by Time, doesn't allow much distinction, so we can't tell the type or severity of the reports, but it does illustrate how tied up the police are each month.

Moving a level up, we might want to visualize specific types of reports throughout the year. (See Figure 9.5.) This requires two variables: Types of Crime (Category) and Time of Year (Time). A table provides greater specificity of values but lacks visual immediacy; a chart quickly and clearly shows trends but does not provide precise data to the reader.

We'll use a table first. This example counts the eight most common or notable types of report and leaves the remainder in a category called "Other." It is organized vertically by month (Time) and horizontally by report frequency (Hierarchy). We can clearly see the most frequent reports are for liquor law violations and the rarest are for arson.

Month	Liquor	Drug	Theft	Traffic	Battery	Harass	Robbery	Arson	Other
January	62	76	19	11	2	6	0	0	144
February	53	78	34	12	4	3	1	0	127
March	54	31	18	17	2	5	0	0	175
April	59	34	29	6	5	1	0	0	152
May	7	7	15	12	1	0	1	0	106
June	1	0	7	9	4	2	0	0	67
July	5	1	12	18	1	0	0	0	84
August	58	45	16	28	2	2	1	0	108
September	65	47	23	15	5	1	0	0	181
October	56	42	12	17	7	4	0	1	122
November	12	48	17	10	8	0	0	0	142
December	24	34	16	16	0	1	1	1	108
TOTALS	456	443	218	171	41	25	4	2	1516

Figure 9.5 *A month-by-month breakdown of various crimes in a spreadsheet format.*

This format reveals precise numbers, but it is difficult to get a picture of how those numbers relate, so we'll try a chart. (See Figure 9.6.)

Our data is for 2011–2012, so in this chart the months have been rearranged to follow the August–May academic year. In this format, there are visible distinctions between reports in months when students are present all month (September, October, January, February), when they have breaks (August, November, December, March, April), and when few are on campus (May, June, July). Liquor and drug violations are high during peak student times, low in others. We also see, however, that thefts keep close to a far more consistent frequency – there is still a summer dip, but not nearly so large.

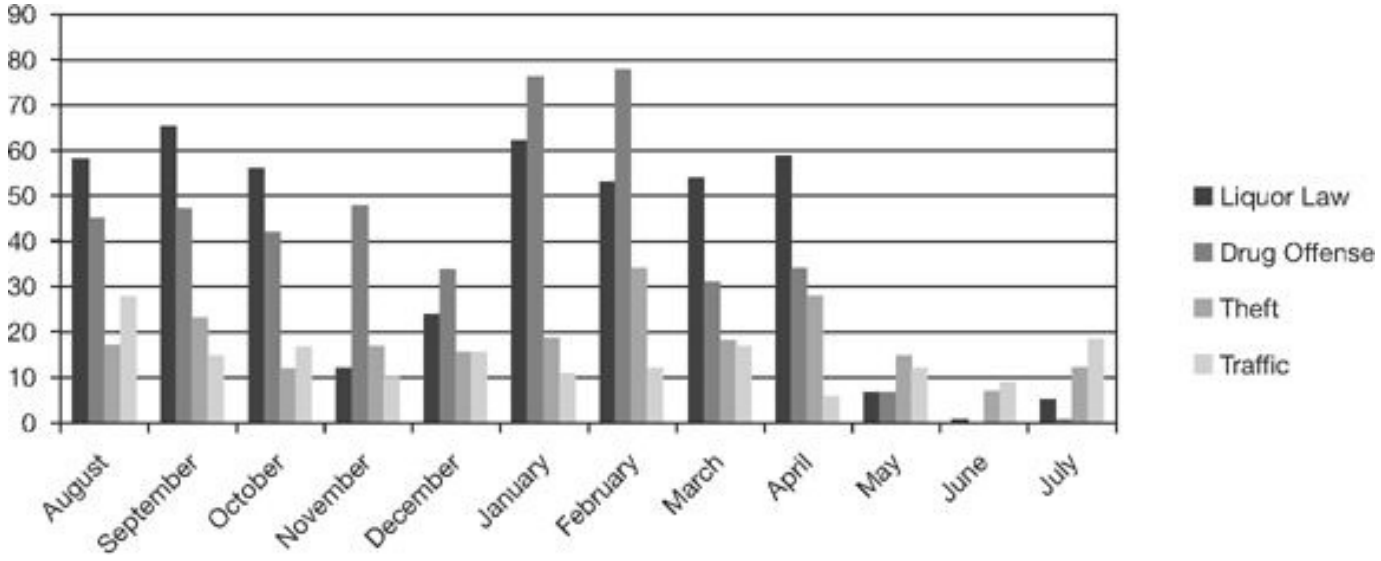


Figure 9.6 *Putting the data from the table above in chart form makes it easier for readers to conceptualize when most crime occurred and what type of crime it was.*

FINAL FOUR

If you take nothing else away from this chapter, here are four things you should remember:

1 Data on its own is not magical. Asking the right questions of it determines what it can tell you. Make sure your questions are based on identifiable variables that can be searched out and examined.

2 Hone your skills of data acquisition – *all* of them. Scraping is just one route to data. So are search engines and FOIA requests. Don't pigeonhole yourself, and you'll be more difficult to shut out.

3 Comparison is key. A given number or statement only becomes compelling in the context of others. The story lies in how it is bigger, smaller, better, worse or otherwise different.

4 No one visualization fits all stories. A sharp-looking chart has its place, but so does a simple list. Know the right tool for the narrative that needs to be told.

10

Social media generates quite a buzz in journalism these days. The excitement centers on the ways in which it allows journalists to produce work and interact with society. In addition, social media gives readers a variety of new ways to consume the information that matters to them.

You likely use social media in your personal life, and perhaps even in professional settings like an internship or job. You are probably among the 73 percent of online adults using Facebook (among more than 1 billion global users) or 43 percent using multiple social sites, according to the Pew Research Center's Internet Project. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest may also draw your attention through a mobile device. eMarketer describes mobile trends as making users "always on, always social" through smartphones and tablets. We are used to people making mobile status updates or uploading photos while walking to class, hanging out at the gym or celebrating with friends.

Media consumption is shifting in society, impacting the ways citizens consume news and society gets informed. The Pew Research Journalism Project reports that about half of Facebook and Twitter users get news from these social sites. Reddit, Google+, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram also are news sources. Users may tap traditional sources too, such as print, television and radio.

News may come from "citizen journalists" who capture live events with mobile devices and then upload the information to social sites. Pew research in 2013 identified the devastating Oklahoma tornados and Boston Marathon terror attack as events that generated highly viewed citizen-captured videos on YouTube.

Blogs, now amongst the older social media forms, may also inform society and showcase citizen journalism efforts. Paul Andrews in the Nieman Report, "Is Blogging Journalism?" notes how bloggers influence traditional journalism. While blogs do not necessarily adhere to journalism reporting standards, they may interact with readers and help circulate information among readers and journalists.

Some principles or best practices help guide journalists toward integrating social and mobile tools. In a couple of years, the tools mentioned here may change, and new ones emerge. Given this reality, the focus ahead will be on the best uses and ways of infusing

social media into journalism practice, no matter the exact platforms and features.

This chapter walks you through professional uses of social media for producing news in the convergence environment. After taking note of the big trends, this chapter will highlight the following three areas:

- Ways to produce news content with uses of social media.
- Using online writing, visual and social-sharing tactics to enhance news content and circulation online.
- Understanding and engaging with audiences on their chosen platforms for accessing information.

Observing Trends

Journalists once worked in a mass-media model in which they disseminated one message, via print or broadcast news, to a large audience. Online interaction ushered in with convergence has shifted this model significantly. This section of the chapter will explore the ways in which social media and an increasing reliance on digital technology have led to massive changes in how we view journalism and communication.

User-generated content

The era of Web 2.0, which Tim O'Reilly defined in 2005, marked the start of user-generated content (UGC) online. Web 2.0 trans formed online interactions from push-out content from Web developers to an arena in which anyone, without a background in Web programming, could put content online.

You create UGC regularly when you post status updates on social network sites or upload pictures to photo-sharing networks. What's important to know is that when the Web shifted to a place where anyone could put content online, our interactions with information and news changed too.

For example, you can watch "The Bachelor" on prime-time television, or follow "spoiler" updates of what will happen on the show via blogs and Facebook pages. You can also use Twitter hashtags to see what other viewers think about the unfolding

drama and share your thoughts as well. NBC News reports in "Game of spoilers: Social media is killing DVR culture" how this UGC disrupts live viewing by informing viewers of "what happens" before the show is seen.

Seeing consumers and producers

Thinking beyond changes for individuals, we also see UGC changing how our society functions in getting news. In "Convergence Culture", Henry Jenkins describes an emerging participatory culture in which people who were just media consumers ten years ago are now content consumers and producers. We now post updates online and engage in online sharing of information through updates, pictures and video. Social sharing has shifted each of our roles from media spectator to media participant.

With consumers who also serve as content producers, the opportunity for crowd-sourcing comes into play. Here we see the online sharing of news, pictures and opinions coming together from several types of people in various places converging in an online space. For example, innovative ideas for recycling may come from people in various U.S. states, but be gathered or sourced from this diverse "crowd" on one Twitter hashtag. Bigger ideas about happenings or trends based on patterns emerge from the massive expression of the public or "the crowd."

Using mobile devices and apps

Increasingly, our participation is mobile. Pew reported in 2013 that 55 percent of Americans own smart phones, with 91 percent owning mobile phones. Further, 32 percent owned e-readers and 42 percent owned tablets. Mobile devices use applications – software programs designed for tablets or phones – to access news, social media and business sites. These apps allow easy and streamlined access to content from a mobile device. Gartner reports that 92 percent of apps downloaded in 2013 were free versions, in which users access the app in exchange for sharing their data or viewing advertising.

This exchange produces one form of "Big Data," a term for large, complex data sets, which at times is sourced through the social

platforms that gather data about individual online activities. Forbes refers to Big Data as "a collection of data from traditional and digital sources inside and outside your company that represents a source for ongoing discovery and analysis."

Big Data from online activities and preferences allows companies to profile us. It shows what users like and don't like, allowing companies to serve preferred content, such as relevant news, or coupons based on consumer buying behavior. It's like going to a restaurant and only being shown items on the menu that you like. That predetermined menu increasingly influences our online experiences – news, advertising and other content. Big Data results from all that data collection and is increasingly used by companies – and even in reporting with data-driven journalism.

Seeking media uses and gratifications

Users may access news and UGC at any time to satisfy their information needs. Another way to view this is from the perspective of uses and gratifications, a theoretical view of how users decide to use forms of media. Researcher Guosong Shao describes users using media in different ways to fulfill needs for information, entertainment and mood management; for example, when users find particular forms of media easy to use and control, like reading a magazine or scrolling through a mobile newsfeed. Users can also gain fulfillment from self-expression with the content they produce online.

Think of users as gatekeepers deciding on the types of content they are interested in so they can satisfy their needs for information or entertainment – from particular sources like online news sites or on certain topics like sports, fashion, local happenings or breaking news.

Posing challenges and opportunities

Taken together, news consumers are also producers, able to access content from mobile devices in order to fulfill needs for information and entertainment. Journalists and other information creators need to think about creating content that fits this audience's needs.

Journalists must orient news production and content to fit the needs of a diverse audience, seeking multiple ways to engage with news stories. You have probably observed that print journalism has struggled to transition to this new model during the last decade. Today, news reaches audiences through multi-platform options that meet the on-demand expectations of society. The old model provided media content in one format for all. In comparison, the modern individualized model must provide media content in multiple formats – for the audiences tuning in via tablets, websites, Facebook or Twitter feeds and many other ways.

Many news organizations can now use website analytics and user data from mobile apps to gain specific insight into how particular news content is relevant or interesting for users. Journalists can now use this data to determine what readers use and what they are talking about. The journalists can then figure out how to provide the information that matters to users.

Producing News Content

Your interest in news is likely based on writing or visual skills. You are developing these skills in order to work as a journalistic writer or photographer or videographer. No matter your discipline, you are producing news content as a storyteller. To be an effective storyteller, social media can help you get the facts, sources and various perspectives that will help make the story accurate, objective and trustworthy. Journalists serve the public, and social media helps them interact with that public. Here are a few social media tools you can use. Keep in mind that social tools are offered as examples only, and new tools are always emerging.

Brainstorming for story writing and visuals

Turn to social media to get ideas about ways to cover an issue or major threads to national or local issues that may be relevant to your story assignment. Further, photos and videos on a variety of social sites, particularly YouTube, can show citizen journalism or corporate videos that lend insight into the topic you are covering.

Let's say your editor asks you to put together a story on the marijuana legalization issues relevant in your state and

community. You may have limited knowledge of this topic, and social media could help you examine legal, medical and educational aspects of the issue. You could also use social media to solicit views from law enforcement and other key groups.

HANGING OUT AT A "VIRTUAL" COFFEE SHOP

Think of social media as a virtual coffee shop – though immensely diverse compared to a real coffee shop, and with varying levels of formal or casual interaction.

- Facebook and Twitter, as well as public comment areas on news websites or recommendation sites like Yelp, can serve as open places for sharing about ideas, happenings and opinions.
- Inherent qualities of social media are openness and provoking conversation – and it's also a transparent channel for sharing interactions.
- Formally or casually, you can ask the audience for information to develop and verify your story.
- Your audience can interact with you regarding opinion, facts or even errors that arise.
- You can listen easily to what audiences are saying. These people may come and go at the coffee shop, while you listen, observe and contribute information to the conversation.
- Endless methods for testing and experimenting with news content and ways to cover it are available through social media. Major social sites like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest are examples of places for research about issues that matter.

In addition to reading pertinent news articles, you can see how the story is being broadly discussed in YouTube searches on "marijuana legalization" or tags on Twitter or Instagram. You might find Facebook groups discussing the issue. You will likely come across a variety of voices, even though not all of them will be helpful. However, your brainstorming will expand with a quick

view of multiple aspects of the topic.

Further, brainstorming and seeing others' points of view can help you determine what may be the key parts of the story to cover, further story ideas or local factors. You should also brainstorm search terms or hashtags for a particular story, and try various uses of them on several social sites.

Finding and verifying sources

The people commenting on Twitter hashtags or Facebook groups can be researched through a Google search. The search can help you find out more background on some of these voices and potentially other things the sources are saying. Another way to verify new sources is through profiles on LinkedIn, a professionally oriented social network site. These profiles typically describe a source's current job, work history and professional and interest groups.

Let's get back to the idea of a story regarding the legalization of marijuana. Social media can be useful as you seek sources on both sides of the issue. You might look for vocal community members with important beliefs about legislative action or community impacts. Researching people discussing these issues could be helpful in locating sources, verifying the credibility of these people and getting quotable information for your story.

You can also let the source know through public or private messaging that you would like to conduct an interview. You also could find the source's contact information through social media and then reach that person in a more traditional format. Either way, social media can help you know more about the source you will meet.

You can access information from a source through prior interviews or statements posted on YouTube, podcasts or other audio capture that may include video. You can use this information in your news article if the source is not available.

Follow official sources like law enforcement, companies, sports teams or public officials, who may be quotable through social media. Additionally, follow unofficial sources such as active community members or vocal power users of social sites and blogs for updates that may include breaking news that you can verify with official sources.

Checking the pulse of social conversation

Increasingly, discussion of issues important in the community happens on social media. This makes social media an ideal way to listen to what people are saying and sharing in your community. For example, regarding a complicated issue like climate change, you can monitor conversations underway among Facebook users or Twitter hashtags. Some comments may be personal opinions about climate change, and others may be factual from scientists or research groups.

It's important not to assume chatter on social media covers all aspects of an important issue or serves as a true representation of society. Just because many people are sharing opinions about climate change on social media, it doesn't mean that those people are "right." Think of the social conversation like a convenience sample – a way to get a sense of what people are thinking.

"Crowd-sourcing" information and citizen status updates for stories

You may crowd-source research or information for your story, which means tapping into networks of people regarding shared experiences, opinions or ideas. Crowd-sourcing allows you to gain access to a wide number of views and group some of those views together as a convenience sample. Individual insights also may spark ideas for broader trends or issues for your story.

Ask people related to a particular topic to chime in on designated Facebook pages or Twitter hashtags, upload pictures, leave comments on news blogs or participate in polls. Invite unique views, shared experiences and pictures to a broad array of story topics: What was it like winning the high school basketball trophy at state? Who can recall Main Street from the 1970s? What ideas could improve business in the industrial park? What priorities should the mayor address this year?

Invite citizen journalists to submit insights, conversational input, photos or video to add to local coverage. However, make sure you validate their work in order to ensure accuracy.

A good way to do this is to blend your reliable sources – like the highway department talking about bad weather conditions – with

crowd-sourced insights – such as Twitter updates from motorists who reported poor highway conditions. A status update about hazardous driving may serve as a good example to back up what the highway department is saying.

A word of caution: You are still responsible for every bit of information you use and publish. To that end, not every citizen journalist will be familiar with the strictures associated with fact checking, journal ism ethics and other tenets you hold dear as a professional. You should use the material you receive from crowd-sourcing, Twitter feeds and other citizen-journalism outlets with care. Make sure you are able to verify information and stand behind what you have published. (See Chapter 13 for more on the ethics associated with this kind of work.)

COVERING LIVE EVENTS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

As a reporter, you may cover a live news event. Your coverage can involve writing a story and "live reporting" via social media while the event is underway. Readers or viewers may tune in to your live updates on social media. These tips cover planning ahead and making updates from the scene.

Before the event

- Preview the event by letting your followers know that you will be making live updates on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and/or other platforms.
- Think ahead of certain aspects you expect to cover so you can easily provide coverage without looking up information online.
- If you look up the following information ahead of the event, you can insert these items during your live reporting:
  - Links to previous stories, pictures or Web resources, such as local history, related issues or past actions
  - References for key individuals or organizations involved, such as Twitter handles or Facebook references that you could cite in your updates
  - Twitter hashtags for key issues being discussed

- Consider using a social media management application, such as HootSuite, which allows you to easily make status updates to multiple social media accounts.

During the event

- Make regular status updates to multiple platforms like Facebook and Twitter, as well as Instagram and others that readers may tune in to.
- Follow up on your final story by posting links to the story on Twitter hashtags or Facebook.
- Quote people who speak or take action during the event, and use those quotes as live tweets or Facebook updates. This is where anticipating Twitter handles or Facebook names before the event can save you time.
- Be creative with funny or human sides of the story. For example, was there a surprise delivery of flowers or birthday celebration before the team hit the court or the council took up business? How can you show these moments?
- Ask questions of your audience and use real-time responses to help you understand community reaction as you write the story that will appear on your news website or publication.
- Show something from behind the scenes. For example, The Washington Post aggregated journalists' "hilarious and gross" experiences when staying in Sochi, Russia, for the 2014 Winter Olympics – complete with social media updates and pictures.

After the event

- Show screenshots of social conversations in your story, such as screenshots from social media platforms or compilations through social sites like Storify.
- View what people were saying for follow-up coverage with ongoing issues.
- Consider thanking sources or the readers who commented in responses on social media regarding your story.

Researching and interacting with groups

As a professional journalist, your storytelling will require you to inter act with diverse groups of people, such as advocacy groups, govern mental organizations and religious groups. Some of these people will be highly recognizable, while others will be new faces on the scene. Social media is another way to become informed and interactive.

Quick background information can be found at Wikipedia, though it should be used with caution and not as a source. The social site is continually updated and offers crowd-sourced information and editing – which leads to potentially good links to back up entries but also the possibility that information is not reliable. In general, citing Wikipedia is not advised. As noted in the American Journalism Review, journalists are responsible for accurate sources and must ensure them outside of Wikipedia.

Using Online Writing, Visual and Social-sharing Tactics

As users engage in more digital media, which is increasingly mobile, their attention spans tend to shorten. Some long-form news stories will draw extended spans of attention, but journalists should realize that many readers will seek quicker reads.

Decreasing attention spans put additional responsibility on the journalist to creatively capture interest and keep it long enough for users to understand the story. Journalists are also fighting with other sites for attention, sites that are using algorithm-baiting techniques to push their work higher and others lower. For example, companies often optimize websites for search engines in order to appear higher in search results. Good writing can help journalists draw readers as well as attract search engines.

Writing online to compel interest and social sharing

Readers tend to scan online information and gravitate toward shorter text. Envision audiences for your story and their platforms.

You should add copy breaks, sub-heads and bullet points to aid online reading. This approach can be challenging depending on the

format expectations of your publication. Breakouts are another way to help a reader quickly see the main points of a story issue. You also want to link to sources, relevant websites and background information to support information in your article. When inserting links, think like the person reading your story. For example, a restaurant review on Google search from a mobile device could add functionality by linking to the restaurant and Yelp reviews in the story.

Compelling headlines can grab attention and views. Readers may be more likely to read a story with the headline "Toddler tests as third-grader – admitted to kindergarten" than one titled "Gifted toddler at head of class." Headlines should also include search terms in order to add relevancy for the search engines.

Increasing use of visuals, pictures, infographics and short video

Web and mobile platform users will likely want to see photos and view videos while they read text on their screens. This crossover of traditional broadcast and print journalism is happening online. Broadcasters are adding visuals and text to online formats while publications are adding video to online storytelling.

Our culture is becoming increasingly visual with online media, and a panel at the 2013 International Symposium on Online Journalism highlighted this topic. The panel emphasized the importance of visuals in storytelling via information graphics, interactive multimedia elements and data-backed graphical images. This convergence of print, audio, visuals and video can increase reader engagement.

You may shoot a photo or a short video at a news event. This video or picture may be posted to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other platforms in "real time" and also accompany your online news article.

You may alert readers ahead of the story in two ways with visuals. First, you could provide advance images on social media to preview the event. Then you could provide your audience members with pictures or video afterward to follow up. Second, depending on the topic, you might crowd-source visuals from readers. These

approaches help encourage readers to watch for your updates and engage with you on social media.

With daily news coverage, brainstorm ways to add visuals. You can use screenshots independently or in a slideshow to show user-created social media updates. You also might consider adding newsroom-created visuals if you have graphics expertise or green-screen access.

VIEW FROM A PRO

DAVE WASINGER

Dave Wasinger's daily duties revolve around increasing engagement with digital readers for the Lansing State Journal and two other Gannett publications, the Battle Creek Enquirer and Port Huron Times Herald.

Wasinger's fast-paced work integrates digital and social media into the news cycle, supporting interaction with readers and pushing journalism in local online conversation about key issues. Today's news cycle incorporates readers' ideas, views and information needs in reactive and proactive efforts with new media.

"Readers are saying 'this is what we want,'" Wasinger said. "And media people are working to meet that."

For 10 years, Wasinger has worked in the Midwest as a reporter, editor and photojournalist with a digital emphasis. Prior to joining the LSJ, he was digital news editor for the Oshkosh Northwestern in Wisconsin.



Figure 10.1
Dave Wasinger.

In his current role, Wasinger oversees multimedia production for the three publications and assists in Web production. This work involves integrating video into online news stories, training reporters to shoot and edit video with iPhones, managing greenroom production and creating packages from video shots – sometimes from citizen journalists.

"One of our most widely watched videos last year was a crash on a local highway," he said.

The stunning freak truck accident with no casualties was captured in a six-second Vine video. Wasinger said he contacted the local citizen journalist via social media, and coordinated placement and voiceover for the video to accompany the news story on the LSJ website.

Wasinger serves as part of the LSJ digital team that strategizes uses of social media for news coverage and events. The team looks at ways to engage readers, such as creating hashtags prior to President Barack Obama's 2014 trip to Lansing in order to generate interest and social sharing of news, photos and video for the event. The team brainstorms crowd-sourcing opportunities, such as encouraging reader contributions of comments and photos for the "Michigander" section that features cool and little-known facts about life in the Wolverine State.

Social strategy also means thinking about how readers access news

via social network sites and mobile devices, he said.

"We try to update Twitter as often as possible without being overbearing," he said. Timing is important for social media updates, as is making information relevant to readers who are accessing news on multiple platforms. The team updates Web content, linked from social media sites coinciding with peak readership times. The team also uses real-time analytics to see how readers are accessing news and clicking on stories, photos or videos of appeal.

In the future, he expects these insights to be of high value to journalists keeping an ear to social media conversations and acting on issues that matter to readers. This effort is important, he said, as journalists and editorial teams must keep pace with digital trends of increased personalization and relevancy in online content.

"Being tuned in, we can see what people are reading and make suggestions to reporters and editors," Wasinger said. "It's another tool in our toolbox."

Promoting social sharing across platforms

Think of your news content – text, images and video – as residing on your publication's website. You can link to this news content from a status update on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Google+, or from blogging sites like Blogger and Wordpress. Further, the video may be posted on YouTube and the pictures on Instagram with relevant hashtags. Many options beyond these exist.

The Lansing State Journal promoted preview news about President Obama's 2014 trip to Michigan's capital as a basis for ongoing coverage of the event. This effort involved creating a hashtag, #ObamaMSU, prior to the event. The publication also promoted engagement on Facebook and captured relevant updates from the visit with Storify.



Figure 10.2 *Facebook screen capture.*
(COURTESY OF THE LANSING STATE JOURNAL, COPYRIGHT FEBRUARY 7, 2014)



Figure 10.3 *Facebook screen capture.*

(COURTESY OF THE LANSING STATE JOURNAL, COPYRIGHT FEBRUARY 7, 2014)



Figure 10.4 *Storify screen capture.*

(COURTESY OF THE LANSING STATE JOURNAL, COPYRIGHT FEBRUARY 7, 2014)



Figure 10.5 *Twitter screen capture and links.*

(COURTESY OF THE LANSING STATE JOURNAL, COPYRIGHT FEBRUARY 7, 2014)

Why you should care:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431521910900285440

The anticipation/lead up to Obama's visit:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431755249611997184

Live coverage: Cover-it Live:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431802006773440512

Twitter list of reporters covering the visit:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431812423478415360
Live tweets of Air Force One:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431840347816488960
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431833042853044224
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431844983818420224
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431858271818104832

Traffic updates from motorcade:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431849730810068992

Retweeting Obama's itinerary:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431851041290985473

Live tweeting Obama's address:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431872227831984128
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431870600282648576

https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431874555406471169

Our most retweeted, favorited tweet (56 retweets, 15 favorites):
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431876673588314112

More traffic updates:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431882646118203393

Air Force One taking off:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431893718485188608

Recap and highlights:
https://twitter.com/LSJNews/status/431992183789719552

The main idea here is that your news content can and should be linked on platforms that reach different readers. One reader may be a heavy Facebook user, while another is only on Twitter. Ideally, both of these readers would see your content on their social network site of choice. Further, as they read they may also share the link with other readers to aid information sharing within the network. This sharing behavior is considered electronic word of mouth. This sharing also is referred to at times as viral sharing or peer-to-peer sharing and can make a story very popular.

Think strategically about how the story gets to readers. Social sharing from your organization or your readers can get your story more broadly read. From those social platforms readers can access your story, and engage in social conversations around the story.

Depending on your story topic, publication and goals, it may make sense to promote your story or event coverage via viral sharing. The term viral sharing means passing along information from one user to another. Social media is a great way for social sharing to happen as readers find information interesting in a new story and then share it with “friends” or “followers” on social media platforms. This strategic approach is not a fit for every story, but the more clicks for your story, the more it has informed readers, which helps show how your story indeed “got” to readers.

Consider informing key community members or groups about your story. Community groups may be interacting with the story. For example, a story about economic issues for downtown businesses may be showing up on a Twitter hashtag or a Facebook feed from your news organization or users, as well as on LinkedIn.

Readers can provide pictures from a major storm in your community that you can then share on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube. The more you can find users on their social sites, the more likely your story will be read. Increasingly, with multi-platform access, this is important.

Think about future audiences for your story too. In the future, your story may be found in a Google or social search as a reader seeks out content that you wrote. Search engines like Google keep an index of website content relevant for searches based on key words. In a sense, your article becomes archived on Google search after it runs. Consider the "after audience" that will read your story in the future.

Understanding and Engaging with Audiences

Many benefits await the journalist who can understand and engage audiences. Social media gives journalists an opportunity to listen to their communities in ways unimaginable a decade ago. Social media conversations provide keen insight into what readers are discussing, ways that complicated news topics affect daily lives and other helpful information for storytelling. Analytic tools on publication websites, mobile apps and social media sites also can show levels of interest for various issues and events.

In your role as a journalist, using social media is another key opportunity. You and your publication can engage with the public through your storytelling via social media. You can engage with your readers and interact with them in relation to particular stories as well as ongoing issues or events. It is important for journalists to present themselves professionally in these social interactions. You are branding yourself as an individual and potentially as a freelancer. At times you will also represent the news organization that employs you. Put your best image forward thoughtfully on social media, so you can leverage all of the benefits discussed in this chapter.

Presenting yourself as a professional journalist on social media

You should only pass along reliable information on social media.

In addition, you should follow AP style, think about all the audiences that may view your updates and conduct yourself with the highest ethical standards. You need to keep a barrier between your personal social media presence and your professional social media presence. More than that, you need to understand that in some cases, the wall between these elements can break down, so you must be careful in how you approach social media in both areas.

As a professional journalist, you want to have a solid presence on LinkedIn, which is a valuable resource for connecting with sources such as politicians, business people and other community members. Use social sharing to send updates to people who you talk to for stories, as it adds to your professional presence.

Google search your name to see your digital footprint and think of managing the impressions that others form of you. Maintain high privacy settings but do not count on them to fully protect your personal information and posts.

View your online presence as a way of branding your professional self. You represent yourself, as well as your publication. Be credible and conversational with others, but show good judgment in emotional responses and humor. Your voice as a journalist is professional, not necessarily the casual, social media voice you use with your friends.

As your career progresses, you will likely change employers, but your professional online presence moves with you. It is common for employers to review the online and social media presence of potential hires. Your professionalism can help your chances of getting the job.

Clean up your non-work social media accounts. You never know when a picture or status update on a personal account may find its way to being viewed by the public or your boss. It may not sound fun, but try to be professional in all of your updates.

FINAL FOUR

If you take nothing else away from this chapter, here are four things you should remember:

1 Convergence means broad shifts for readers who are increasingly not just consumers of news but also producers. Thanks to Web 2.0 and mobile access, readers can participate in news conversations through social media. At times, they also are a source of news as reporters and editors engage with citizen journalists and crowd-sourced information.

2 In producing news content, journalists may use social media to aid story brainstorming, finding and verifying sources, crowd-sourcing comments or visuals – at times from citizen journalists – and researching new topics or organized groups. Modern storytelling involves journalists interacting with their communities. They are adding social tools into traditional journalism, which is based on accuracy, truth and objectivity.

3 Online writing needs to factor in the ways readers read text via computers or mobile devices and the importance of visual aspects to tell stories through pictures, videos and infographics. Journalists need to understand how search engines work and provide access to news stories with links and social integration. Most importantly, journalists can also promote stories across social platforms to increase readership and pass them along to others.

4 New methods for understanding audiences with social media include observing social media conversations, watching social

analytics for stories and visuals of higher appeal and checking website analytics to see times and types of access for readers. Focus on engaging with your audience on social platforms. Interacting on issues with sources and community members can improve your knowledge while demonstrating professionalism and your personal "brand" as a journalist.

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>> Chapter 1 <<

INTRODUCTION: NETWORKED JOURNALISM

Overview

The media are changing. This is obvious to anyone who has been paying attention, but over the last decade the pace of change has increased beyond even the ability of the language we use to describe it or the rules we use to govern it. Who is a blogger, really? What is citizen journalism? Who operates under what privileges? A new media ecology has emerged, one that is social and fluid, and trades on connections and collaborative relations. This shift is fundamental to everything we do as journalists and journalism trainers. This is the ecology of the new media environment. This book proposes a new way of examining the practical skills that are necessary to thrive as a journalist, and the principles governing the new media ecology for those working within it, consuming it and researching it.

Key concepts

- Citizen journalism
- Connections
- Media landscape
- Networks
- New media ecology
- Relationships
- Reporting
- Social media
- Traditional media
- User-generated content

Introduction

An ecology is an interdependent network of living things, each fulfilling its own function within the system, but with no one thing dominating or monopolising it. You do not control it, or master it: you find your niche, your relationships, your dependencies and you thrive – as long as the system thrives.

This book is a guide on how to find – or create – your niche in the ecology of new media, and how to understand and nurture the connections that will allow you to thrive. Throughout this book, you will be encouraged to think about relationships, to think about the rest of the system – the other players and participants (not only other producers, but audiences and advertisers as well) – and to work with them, not against them, to create great journalism.

We propose a new way of talking about and operating within the news environment, a new way of examining and defining the media landscape for those working within it, consuming it and researching it. We are not hoping to pin down the definition of what the news landscape now is, but to describe its trajectory in a way that is flexible and dynamic enough to explain both the contemporary ways of reporting, and to illuminate the changes we know will come, although we don't yet know what they are.

A broken model

As the news environment has expanded and fragmented, coalesced and converged, the meanings of terms like 'newspaper' and 'television channel' have become harder and harder to pin down, and more organisations exist for which we have no simple definition. The dichotomy of 'old' and 'new' media is likewise becoming meaningless – talking to a room full of students who were not yet born when the World Wide Web was invented and referring to it as 'new' makes one realise how meaningless 'new' actually is in this context. What is 'online' in a world where those of us who have physical 'lines' to connect to the internet are increasingly in the minority, and where more people have smartphones, tablets and laptop computers than have television sets?

And this change and confusion is not just on the institutional level – individuals working within (and outside) these organisations have found themselves increasingly unable to define what they do in a single sentence, although they know what they are doing, and are doing it well.

Traditionally, news organisations were constructed and determined by their output mechanism, and hence by their technology. Once the printing press was invented, the newspaper was an almost inevitable consequence; and radio and television engendered the news broadcast. Since the technology was both the prerequisite for production, and the locus of a substantial financial investment, we named these organisations for their technology, not their content. We still speak of 'the press' as though the hulking steel machinery in the basements of Fleet Street was the soul of the news media, and the broadcast towers have only recently vanished from the logos of television stations worldwide – as they are vanishing from the physical landscape.

The internet was the agent of this change. We used to measure the importance of a news outlet by the speed of their presses, or a radio station by the power of its antenna, which were themselves functions of the size of their capital investment. We can't measure these new outlets by the clock speed of their servers, or the size of their disk array, although the servers perform the same function the presses and towers did for newspapers and broadcasting. We don't do this because, relatively speaking, a server costs a pittance compared with the cost of a printing press or, and much more importantly, compared with the cost of the people who make the content that is distributed by mechanisms new and old. Almost anyone can set up a site, anyone can create a blog, a Twitter account, a Facebook wall, a platform from which to spread a message – the technology is no longer the stumbling block; the content and connectivity are.

Just as the technology determined the nature of the enterprise, it also had a huge influence on the content that was produced. News organisations produced news in recognisable shapes and formats for recognisable outlets consumed by recognisable consumers in predictable ways. As the technology changed, more and more sources of news became available online and competed with other sources of information and news, in myriad new shapes and sizes. You can still find the third-person-objective inverted pyramid news story and the traditional 'package' for broadcast on the internet, but you also find live blogs and Twitter feeds from people on the ground and in the office, satirical animations of news events on YouTube, and first-person reports, Twitpics, blogs, alternative news sites, aggregators and discussion forums, in all sorts of voices and styles all mixed in together, linked, referenced and cross-posted to a range of places and formats. In this environment, the traditional definitions of what journalism is have

inevitably shifted, as have the skills and techniques required to participate in it.

Social media

These changes have created a more social way of doing journalism. More people can be heard. More voices can be included. The focus is less on what platforms to use or what products to produce, and more on whom to speak to and connect with, and how to go about doing that. Everyone steers their way through the network via connections and exchanges, making sense of the content they encounter or use. Journalists are no different.

Relationships emerge as a key unit of currency. These relationships exist at many different levels, but without these voices the web would be nothing more than a structure of portable pieces of code lacking any meaning. News organisations are re-evaluating how they interact with 'the people formerly known as the audience' (Rosen, 2006). They have moved towards curated or humanised approaches to distribution rather than automated feeds and abstract 'packages' of news. Strangers help us find content through recommendations or reviews. Friends contribute to making that journey more relevant and real (Pickard and Catt, 2011).

Out of these relationships grow communities. Journalists have to appreciate how to act within a community, and take an active part in growing and developing them. In this ecology, journalism trades on participation and connections rather than a top-down approach. It is no longer the case that the moment you signal your need you are given everything you desire. This is a culture of collaboration, not co-optation. There's a wealth of information in the crowd, but journalists need to understand how to collaborate with users, not simply take from them. Talking, interacting, thanking and crediting all become key. There are new skills and rules to consider if you are to become a trusted and respected part of the online network.

And the crowd – not journalists – are in control. The crowd can seek out imposters and regulate itself, just as they can amplify and ring out changes. The web community expects transparency, even as identities ebb and flow in different spaces. Journalists have to tell people what they are doing and how they are doing it. This new culture of social media in which journalists operate has to be understood if you, as a participant, are to thrive.

A word about terminology

The terms that define this new landscape are by no means set, and there is considerable confusion regarding what they mean. For this book, we take 'social media' to mean all forms of new media production whose primary function is interaction – not simply presentation of information. Any news product or piece of information that is presented in order to be commented on, discussed, circulated and used within a network of social interaction is, for us, 'social' media. This includes what are increasingly thought of as the 'social media' applications – Twitter and Facebook – but also stories presented for comment online, television panel shows that incorporate audience commentary, live blogs that curate and collect material from multiple sources, and myriad other ways (some not yet invented) in which the audience and the producers meet and talk.

The new media ecology

In this landscape, there's more than one way to define media organisations and individual journalists. Traditionally, newsmaking was a process that took events and turned them into recognisable reports or news packages, using the 'third-person-objective' voice of authority that we have come to associate with news. This voice still exists, and plays an important role in conveying events to people. These are the shaped, formatted and edited packages that we most easily recognise as journalism. After all, we can't all physically attend news or events; neither would we want to. We rely, inevitably, on reporters to reach out and expand our worlds, our discovery, our understanding.

But in the social media ecology, this is not the only version of events that exists. Social media have allowed for a vast expansion of voices and participants, sites and streams. We may watch edited news, but we may also listen, watch or participate in the loose, unedited, stream-of-consciousness voice of social media: the personal blogger or tweeter, or the chaotic and unedited video footage taken by a participant in a protest. The news products here are more divergent, incorporating multiple voices and channels, but creating an environment where one user may need to have access to hundreds of sources to provide an understanding of events.

This brings us to the question of gatekeeping. In the past, edited and polished news products were traditionally closed off to the public;

professional journalists in the traditional sense constructed the news product based only on their sources and research, and presented a sealed and finite news product to a passive audience. But social media allows for those gates to open, and the public are given potential access to the news production process, more opportunities to participate in and guide the news agenda. In social spaces, the distinction between journalist and audience has vanished completely: the gates have crumbled away.

From our perspective, the news landscape is becoming more and more social, requiring new perspectives on the interplay between the voice and intent of journalists and media outlets. Even the most traditional news organisations have set out an agenda to become more engaged; they are including live blogs of events on their websites, incorporating amateur video into their feeds, and encouraging user comments and feedback in formal and informal ways.

Journalist by definition

The opening up of the new media ecology to include an infinite array of news producers and providers leaves us with plenty to ponder. What is journalism, anyway, and what makes one news organisation different from another?

First, not everyone working in journalism has the same intentions. The intent of a news organisation varies tremendously from the traditional, mainstream, commercial and industrialised mass media to organisations whose production of news is entirely secondary, or even accidental, to their main goals. News producers may be registered professionals, subject to the oversight typical of their national context, which sets rules on the dissemination of news and the behaviour of news outlets, or they may be activist journalists dedicated to spreading the truth in aid of a political or social cause, or they may be accidental journalists – passersby caught up in events, whose stories and pictures become part of the narrative. All of these people, and the institutions in which they may or may not work, have different ideas on what they do, what they should do and what it means in the greater scheme of things.

As an example, consider the uprisings that racked Egypt in 2011, and dominated the news around the world, as Tahrir Square in Cairo became the focus of the frustrations and hopes of not only the Egyptian people, but people all over the world. A wide variety of reporters and journalists

descended on the square to tell the story.

Purely journalistic institutions – the BBC, CNN, New York Times – would cover Tahrir Square because it fulfils a traditional idea of what news is, and claim to do so in an 'objective' way. They would refer to President Mubarak and protestors in the most neutral way possible. Then there are the news organisations that have overt social or political goals. A newspaper with a clearly stated belief in social justice would cover the same events, referring to Mubarak as a dictator or despot and the protestors as campaigners or activists. There are also organisations in which the journalistic goals are less important than the political or social goals. Groups and related blogs may provide reports from Cairo relating directly to the action of the people of Egypt against state repression. At the far extreme, there are organisations whose journalistic goals are incidental to other goals. WikiLeaks's release of diplomatic cables relating to Egypt, and other documents, are not simply journalistic, but include an element of anarchy, of subversion of power on the principle of it.

In this new media landscape news outlets have to carve out a space and identity alongside all these other forms of news. They find themselves having to coexist with blogs and aggregators online, or reports from people and organisations that have goals other than becoming a formal, commercial news organisation, such as 'zines, radical news outlets and activist groups online.

There is also a changing relationship between producers and consumers. It is a rare news organisation or journalist who does not invite contributions from the public, feedback or sharing. In its broadest form this has sparked a range of discussions relating to where the boundary lies between journalists and non-journalists, users and producers, curators and sense-makers.

As a result of this cacophony of competing voices and ideas, it is little wonder that traditional journalists have felt under threat from the fact that anyone can and does produce content and distribute it. Citizen journalists (the very meaning of which is debatable) have been seen as stepping into the terrain previously guarded as the professional journalistic field, but that is not strictly accurate – their goals are different, so how do they fit into this new media ecology? And what is citizen journalism or user-generated content, anyway? Language and terminology struggle to cope with the multitude of ways in which the traditional barriers of the journalistic profession are breaking down as a result of the changes in technology brought on by social media.

Although many definitions exist, and there is no consensus on meaning, in this book we distinguish citizen journalism from user-generated content based on the final product: citizen journalism is its own discrete product, while user-generated content exists within and forms part of a mainstream news product. This can be a complex distinction, especially where commercial news organisations construct their own news sites for the contribution of user-generated content – which can exist both as a discrete product and provide material for the main site.

Individual journalists

These questions have sparked a re-evaluation of what a journalist actually is and what makes us different from anybody else. For almost as long as there have been journalists there has been a struggle over journalistic identity. What, exactly, are we? As actors in society, newsmakers have laid claim to being culturally or socially more significant than plain citizens or even other professions. The role of finding out what is going on and reporting it to others is deemed to have a certain significance, a certain privilege.

The individual journalist has become more visible as the traditional media landscape has exploded and fragmented. In a social-media landscape, the voice of the individual becomes clearer. Journalists working within (and outside) media organisations find themselves in direct contact with audiences and with more options than ever as to where they source or output their work. They are increasingly unable to define what they do or slot their role and interactions under neat labels. They exist in an evolving network of connectivity, across sources and outputs.

Many people have framed this debate as being about the conflict between bloggers and journalists, a perceived standoff between formal and informal journalism. In the new media ecology, however, neither the products journalists produce nor the resources on which they draw are fixed. As a result, the meaning of the word 'journalist' has dissipated. There are lots of people operating as journalists, but they may be bloggers, freelancers, tweeters, YouTube commentators or mainstream reporters – or any combination of these. The waters have become increasingly muddied because amateur journalists can publish material and aggregate content as much as anyone bestowed with a press pass, salary or academic qualification (Knight and Cook, 2011).

The fluidity across these spaces may also spark legal and ethical

considerations – if the law or the state recognises 'journalist' as a specific class of person, with differing privileges and obligations to those of the general public, then who can be a journalist becomes a legal, as well as a personal, question.

In both practice and principle, journalists have much to acknowledge and synthesise if they are to thrive in this new media ecology. They need different skills as they move around networked spaces. It is important for a journalist to understand the rules of engagement when sourcing content from the crowd, just as they need to know how best to verify information, avoid being hoaxed, or how to operate fairly. We need to have a clearer sense of what legal and ethical implications our decisions have. Similarly, there's a vast scope of considerations in how best to tell and disseminate stories when the range of possible outputs is so vast. Journalists need to understand their choices in social storytelling for networked distribution. When and how should you produce speedy updates compared to immersive packages in rich media? In terms of practical journalism skills, this book advocates that social-media activities run concurrent to the core principles of traditional reporting.

As journalism re-boots itself within these new parameters, there can be a wealth of exciting opportunities to define great journalism anew. This is a time for innovation. Journalists are looking for ways to reinvent their careers, and are flexing their muscles launching dynamic sites, services and products. We recognise the valid place in the new media ecology for such media entities, which may exist in a more structured way to a freelance journalist, and the increasing likelihood for journalists to work within, alongside or indeed launch such organisations.

This book frames a clearer understanding of a journalist's work as a matter of connections, expectations and reporting norms. Journalists must carve out a new relationship between sources and output, aware of the much wider culture of social media. How you navigate this space is up to you. The amount of time, energy and interest you show in the different sourcing and output practices help you understand what works for you as a journalist. This allows individual reconfiguration of defined roles based more on connections and relationships than saying you are a 'blogger' or a 'local newspaper reporter'. A journalist defined by connections and networks can occupy more than one space within this fragmented media ecology.

Conclusion

As you read through this book, a number of themes and ideas will become apparent. We have, as much as possible, tried to blend discussion of practice and principles together. We have, however, broken the book up into four sections, some more practical, some more theoretical. Throughout the book you will find cross-references to more detailed discussions in other sections, as well as boxes defining terms, giving further reading and discussion, relevant quotes and definitions of terms. The links to further readings, technical information and resources are then included at the end of each chapter, and a complete glossary of all defined terms is found at the end of the book.

The first section of the book, The Networked Journalists' Toolkit, deals with the finding, creating and distributing of news and information, which is what journalists, fundamentally, do. In this section you will find concrete advice on how social media has affected the practice of journalism – the changing relationships with sources and the changing forms of output that penetrate all aspects of life as a contemporary journalist. It looks at how stories are sourced, and then packaged and distributed in an iterative cycle, offering both practical guidance and a way to frame an understanding of how sourcing practices influence doing journalism.

The next section, The Networked Ecology, takes this process wider, and examines the new contexts and environments in which journalists work, and the newer (and older) entities and ideas which now operate within these spaces. This is the most theoretical section of the book, giving as it does the underlying concepts and ideas of this new landscape, as well as practical advice on working within it.

The New Rules of Engagement discusses the conduct in a space that is not quite public, not quite private. It delineates guidelines and best practice for working ethically and morally in the connected new media ecology. Issues of authenticity and verification in the virtual world, pivotal to the function of a journalist, are also tackled.

The New Economics of Journalism then examines the all-important question of money – how to make enough to keep going, to expand, and to make your name and fortune. It acknowledges that media entrepreneurs are finding new and innovative ways to take their place in this landscape, reinventing what it means to do news.

The concluding chapter lays out a typology and mechanism for

understanding the landscape of this new media environment: we provide a pair of matrices that examine and define the macro (institutional) and micro (individual) levels of this new ecosystem.

The book is intended both as a primer on how to become a journalist in this new ecosystem, as a guide to navigating the space for experienced journalists, and as an introduction to the theoretical and philosophical ideas which both underpin and rise out of this new landscape. Each chapter and section can be read separately as a guide to the specific issues raised within it, but the book as a whole should serve as a guide to the entire system – the one book which the new, social, connected journalist should

The Atlantic

When Silicon Valley Took Over Journalism

The pursuit of digital readership broke the *New Republic*—and an entire industry.



James Gilleard

CHRIS HUGHES was a mythical savior—boyishly innocent, fantastically rich, intellectually curious, unexpectedly humble, and proudly idealistic.

My entire career at the *New Republic* had been spent dreaming of such a benefactor. For years, my colleagues and I had sputtered our way through the internet era, drifting from one ownership group to the next, each eager to save the magazine and its historic mission as the intellectual organ for hard-nosed liberalism. But these investors either lacked the resources to invest in our future or didn't have quite enough faith to fully commit. The unending search for patronage exhausted me, and in 2010, I resigned as editor.

Then, in 2012, Chris walked through the door. Chris wasn't just a savior; he was a face of the zeitgeist. At Harvard, he had roomed with Mark Zuckerberg, and he had gone on to become one of the co-founders of Facebook. Chris gave our fusty old magazine a Millennial imprimatur, a bigger budget, and an insider's knowledge of social media. We felt as if we

carried the hopes of journalism, which was yearning for a dignified solution to all that ailed it. The effort was so grand as to be intoxicating. We blithely dismissed anyone who warned of how our little experiment might collapse onto itself—how instead of providing a model of a technologist rescuing journalism, we could become an object lesson in the dangers of journalism's ever greater reliance on Silicon Valley.

Chris Hughes wasn't just a savior; he was a face of the zeitgeist.

When Chris first invited me for a chat one jacketless day in earliest spring, we wandered aimlessly across downtown Washington, paper coffee cups in hand. During those first weeks of his ownership, Chris had booked himself an endless listening tour. He seemed eager to speak with anyone who had worked at the magazine, or who might have a strong opinion about it. But as we talked, I wondered whether he wanted something more than my advice. I began to suspect that he wanted to rehire me as the *New Republic*'s editor. Before long he offered me the job, and I accepted.

In my experience, owners of the *New Republic* were older men who had already settled into their wealth and opinions. Chris was intriguingly different. He was 28, and his enthusiasm for learning made him seem even younger. During his honeymoon, he read *War and Peace*; the ottoman in his SoHo apartment was topped with seemingly every literary journal published in the English language. "When I first heard the *New Republic* was for sale," he told me, "I went to the New York Public Library and began to read." As he plowed through microfiche, the romance of the magazine's history—and its storied writers, among them Rebecca West, Virginia Woolf, Edmund Wilson, Ralph Ellison, and James Wood—helped loosen his hold on his wallet.

Even after Facebook went public, leaving Chris with hundreds of millions of dollars in stock, he seemed indifferent to his wealth, or at least conflicted by it. He would get red-faced when people pointed out that he owned two estates and a spacious loft; he was apt to wear the same blazer every day. The source of his fortune didn't define him—indeed, he always spoke of Facebook with an endearing detachment. He didn't even use it that much, he once confessed to me at dinner. It was an admission that I found both disarming and hugely compelling. We soon began to remake the magazine, setting out to fulfill our own impossibly high expectations.

OVER THE PAST GENERATION, journalism has been slowly swallowed. The ascendant media companies of our era don't think of themselves as heirs to a great ink-stained tradition. Some like to compare themselves to technology firms. This redefinition isn't just a bit of fashionable branding. As Silicon Valley has infiltrated the profession, journalism has come to unhealthily depend on the big tech companies, which now supply journalism with an enormous percentage of its audience—and, therefore, a big chunk of its revenue.

Dependence generates desperation—a mad, shameless chase to gain clicks through Facebook, a relentless effort to game Google's algorithms. It leads media outlets to sign terrible deals that look like self-preserving necessities: granting Facebook the right to sell their advertising, or giving Google permission to publish articles directly on its fast-loading server. In the end, such arrangements simply allow Facebook and Google to hold these companies ever tighter.

What makes these deals so terrible is the capriciousness of the tech companies. Quickly moving in a radically different direction may be great for their bottom line, but it is detrimental to the media companies that rely on the platforms. Facebook will decide that its users prefer video to words, or ideologically pleasing propaganda to more-objective accounts of events—and so it will de-emphasize the written word or hard news in its users' feeds. When it makes shifts like this, or when Google tweaks its algorithm, the web traffic flowing to a given media outlet may plummet, with rippling revenue ramifications. The problem isn't just financial vulnerability, however. It's also the way tech companies dictate the patterns of work; the way their influence can affect the ethos of an entire profession, lowering standards of quality and eroding ethical protections.

I never imagined that our magazine would go down that path. My first days working with Chris were exhilarating. As an outsider, he had no interest in blindly adhering to received wisdom. When we set out to rebuild the *New Republic*'s website, we talked ourselves into striking a reactionary stance. We would resist the impulse to chase traffic, to clutter our home page with an endless stream of clicky content. Our digital pages would prize beauty and finitude; they would brashly announce the import of our project—which he described as nothing less than the preservation of long-form journalism and cultural seriousness.

Chris said he believed that he could turn the *New Republic* into a profitable enterprise. But his rhetoric about profit never seemed entirely sincere. "I hate selling ads," he would tell me over and over. "It makes me feel seedy." And for more than a year, he was willing to spend with abandon. With the benefit of hindsight, I might have been more disciplined about the checks

we, I mean *he*, wrote. But he had a weakness for leasing offices in prime locations and hiring top-shelf consultants. I had a weakness for handsomely paying writers to travel the globe. I moved quickly to hire a large staff, which included experienced writers and editors, who didn't come cheap. Chris didn't seem to mind. "I've never been so happy or fulfilled," he would tell me. "I'm working with friends."

Eventually, though, the numbers caught up with Chris. Money needed to come from somewhere—and that somewhere was the web. A dramatic increase in traffic would bring needed revenue. And so we found ourselves suddenly reliving recent media history, but in a time-compressed sequence that collapsed a decade of painful transition into a few tense months.

At the beginning of this century, journalism was in extremis. Recessions, coupled with readers' changing habits, prodded media companies to gamble on a digital future unencumbered by the clunky apparatus of publishing on paper. Over a decade, the number of newspaper employees dropped by 38 percent. As journalism shriveled, its prestige plummeted. One report ranked newspaper reporter as the worst job in America. The profession found itself forced to reconsider its very reasons for existing. All the old nostrums about independence suddenly seemed like unaffordable luxuries.

Growing traffic required a new mentality. Unlike television, print journalism had previously shunned the strategic pursuit of audience as a dirty, somewhat corrupting enterprise. The *New Republic* held an extreme version of this belief. An invention of Progressive-era intellectuals, the magazine had, over the decades, became something close to a cult, catering to a loyal group that wanted to read insider writing about politics and highbrow meditations on culture. For stretches of its long history, however, this readership couldn't fill the University of Mississippi's football stadium.

A larger readership was clearly within reach. The rest of journalism was already absorbing this lesson, which Jonah Peretti, the founder of *BuzzFeed*, had put this way: R = ßz. (In epidemiology, *ß* represents the probability of transmission; *z* is the number of people exposed to a contagious individual.) The equation supposedly illustrates how a piece of content could go viral. But although Peretti got the idea for his formula from epidemiology, the emerging science of traffic was really a branch of behavioral science: People clicked so quickly, they didn't always fully understand why. These decisions were made in a semiconscious state, influenced by cognitive biases. Enticing a reader entailed a little manipulation, a little hidden persuasion.

Chris not only felt urgency about the necessity of traffic, he knew the tricks to make it grow. He was a fixture at panels on digital media, and he had learned about virality from Upworthy, a site he had supplied with money to help launch. Upworthy plucked videos and graphics from across the web, usually obscure stuff, then methodically injected elements that made them go viral. As psychologists know, humans are comfortable with ignorance, but they hate feeling deprived of information. Upworthy used this insight to pioneer a style of headline that explicitly teased readers, withholding just enough information to titillate them into reading further. For every item posted, Upworthy would write 25 different headlines, test all of them, and determine the most clickable of the bunch. Based on these results, it uncovered syntactical patterns that almost ensured hits. Classic examples: "9 out of 10 Americans Are Completely Wrong About This Mind-Blowing Fact" and "You Won't Believe What Happened Next." These formulas became commonplace on the web, until readers grew wise to them.

Like a manager with a stopwatch, Chartbeat and its ilk now hover over the newsroom.

The core insight of Upworthy, *BuzzFeed*, Vox Media, and other emerging internet behemoths was that editorial success could be engineered, if you listened to the data. This insight was embraced across the industry and wormed its way into the *New Republic*. Chris installed a data guru on our staff to increase our odds of producing viral hits. The guru kept a careful eye on Facebook's trending topics and on what the public had craved at the same time the year before. "Super Bowl ads are big," he told the staff at one of our weekly meetings. "What can we create to hit that moment?" Questions like these were usually greeted by hostile silence.

While I didn't care for the tactics, I didn't strenuously resist them either. Chris still encouraged us to publish long essays and deeply reported pieces. What's more, he asked a perfectly reasonable question: Did we really think we were better than sober places like *Time* or *The Washington Post*? Clicks would rain down upon us if only we could get over ourselves and write about the same outrage as everyone else. Everyone else was doing this because it worked. We needed things to work.

One of the emblems of the new era in journalism haunted my life at the *New Republic*. Every time I sat down to work, I surreptitiously peeked at it—as I did when I woke up in the morning, and a few minutes later when I brushed my teeth, and again later in the day as I stood at the urinal. Sometimes, I would just stare at its gyrations, neglecting the article I was editing or ignoring the person seated across from me.

My master was Chartbeat, a site that provides writers, editors, and their bosses with a real-time accounting of web traffic, showing the flickering readership of each and every article. Chartbeat and its competitors have taken hold at virtually every magazine, newspaper, and blog. With these meters, no piece has sufficient traffic—it can always be improved with a better headline, a better approach to social media, a better subject, a better argument. Like a manager standing over the assembly line with a stopwatch, Chartbeat and its ilk now hover over the newsroom.

This is a dangerous turn. Journalism may never have been as public-spirited an enterprise as editors and writers liked to think it was. Yet the myth mattered. It pushed journalism to challenge power; it made journalists loath to bend to the whims of their audience; it provided a crucial sense of detachment. The new generation of media giants has no patience for the old ethos of detachment. It's not that these companies don't have aspirations toward journalistic greatness. *BuzzFeed*, *Vice*, and the *Huffington Post* invest in excellent reporting and employ first-rate journalists—and they have produced some of the most memorable pieces of investigative journalism in this century. But the pursuit of audience is their central mission. They have allowed the endless feedback loop of the web to shape their editorial sensibility, to determine their editorial investments.

Once a story grabs attention, the media write about the topic with repetitive fury, milking the subject for clicks until the public loses interest. A memorable yet utterly forgettable example: A story about a Minnesota hunter killing a lion named Cecil generated some 3.2 million stories. Virtually every news organization—even *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*—attempted to scrape some traffic from Cecil. This required finding a novel angle, or a just novel enough angle. *Vox*: "Eating Chicken Is Morally Worse Than Killing Cecil the Lion." *BuzzFeed*: "A Psychic Says She Spoke With Cecil the Lion After His Death." TheAtlantic.com: "From Cecil the Lion to Climate Change: A Perfect Storm of Outrage One-upmanship."

In some ways, this is just a digitally enhanced version of an old-fashioned media pile-on. But social media amplify the financial incentive to join the herd. The results are highly derivative. Joshua Topolsky, a founder of *The Verge*, has bemoaned this creeping homogenization:

"Everything looks the same, reads the same, and seems to be competing for the same eyeballs."

Donald Trump is the culmination of the era. He understood how, more than at any other moment in recent history, the media need to give the public the circus that it desires. Even if the media disdained Trump's outrages, they built him up as a plausible candidate, at which point they had no choice but to cover him. Stories about Trump yielded the sort of traffic that pleased the data gods and benefited the bottom line. Trump began as Cecil the lion and ended up president of the United States.

CHRIS AND I ONCE sat at the breakfast table of an august Washington hotel, pondering the core qualities of the *New Republic*—the *New Republic* that we would re-create together. We didn't say so explicitly, but we were searching for a piece of common ground, an adjective that could unite us. If there had been a whiteboard—and Chris loved whiteboards—it would have been filled with discarded terms. "We're *idealistic*," he said finally. "It ties together our storied past and our optimism about solutions." *Idealism* was a word that melted my heart, and I felt uncontainable joy at the prospect of agreement. "Boom. That's it."

We were idealistic about our shared idealism. But my vision of the world was moralistic and romantic; his was essentially technocratic. He had faith in systems—rules, efficiencies, organizational charts, productivity tools. Around the second anniversary of Chris's ownership, he shared a revised vision of the magazine's future with me. As the months had slipped by, he had gotten antsy. Results, by which he meant greater web traffic and greater revenue, needed to come faster. "To save the magazine, we need to change the magazine," he said. Engineers and marketers were going to begin playing a central role in the editorial process. They would give our journalism the cool, innovative features that would help it stand out in the marketplace. Of course, this required money, and that money would come from the budget that funded long-form journalism. We were now a technology company, he told me. (Hughes denies saying this.) To which I responded, "That doesn't sound like the type of company that I'm qualified to run." He assured me that I was.

Two months later, I learned from a colleague that Chris had hired my replacement—and that my replacement was lunching around New York, offering jobs at the *New Republic*. Before Chris had the chance to fire me, I resigned, and most members of the magazine's editorial staff quit too. Their idealism dictated that they resist his idealism. They didn't want to work for a publication whose ethos more clearly aligned with Silicon Valley than with journalism. They

were willing to pay careful attention to Facebook, but they didn't want their jobs defined by it. The bust-up received its fair share of attention and then the story faded—a bump on Silicon Valley's route to engulfing journalism.

Data have turned journalism into a commodity, something to be marketed, tested, calibrated. Perhaps people in the media have always thought this way. But if that impulse existed, it was at least buffered. Journalism's leaders were vigilant about separating the church of editorial from the secular concerns of business. We can now see the cause for fanaticism about building such a thick wall between the two.

Makers of magazines and newspapers used to think of their product as a coherent package—an issue, an edition, an institution. They did not see themselves as the publishers of dozens of discrete pieces to be trafficked each day on Facebook, Twitter, and Google. Thinking about bundling articles into something larger was intellectually liberating. Editors justified high-minded and quixotic articles as essential for "the mix." If readers didn't want a report on child poverty or a dispatch from South Sudan, they wouldn't judge you for providing one. In fact, they might be flattered that you thought they would like to read such articles.

Journalism has performed so admirably in the aftermath of Trump's victory that it has grown harder to see the profession's underlying rot. Now each assignment is subjected to a cost-benefit analysis—will the article earn enough traffic to justify the investment? Sometimes the analysis is explicit and conscious, though in most cases it's subconscious and embedded in euphemism. Either way, it's this train of thought that leads editors to declare an idea "not worth the effort" or to worry about whether an article will "sink." The audience for journalism may be larger than it was before, but the mind-set is smaller.

This essay is adapted from Franklin Foer's forthcoming book, World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech.

>> Chapter 6 <<

CITIZEN JOURNALISM AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

Overview

This chapter introduces the concept of 'citizen journalism' and examines some of the key ideas that inform this new movement: the public sphere; the network society; and public or civic journalism. In comparison with other chapters this contains more of the 'why we do things', and less of the 'what we are doing'. Although this chapter may appear more abstract than others, an understanding of the ideas and motives of the players in the field of social media, as well a grounding in the philosophy of the internet and of journalism, is important in order to be able to understand and prepare for the changes that have already happened, and the ones that are still coming.

Key concepts

- Citizen journalism
- Fourth estate
- Industrial journalism
- Network society
- Non-profit journalism
- Online activism
- Public sphere
- Social capital

Springboard

- *Activist, citizen and public journalism*: this collection of terms refers generally to journalism that has an agenda other than the production of news as a commodity to be sold. Conceived in part as a response to the perceived hyper-commercialism of the news industry in the last part of the twentieth century, these new forms of journalism also hark back to the early days of the news media, to the pamphleteers and campaigners of the eighteenth century.
- *Public sphere*: the public sphere is envisioned as the space, whether real or virtual, in which the citizens of a society discuss and negotiate the ways in which that society will be constructed. The internet, the World Wide Web and social media are often presented as the new form of the public sphere.
- *Social capital*: this is the idea that one's value within a community or network can be measured in the impact one's ideas or reputation has, rather than simply in monetary terms.
- *Fourth estate*: in Anglo-Saxon countries, the fourth estate is the media, the watchdog that guards and represents the interests of the public against the activities of the other three estates: the church, the aristocracy and the commons. Nowadays, the phrase is used to refer to the news media in its function as watchdog and protector of the public interest.
- *Online activism*: the internet has become a locus for organising of political and social activism. Online activism may refer specifically to activities conducted online, such as virtual protests, or to activities conducted in all spheres, but planned and organised online.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new phrase 'citizen journalism' began to be circulated. Two documents started this discussion: Dan Gillmor's book *We The Media* (2004), and Bowman and Willis's *We Media* report for the American Press Institute (2003). Both works owe something to a seminal article by Jay Rosen, 'Beyond Objectivity' (1993), in which he exhorted the American news media to reinvent itself in a voice and manner that was more engaged with the audience, more subjective, and would create a closer relationship. Although Rosen's article was written

before the World Wide Web became the phenomenon it now is, the web was quickly lept on as the catalyst and location of these possible new forms of journalism: collectively (and loosely) named citizen journalism.

It is important to understand that the citizen journalism movement as it started in the USA was a response to a specific set of circumstances: the rise of corporate news media in the last decade of the twentieth century, and the overall lack of trust in journalists that was prevalent in the USA at the time (some would say as a consequence of the corporatisation). Rosen's call for more subjective, engaged journalism is a response to the American journalistic ideal of objectivity, something that European thinkers had already rejected as impossible and possibly meaningless. However, the corporatisation and commercialisation of the industrial news media remains an issue in many countries, as does the control of the media by political interests in many others.

However, despite the specificity of the circumstances, the phrase citizen journalism caught on and was presented as both a threat to, and possible saviour of, mainstream, commercial, professional journalism. This also tied in with the considerable activist and alternative news organisations which had existed alongside mainstream news for hundreds of years, but which were starting to undergo something of a revival, thanks to the internet.

Traditional news media organisations need to be large industrialised organisations. The cost of printing presses, of broadcast towers (and broadcast licences) means that an organisation needs to have a minimum size and revenue in order to be viable. The nature of advertising revenue also tends to favour larger organisations – the more audience you can reach and the more efficient that reach, the more the advertisers will be interested in your product. Corporatisation – the process of bringing small companies together into a single networked organisation – also helps to increase the profits of news organisations, by allowing them to save costs on duplicated services and functions.

Technology has broken the stranglehold that news organisations used to have by virtue of their ownership of the means of production and distribution, and made it more possible for smaller news organisations to compete: freedom of the press belonged to those who had one. Now everyone has one, or access to one. In this new landscape, news organisations are competing and collaborating not only with each other, but with organisations and individuals who provide news content and information, but do not adhere to the techniques, intents and principle of

the mainstream.

New forms of activist and engaged journalism are not necessarily functions of new technologies, and some of them clearly predate the changes brought by the World Wide Web, but they are greatly enhanced by the lower barriers to entry and ease of distribution that technological changes have provided. These forms of journalism are then themselves informed by ideas about the network and how it functions, while the network is also informed by ideas about communication and politics. It is these interlinking ideas that inform this chapter, and its discussion of the highly confused terms of citizen, public, activist and new journalism.

Citizen journalism

The key ideas that underpin grassroots media and citizen journalism are outlined in Dan Gillmor's 2006 book *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People*, and in the *We Media* report, published by the American Press Institute (Bowman and Willis, 2003). Both documents are informed by the call to arms for a journalism that moves 'Beyond Obectivity' published by Jay Rosen in 1993.

The phrase 'citizen journalism' is both widely circulated and inconsistently defined. Jay Rosen refers to 'the people formerly known as the audience' as 'citizen journalists', but that definition is too loose for some commenters, including as it does all forms of public engagement and response to the news (Rosen, 2006). Mark Deuze characterises citizen journalists as 'news-producing consumers', but also in opposition to professional journalists – as 'competitor-colleagues' (Deuze 2007: 122). Neither of these definitions go as far as to explain what citizen journalists do, and whether that is different from other forms of journalism.

Citizen journalism

Citizen journalism as a term has been used to signify many different things and ideas over the last two decades. In its original form it was taken to refer to groups of citizens using the internet to report on events in their own communities, something the increasingly corporatised and commercialised press was failing to do. It has also been used to refer to people

providing media content to other, more formal, outlets, such as the provision of video footage of events although this is more commonly distinguished as user-generated content.

Stuart Allan and Einar Thorsen do not attempt to define citizen journalism in their book of the same name, but they do discuss the forms of citizen journalism: blogs, citizen newsgathering and, implicitly, something other than 'corporate' news ventures (Allan and Thorsen, 2009).

What is clear from the literature is that the term embraces everything from people commenting on stories or responding to polls (Lewis et al., 2010), to news material provided by the public to mainstream news organisations (Allan and Thorsen, 2009), to personal blogs, to fully fledged, professionally run news organisations that exist in parallel to the mainstream news (Bowman and Willis, 2003).

It is this last definition, that of the *We Media* manifesto, that is used in this chapter. As they put it: 'The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires.' (Bowman and Willis, 2003). This locates citizen journalism firmly within the field of activism, and within the roles not only of collecting (what we would call user-generated content), but also of producing and distributing the news they have collected: there is a degree of motivation to act in some way journalistically. This narrows down the scope of this chapter, but still leaves a fairly wide range of possibilities to be considered, and two main sub-fields of citizen journalism: public and activist journalism, which inform the citizen journalism movement.

Public journalism

At the time of writing, public journalism as a phrase is almost uniquely American, although the ideas and practices that underpin it are not. Public, or civic, journalism is journalism that has explicitly abandoned the ideology of objectivity or neutrality and has become engaged in civic life, and especially in the defence of democracy. As with other forms of citizen and activist journalism, public journalism is responding to a specific set of circumstances: the corporatisation of the media, and its perceived

subsequent move away from the communities it serves (Friedland, 2010).

Public journalism has been advocated by the Kettering Foundation, and its President, David Mathews, as well as by organisations like the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, the Knight Foundation and others. Public journalism is similar to Dan Gillmor's grassroots journalism in conception: the move away from dispassionate observation and reporting to engagement and activism is key to both ideas, and there are considerable overlaps in these ideas, at least in the USA. In some instances, public journalism is constructed as a deliberate alternative to commercial or corporate forms of journalism, but this is not universal to the movement. In contrast to the more radical form of activist citizen journalism (discussed below), public journalism seeks more to inform and improve existing journalistic forms and outlets than to overthrow them (Rosenberry and St John III, 2010).

ProPublica was launched in 2008 as a non-profit organisation dedicated to investigative journalism in the public interest. Working collaboratively with a number of professional news organisations, and with funding from donations and philanthropic foundations, it provides stories both on its own site and in syndication to its partners: 'In the best traditions of American journalism in the public service, we seek to stimulate positive change. We uncover unsavory practices in order to stimulate reform. We do this in an entirely non-partisan and non-ideological manner, adhering to the strictest standards of journalistic impartiality. We won't lobby. We won't ally with politicians or advocacy groups. We look hard at the critical functions of business and of government, the two biggest centers of power, in areas ranging from product safety to securities fraud, from flaws in our system of criminal justice to practices that undermine fair elections.' (ProPublica, n.d.).

ProPublica is not a citizen-journalist organisation: it is staffed by experienced and professional investigative journalists, but in its ideals it has much in common with forms of journalism that are called citizen journalism, and it is clearly intent on enhancing and supporting the civic public sphere.

Alternative and activist journalism

Alternative news sources (pirate and community radio, underground or alternative newspapers and magazines) have been around for as long as there has been a mainstream press, with a greater or lesser presence,

depending on the circumstances. In western societies, these outlets have been largely tolerated; some have even become mainstream themselves over time. The Village Voice in New York has gone from scrappy newsletter presenting the ideas of the beats and hippies to being a an entertainment and lifestyle guide for the city; the original Manchester Guardian newspaper founded after the Peterloo Massacre is now firmly part of the British media establishment, although with its original ideals intact (Atton, 2002).

In non-western societies, especially repressive ones, alternative news sources remain(ed) important, although often repressed. Technology made a massive difference to these alternative sources of information. Prior to the development of the internet, these outlets were limited by their access to printing or broadcasting technology and distribution mechanisms. These are expensive, and fairly easily disrupted by the interests of the state. Even in democratic societies, where alternative sources of news were tolerated, they were limited by financial constraints (the number of papers published, the footprint of the broadcast tower). The internet suddenly changed all of that, and alternative and mainstream sources of news were now competing on the relatively level playing field of the internet.

These two ideals, of a new movement of amateur journalism based on the internet, and the existing activist movements that had been using old media forms moving onto the internet, have been joined in the minds of many as a movement of citizen journalists, one that is part of a new, revived, public sphere.

Citizen journalism, inasmuch as it exists, poses a theoretical challenge to the professional identity of journalists, and the boundaries of the journalistic field. Much of the discourse within the commercialised mainstream media regarding social media and citizen journalism constructs it as this – a threat to the very existence of professional news practitioners.

Theoretical understandings

This section introduces some of the key theoretical concepts that underpin this new practice of journalism. In usual practice, traditional journalism has simple motives: for commercial organisations – making money; for public and state-funded organisations – fulfilling social and political requirements. New forms of journalism have more complex varied motives: social engagement, political activism and abstract pursuits of ‘truth’ or ‘justice’. This is not to say that the people working within traditional news structures

do not have altruistic or world-changing motives, or that activist and citizen journalists may not be concerned with money, but that as institutions, these organisations tend to concern themselves primarily with these goals.

Citizen, public, activist and non-industrialised journalism locates itself firmly within the context of democratisation and activism, rather than a purely neutral activity, or one located only within economic or technological concerns. The theory of journalism practice has always considered journalism within its context of political, social and economic factors. Journalism must always negotiate its relations with the power elites in a society and, within the new, computer-networked environment, all of those considerations remain.

There is a library of works that discuss and analyse the role of journalism and its function within society, but within this chapter we aim to set out some of the key ideas which we believe are most useful in understanding this new media environment. We then show how these ideas can be seen as influencing journalism, especially within the new (or newly rediscovered) forms of citizen and activist journalism.

The public sphere

The public sphere is the space, whether physical or conceptual, in which citizens engage with the broader society, and in which consensus is reached as to the nature of that society. It is not necessarily the explicit spaces in which issues are debated, such as parliaments and congresses, but also includes the media and other areas of public engagement, the places where public, as opposed to private, life is carried out.

Although his is not the first use of the phrase, 'public sphere' is most often associated with Jürgen Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlicheit:Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, originally published in 1962, and translated into English in 1989 as *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. It is a difficult but extremely rewarding book. Craig Calhoun's 1993 book *Habermas and the Public Sphere* provides an excellent introduction to Habermas's ideas, and to their impact on specific areas of theory, including the media.

Habermas's book is famously dense, and spans history, economics, politics, sociology and philosophy, dealing only peripherally with the media, but the key idea for media and journalism theorists is the way in which the media functioned as an enabler of the public sphere (through the first

literary products, newspapers and books, in the eighteenth century), and that the modern mass media then served to replace the original 'authentic' public sphere with an illusory one: one in which the 'public' is replaced by the illusion of participation. Critical engagement with society via the public sphere is replaced by mindless consumption (Habermas, 1989; Calhoun, 1993a; Calhoun, 1993b; Garnham, 1993).

Jürgen Habermas is usually considered a member, or at least the inheritor, of the Frankfurt School – a group of Marxist social theorists based first at Frankfurt University, and then in the USA after the Nazis came to power in Germany. The Frankfurt School has had a great impact on almost all areas of thought in the twentieth century, including media studies.

The network society

The publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* in English coincided with the rise of the new internet-enabled 'networked' society. The 'Network Society' was described by Jan van Dijk and Manuel Castells as one in which society was structured through electronic networks of relationships. Drawing on theories of the information society, as well as on the technological mechanisms used in the construction of computer networks, both argue that communication technology has fundamentally changed society. Castells argues that this new, electronically mediated form of relationship is entirely constructed by computer networks; van Dijk holds that other social relationships still have weight, although they may be mediated by electronic, rather than organic, communication networks; but they both agree that the nature of engagement and communication within society has been changed by networked communications (Castells, 2000; van Dijk, 2006).

Computer networks such as the internet are not necessarily hierarchical. Egalitarian ones are generally more stable than hierarchical ones – for technical reasons. The internet was largely developed as a collaborative research tool among universities, and it is a legacy of this that access to the network is largely open to the public, and the legacy of collaboration and transparency has persisted into the new social networks. Unlike other mass-media technologies, the differential between the cost of production and that of consumption (compare the cost of a printing press and the cost of a newspaper) is minimal, although not entirely vanished – a server and a web-hosting agreement to run a blog does not cost that much more than a home

computer and internet access. Social media, even more so, erase this strictly financial barrier to entry, although other barriers remain.

The internet

The internet was originally designed as a robust communication network that would function well in times of war and disaster. Unlike other networks, such as broadcasting or telephone networks, it has no central hub that can be easily damaged. Instead, each node on the network connects to multiple other nodes, providing redundancy, and meaning that, even if nodes are destroyed, communication will continue to flow around the gaps. In practice, this is not always the case; many parts of the world are connected to the network by a single cable, and entire countries and regions have spent days and weeks cut off when that cable has failed.

The matrix discussed in Chapter 1 of this book lays out the landscape as one in which technology, financial capital and infrastructure are less important than reach, intent and voice. Intent and voice are choices, not constraints, and, although reach is something that can be increased through financial investment, money is not a prerequisite. Andy Carvin's reach through Twitter is substantial, and costs only the investment of social relationships and time.

The network, therefore, that makes up the backbone of the network society is one which does not place a huge amount of emphasis on one's status or role within the network (or at least, on the status of the node with which one connects to the network), or the wider community. To the network, you are simply an Internet Protocol (IP) address, just like every other IP address. Unlike the traditional mass media, there is no technological or structural differential between producers and consumers.

Commodification

Commodification refers to the process of turning something into

> an object that can be traded, and that has economic value. The commodification of information is a fundamental aspect of the practice of media — information is what is being traded. Habermas and others believe that this commodification is damaging to society as a whole — moving knowledge from a public good to a scarce commodity.

This is something of a fantasy, though: although the technology cannot see the difference between a student in a high school in Nairobi and the president of the United States, the internet is still made up of people and as soon as one's identity is known, status can usually be inferred. The fact remains that although the technological barriers to entry are much lower than for other mass media, the content and recognition barriers are not, and it is the best-known organisations that have the largest audiences. The original structure and concept of the network, though, was one which does not recognise or credit importance or wealth to messages, but one which allowed free communication to all parties.

It is this that has led thinkers to posit the network as the salvation of the public sphere. Where Habermas saw that commodification of information (through the commercial mass media) and the rise of consumerism had transformed the public sphere from an open forum for discourse and engagement into one in which the mass media simply reinforced the ideas of the dominant elites in society, that is capitalism, proponents saw in the internet the potential for the revival of the original, supposedly egalitarian, public sphere, one in which rational discourse among equals was paramount (Boeder, 2005; Jan, 2011).

The way online interaction is structured and substantially different from other forms of communication is discussed in the works of Manuel Castells (2000) and Jan van Dijk (2006) on network theory, the new, engaged form of computer-aided communication and interaction that informs online lives. Both of these thinkers are informed by Stewart Brand's (1987) discussion of the way the network works. Another internet theorist, Henry Jenkins (2006a, 2006b), discusses participatory and fan cultures online, which although not specific to journalism, have a lot to say about all kinds of online cultures.

Social capital and the journalistic field

Another theorist whose ideas have contributed to our understanding of the communication and human networks in which we are all engaged is Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu was a French sociologist and philosopher whose work spanned a wide range of disciplines, but the concept that is most often applied to these discussions is that of social capital.

Social capital

Social capital may be a relatively new concept for English speakers, but in many societies it is a clearly recognised and structured part of society. Known in Arabic as Wasta and in Chinese as Guanxi, for example, influence is simply part and parcel of all social interactions. The fact that there is no English-word equivalent does not mean that social capital has less influence within western society, simply that we are perhaps less likely to acknowledge it.

Capital can be defined as the base resource one brings to society, and it usually refers to financial capital. Financial or economic capital is the main source of power in capitalist societies, but Bourdieu and others posited different kinds of capital to the simply financial. Human capital is the resources an individual commands – time and skills – and for most people it is this that they use to engage in the economic marketplace, and gain power in society, but there are still other forms of capital. Cultural capital consists of the knowledge, skills and information one can access and use – one's education; social capital derives from one's relationships – memberships of groups and networks within society; and symbolic capital is capital one accrues through status or prestige (Jenkins, 2002).

Objectivity

Objectivity has often been held up as the ideal of journalistic practice — the completely disinterested and uninvolved

commentator, presenting all sides of an argument 'without fear or favor' (Allan, 2010). More recent thinkers, influenced by postmodernism's contention that objective truth is an impossibility, maintain that objectivity is also an impossible goal.

Bourdieu and others argue that capital of all kinds can be traded or negotiated for power within society, or within the social network and community one operates within. In structured societies, the ability to gain and use the various forms of capital may be constrained by other factors (access to education may be limited to those with economic means, group membership may be limited on the basis of gender, or race), and people's ability to advance within the system may be limited (Bourdieu, 1993; Jenkins, 2002; Benson, 2005).

Social capital is usually constructed within a field of endeavour or expertise, so journalists accrue social capital through their status and links within the field of journalism. This is a key idea for students of media, especially of journalism, because despite the importance of the audience to the industry as a whole, journalists look most often to their peers for affirmation, and for judgement on their work (Bourdieu, 1993b).

The rigid hierarchy and boundaries of the field are challenged by the network society, in that the technology of the internet allows access to all newcomers, without the requirement of prior membership of the field itself. In the mid-nineties, shortly after the development of the World Wide Web, theorists and activists began to posit the idea that this meant the end of professional (commercial) journalism; that the field would be dismantled by the network society and replaced by alternative forms of journalism (Rosen, 1993; Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004).

This projected death of professional journalism led to the development of the concept of citizen journalism.

Profession or trade?

The question of whether journalism is a profession or a trade is a complex one. In Anglo-Saxon societies, professional status has certain rights, such as the formal right to regulate access to the

profession through accreditation, and the right to maintain standards and discipline within the profession (as through medical or legal councils). This grants the professions considerable status within these societies. Journalism is not legally a profession, but it has pretensions to being one, through training councils and self-regulation. The internet, and social media specifically, presents a considerable challenge to the professional identity of journalists. These issues are further discussed in Chapter 10, especially in terms of legal and ethical constraints.

Citizen journalism in practice

Although citizen journalism may or may not exist in the form which Gillmor, Rosen, Bowman and Willis envisioned, it is repeatedly invoked by both professional journalists and the public as an entity, sometimes even a monolithic one. The fear of citizen journalism is evident in much of the public discourse around it, and far in excess of the actual prevalence of citizen journalism in practice.

Sites and practices identified as examples of 'citizen journalism' generally take one of the following forms: user-generated content, blogs, hyperlocal community sites, and activist or alternative sites.

Sites, pages, blogs, channels, feeds

As technology and social media change, the specifics of what people do online changes. Although initially the website was the common denominator of web-based content and for citizen-journalism activities, increasingly the activities may be centred around a Facebook page, a YouTube channel, a Twitter feed or an actual site that aggregates all of the above. However, it is impossible to refer to a list of sites, pages, blogs, channels or feeds every time one mentions them, so the term site is being used to incorporate all of these things.

User-generated content is discussed more extensively in the following chapter, but it refers to either raw news material (images, footage, audio recordings or information) that is provided to a news organisation by the public for use within their own edited, constructed news product, or to the comments, discussion and interaction which is created around a formal news product. User-generated content always exists within the constructed news product of a formal outlet, and is mediated by them.

In this book we distinguish citizen journalism from user-generated content, based on the final product: citizen journalism is its own discrete product; user-generated content exists within and forms part of a mainstream news product. This can be a complex distinction, especially where commercial news organisations construct their own sites for the contribution of user-generated content which can both exist as discrete product and provide material for the main site.

Citizen-journalism projects

It is tempting to refer to these, unironically, as 'true' or 'traditional' citizen-journalism projects, so much has the phrase been borrowed, changed, adapted and abused. We won't do that, but there are citizen-journalism projects that best embody the principles of citizen journalism, inasmuch as there are concrete principles. There is, however, no one way to do citizen journalism, no one ideal perfect site.

OhMyNews, launched in 2000, in South Korea, is often considered the original citizen-journalism site. The site uses material provided by some 20,000 volunteer reporters, which is posted to the site after being checked by the team of professional journalists. OhMyNews is often held up as the ideal of a successful citizen-journalism project; it is also a commercial enterprise, selling advertising to the same organisations as the mainstream media (Gillmor, 2004).

Although OhMyNews's contributors are encouraged to cover stories not included in the mainstream press, the process of publication is similar to any news organisation using a network of freelancers: material is edited and placed on the page by the professional staff. Citizen reporters working for OhMyNews are paid according to how important and useful the professional editors consider their contributions, creating the possibility that the site's content will eventually reflect not the interests of the contributors but the professionally paid staff (Kim and Hamilton, 2006).

WikiNews is based on the model of Wikipedia, and is one of the projects run by Wikipedia's parent organisation, the Wikimedia foundation. WikiNews is a collaborative, citizen-led news site, with contributions from anyone who registers and chooses to upload content. Unlike other citizen-journalism sites, the site does not mimic a news site, but instead follows the structure of Wikipedia, with links and references, the ability of any user to edit the story, and no bylines. The identification of journalists through bylines is one of the hallmarks of traditional journalism, and the lack of bylines makes WikiNews possibly unique among citizen-journalism projects (Wikinews, n.d.).

Wikiwhat

'Wiki' is a Hawaiian word meaning quick, but in internet culture it is a kind of shorthand for an open-source, collaborative publishing project such as Wikipedia, the open-source encyclopaedia, WikiLeaks and WikiNews. A wiki can also refer to any site using an interlinked and collaborative structure, as exemplified by Wikipedia.

The site does not impose a news diary or structure on its contributors, but work is reviewed by more experienced volunteers, and rated on a number of key points including newsworthiness, verifiability and a neutral point of view – all traditional journalistic goals. The neutral point of view is key to the Wikimedia Foundation's goals, but is uncommon among citizen-journalism projects, which tend to embrace opinion and subjectivity (Thorsen, 2008).

Mainstream media's citizen journalism

CNN's iReport, Bild's (Germany) Leserreporter and Avusa's (South Africa) Reporter.co.za are examples. These sites appear(ed) as separate entities from the parent site, but exist as a way for the main news organisation to attract aspiring citizen journalists who will post stories and videos (especially in the case of Bild) which can then be used as a resource by the parent organisation to attract audience, sell advertising and provide content for the main product (Knight, 2010).

As an example of this, CNN's iReport was launched in 2006 to allow non-journalists to upload images, stories and video to a website, www.ireport.com. Stories and material can be viewed on the iReport site, but can also be incorporated into CNN's own coverage. Despite the rhetoric of being a truly independent and collaborative site, and one which attempts to 'expand the current definition of news' (CNN, n.d.), CNN maintains editorial control, suggesting assignments, vetting stories and content, and controlling the news agenda. Although it is true that any citizen can contribute to the site, the overall feel is very much that of a formal news organisation, and the news values and angles that are presented are hardly different from that of the parent organisation.

This form of citizen journalism has been criticised for co-opting the voice and ideas of true citizen journalism, but these sites remain a substantive forum for citizen journalism and contribution (Kperogi, 2010).

Hyperlocal

Hyperlocal news sites are small news organisations, whether commercial, amateur or a mix of both, which represent a community and its interests. First posited (albeit indirectly, since he does not use the term) by John Pavlik in *Journalism and New Media* (Pavlik, 2001), hyperlocal sites are constructed as an alternative to the increasing corporatisation of news outlets within the western world, and the ensuing lack of news available for citizens of smaller communities and towns. Thanks to the increasing financial pressure on news organisations in the twenty-first century, more and more towns and cities in the developed world have no local news outlet, it having been closed or merged with a larger news outlet; hyperlocal sites are arising to fill this gap (Kurpius et al., 2010).

Hyperlocal sites provide an imitation of the norms and behaviours of professional and commercial news production, often using the same funding models and being staffed by professionally trained journalists. Hyperlocal sites in many ways are the strongest evidence of new forms of journalism posing a financial and cultural threat to the entrenched professional and commercial news interests, except for the fact that they tend to thrive best in communities that have been abandoned by those very same interests.

Blogpreston (http://blogpreston.co.uk/) is a hyperlocal site, covering the small city of Preston in northern England. The site was launched in January

2009 as 'a hub of news, views and information about the city' (Blog Preston, n.d.), and contains a range of content from professionally written news stories to citizen-submitted photos of the city, to reports on social events organised by the team of volunteers. The site runs advertisements and has also received funding to train local people as community journalists – combining the goals of hyperlocal and public journalism. The site is a challenge to the local corporate newspaper in many ways – covering the same ground, in the same ways, and even, to some extent, going after the same advertising.

Activist citizen journalism

Activist citizen-journalism sites are probably the most common form of the medium worldwide, being the direct inheritors of the tradition of activist and alternative news sources that has remained intact through technological and social change. The number of sites and projects have increased, however, since the internet substantially lowers the technological and financial barriers to entry for would-be activists and journalists, and provides considerable sanctuary for sites and projects that would otherwise have been shut down by authorities. The increased dispersion of social media as well has meant that more individual channels exist for people to express their opinions: individual blogs, Twitter feeds and Facebook pages abound, some more 'journalistic' than others.

The speed with which these new forms of online publishing can be launched and start functioning is also a factor in their favour. It takes only a minute to create a new feed or channel and, provided the information is newsworthy enough, it will be picked up and circulated immediately. The events of the so-called Arab Spring were publicised in this way, and the speed of the network directly fed into the events, bringing them to the fore much faster than would have happened in the days of samizdat printing presses and pirate radio (Hermida, 2012a).

In addition, a number of projects exist which provide frameworks, expertise, training and infrastructure for those wishing to set up a citizen-journalism site, or wishing to participate in one. Allvoices (www.allvoices.com), Global Voices Online (globalvoices.org), the Guerrilla News Network (GNN.tv – now defunct) and Indymedia (www.indymedia.org) all provide a locus for gathering disparate groups of citizen journalists into a single identifiable framework. Most of these

projects are explicitly activist, and many receive funding through charitable organisations and political groups. These kinds of projects are of interest to mainstream journalists primarily because of the insight and information they can provide to reporters and researchers, and their primary journalistic impact is on the news agendas of the world's media. The events of the so-called Arab Spring of 2011 were heavily discussed and reported on within these networks of activists, social media users, bloggers, citizen journalists and the like, and this did filter its way through to the agenda of the mainstream media (Akinfemisoye, 2011; Knight, 2012, 2013).

Issues in citizen journalism

These forms of citizen journalism are important, at least for the communities in which they function, and interesting, but the questions remain as to their role in relationship to mainstream forms of news media. Whether they pose genuine challenges to mainstream commercial news is hard to quantify, but in specific areas and sectors they may prove to do so.

Financial constraints

The main constraint facing these kinds of projects is financial. Although the barriers to entry are lower than for mainstream media, financial clout (capital, in Bourdieu's words) is still important. Web hosting and development are also expensive, although these costs can be mitigated against with the use of freely available services. Free services tend to make it difficult to generate revenue, though, since control of the linked advertising may remain with the hosting company, and once sites begin to generate enough traffic for the linked revenue to be more than negligible, the hosting costs can become prohibitive.

It is, however, the cost of content that remains the substantive barrier. Journalists need to be paid and, simply put, the more you pay, the better the journalism you get (up to a point). Some citizen journalism sites are run entirely with volunteers, but this can create its own problems, especially with consistency and range of product, and with issues of overall control. Left to their own devices, most people would rather write opinion or columns. Several citizen-journalism projects such as Reporter.co.za, Demotix, Blottr and Global Voices Online tend(ed) to be repositories of comment pieces and photography, all interesting, but it is unclear how they

can form a replacement for the mainstream or commercial news sector (Knight, 2010).

Consistency

Audiences expect and want a consistent and predictable news product: a certain amount of hard news, a certain amount of comment, some entertainment or light news, sport, a weather report and, in a printed product, the horoscope, the TV guide and a crossword. This is a reductive list of the content of mainstream news products, yes, but there is considerable truth in it. Citizen or activist journalism products that are looking to become the comprehensive news source for a community may find it hard to provide this kind of range. Many sites at best form a counterpoint to or commentary on the news provided in other contexts and forms.

Sites also need to provide enough material on a regular enough schedule that readers will return consistently. Random updates don't drive audience or advertising. The consistent product which drives loyal readers also drives advertisers – it is difficult to make revenue from advertising unless you can show that you have a consistent product (automatically served Google ads have limited revenue-generating possibility).

For activist projects, one assumes that money is less relevant, or that money is being provided through other means to maintain the project. In addition, in an activist context, the drive and motivation to maintain the project and its content is rooted in something other than the product itself. Most projects function either until the aim is achieved, or the movement that inspired them burns out entirely.

Accusations of bias

One of the main criticisms of amateur journalism from the mainstream media is that it is biased. This bias, whether perceived or real, forms much of the debate around amateur-journalism sites, at least in the way it is presented in professional-journalism contexts. There is considerable doubt as to whether this matters at all to either the audience or the advertisers. Certainly, some of the most popular blogs, forums and information sites on the internet are informed by very clear political aims and points of view (from all parts of the spectrum), and, if anything, the readership is more loyal than that of more middle-of-the-road sites. It is apparent that despite the stated need of communities for unbiased information provided to the

audience in a neutral space (a key tenet of democratisation, as reiterated in documents from the American Constitution to the UN Charter of Rights and Freedoms), the desire of people is for news and information that reinforces their pre-existing beliefs. The popularity of news organisations that hold specific and clear political views – from Fox News in the USA to the more extreme of the British tabloids – shows that giving the people what they want often means giving them biased and prejudicial information.

But neutrality and freedom from bias is a key part of the ideology of professional journalism (Allan, 2010). The construction of a journalistic identity is built on the bedrock of 'objectivity', which in western democratic societies is clearly linked to the independence of the media from political interference or regulation. It is this supposed objectivity that is the magic that transforms ordinary writing into journalism, and then grants it specific legal protections, such as the right to protect ones sources, and the defence of public interest against other possible charges (discussed further in Chapter 10).

The myth of objectivity, which has been thoroughly unpicked and discredited among the media theorists, at least remains firmly entrenched in the professional practice of journalism, and the more the profession comes under fire, the more objectivity is defended as a necessary part of the contribution that news organisations make to society as a whole. Even in countries like the UK, where it is accepted that newspapers, at least, have clear political-party allegiances, the ideal of objectivity is upheld. The UK's Leveson Inquiry into press standards and phone hacking was more concerned with issues of corruption and illegal behaviour, but the journalists and editors who appeared before it roared their defence of the importance of the free press, on the grounds that professional, objective, neutral journalism is an essential part of a democratic society. Whether any citizens of that democratic society are paying any attention, or whether this, and numerous other, similar, debates that occupy the media pages of the newspapers, or the academic textbooks, are of any interest to the public whose interests we are supposedly so concerned with is an open debate.

Conclusion

The question remains as to whether any of the supposed conflict between citizen or amateur journalism and the more traditional, mainstream journalism is genuine, or whether there is, in fact, any serious threat to the

mainstream or commercial news sector posed by these projects.

Certainly, activist news organisations may pose a structural or political threat to the state-backed news organisations that control the free flow of information in undemocratic societies. These contexts, however, move journalism clearly into the realm of politics, and the conflict is inherently political, not journalistic. In societies where there has been a transition of power, the activist news organisations either closed down, or became simply the news media of the new society, in a relationship with the political power of the society that is mirrored across democratic societies worldwide.

In other contexts, however, activist news organisations are a valuable resource for other journalists – every foreign correspondent needs to know the sites and projects that offer an alternative take on events to the state-controlled media.

Other forms of citizen journalism, hyperlocal sites, social-aggregation projects like the Huffington Post and community alternative sites either remain too small and focused on the interests of a specific community (whether geographic, cultural, political or sub-cultural) to be of interest to a larger organisation (although they may well be completely viable as projects in and of themselves), or they are large enough to compete with the mainstream organisations, in which case the distinction between them is irrelevant – media pundits may go on at length about the structural, economic and philosophical differences between the Huffington Post and USA Today, but readers and advertisers don't often care. The fact remains that, despite the constructed tension between 'professional' and 'amateur' journalism, in practice, and to the audience, there is little to be found between them.

Less-constructed forms of 'citizen' information sharing, Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, Google+ circles, may well be part of the public sphere that Habermas envisioned, and for a social theorist they are fascinating. It seems unlikely, however, that they would pose any kind of threat to the existence of more traditional, constructed and managed forms of news (if anything, the managed product that news organisations are now moving into these spaces is more of a threat to the amateur efforts than the other way round).

However, it is important to remember that news is an ecosystem, and the effect of amateur, activist and alternative news sites on other sites within that ecosystem is noticeable. Social media might not have provided the perfect public sphere, but the existence of these projects within the same

landscape as the more traditional news media can be seen to have an effect. The higher level of engagement with the audience, the greater proportion of opinion to hard news, and the lowered formality of language are all hallmarks of amateur journalism that are increasingly visible within the mainstream. The network has changed everyone within it, not simply the newcomers.

CASE STUDY

‘Netizen’ journalism in China

In July 2011 two high-speed trains running through the eastern city of Wenzhou, China, collided while crossing a viaduct. Four cars were derailed and 40 people died. The accident, as well as being a tragedy, was a great embarrassment for China’s much-publicised high-speed rail programme, and the government moved to limit the public-relations damage by issuing media directives, limiting access to the site and clearing away the wreckage as soon as possible (Blanchard and Wee, 2011).

Media directives are a common way for the Chinese authorities to control a news story: instructions are given to news editors as to what angles to use, and how to construct the story. In the case of the train crash, directives instructed that: ‘Reporting of the accident is to use “in the face of great tragedy, there’s great love” as the major theme. Do not question. Do not elaborate. Do not associate. No re-posting on micro-blogs will be allowed!’ (Hernandez, 2011).

Three years earlier, the Wenchuan earthquake had provoked a similar response from the government, but the prevalence of mobile phones and internet access had resulted in images, news and information being spread across social networks, embarrassing the Chinese authorities and undermining their control of information (Nip, 2009).

In the time between the Wenchuan earthquake and the Wenzhou train crash, Chinese use of the internet rose to some 450 million users (China Internet Watch, 2011), known as ‘netizens’ in China, many of them using microblogging and discussion platforms such as Weibo (a Chinese version of Twitter), Tianye and QQ.

This growing online public was horrified by the news of the train crash, and reports began to appear on the social-media networks in China, reports

that contradicted the official version as to the time of the accident, and that began to create a picture not just of 'in the face of great tragedy, there's great love', but of a disaster being covered up because it did not tally with the government's desires and plans. As the story unfolded, the demands by the families for explanation and compensation was highlighted on the networks, something the directives had not wanted discussed (Chen, 2011).

The mainstream Chinese media became caught between the official version of events, and the version they could see unfolding online, faster than the online censors could erase it. Many news organisations began to report what was happening on social media, a move that at least one senior editor believed would be seminal in changing the Chinese media: 'Thanks to micro-blogs, it was providing a convenient platform for people to collect variety information together. Micro-blog can make people get their power together and foster citizen consciousness to help people who need to help, also can supervise our government and society. It's seems like that micro-blog offer a microphone to everyone, If you got 10 million followers, then what you post on your micro-blog will be concerned by your followers. I think it can be an individual media and everyone can be a journalist in the future. It will make the media in China become more freedom and be responsibility to expose the truth.' (Liu Xiang, quoted in Chen, 2011)

Whether or not the Chinese media is more free, it is certainly more subject to scrutiny by the new networked and connected educated population, who do use social media as a way to hold the mainstream media to account. The more activist news organisations, the ones that chafed against central government controls, have been emboldened by online activism, and many took the opportunity of repeating and amplifying what was being said online, taking their news agenda guidance from the public, rather than from the state.

Social-media and citizen-media activism in China is still evolving. Certainly there are changes, and the ways in which social media can influence public opinion, and possibly public activism, can be seen. The rising influence of social media can be evidenced in the new guidelines on their use issued by the Beijing government in December 2011. These controls, which include a prohibition against 'rumour-mongering' and a ban on accounts not linked to a genuine name, are clearly designed to prevent similar responses to events like the Wenzhou train crash (Bandurski, 2011).

Note: Thanks to Chen Dan Qi, for her assistance with this case study.

Key reflections

- Within this new, fluid environment it is possible for ideas and individuals that do not have access to the elite power structures to be heard, but it is not a given: access must still be fought for.
- Can commercial journalism still maintain the goals of public journalism while serving business interests?
- Is the online space more egalitarian and accessible for people left isolated and ignored by mainstream media, or does it simply reflect the rest of the media?
- Is non-professional journalism still journalism? Does it matter if the people doing it are not trained or certified?
- What can mainstream commercial journalism learn from citizen journalism and community engagement?
- Is social capital in the new media space more useful than financial capital? Why?



Readings and resources

Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) is a key text for this chapter. Craig Calhoun's 1993 book *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (1993a) is a slightly more accessible introduction to the original text, and Pieter Boeder's essay 'Habermas' heritage: the future of the public sphere in a network society' (2005) is a good starting point for the subject.

The network society is discussed primarily by Manuel Castells in *The Rise of the Network Society* (2000) and by Jan van Dijk in *The Network Society* (2006). Henry Jenkins is the leading thinker on fan and participatory culture. His main works are the books *Convergence Culture* (2006a) and *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers* (2006b), and he maintains a blog at http://henryjenkins.org/.

Dan Gillmor's book *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People for the People* (2004) can almost be considered the manifesto of the citizen-journalism movement. This book, along with Bowman and Willis's 2003 report *We Media*, is core reading for anyone interested in the subject. Dan Gillmor maintains a blog at http://dangillmor.com/.

The main works on alternative and activist media are Chris Atton's books *Alternative Media* (2002) and *An Alternative Internet* (2004).

Einar Thorsen writes about citizen journalism in the book *Citizen Journalism: Global Perspectives* (co-edited with Stuart Allan), and in journal articles and other works. He maintains a website at http://multimediajournalism.info/ and tweets as @einarthorsen.

Indymedia (www.indymedia.org/en/index.shtml) and Global Voices Online (http://globalvoicesonline.org/) both provide technology, training and support for citizen journalists, as well as hosting news and material from citizen journalists around the world. Indymedia maintains local organisations in a number of countries as well.

A number of initiatives exist to promote public journalism, including the Knight Community News Network, which is part of the John S. and James L. Knight foundation, and provides a wealth of information and services for aspiring community and public journalists.

The Center for Investigative Reporting (http://centerforinvestigativereporting.org/) and ProPublica (www.propublica.org/) both do independent investigative journalism, and provide tools and support for journalists as well.

For a development of alternative media since the 1970s see Tony Harcup's *Alternative Journalism, Alternative Voices* (Routledge, 2012).