



**EIILM UNIVERSITY**  
S I K K I M

## **ADVANCED REPORTING**

**Subject: ADVANCED REPORTING**

**Credits: 4**

## **SYLLABUS**

### **Basics of Reporting**

Difference between Print and Television Reporting; Meaning of News; Characteristics of Reporter; Resources for Reporting; Importance of Research for Reporters; Press Officers; Spin Doctors and Experts; Follow-Ups in Journalism.

### **Practical Reporting Skills**

Listening and Note-Taking Skills; Structure of a News Report; Importance of Interviews; Techniques of Conducting Interviews.

### **Tools of Reporting**

Maintaining Focus; Rewriting; Writing Tools; Concise Reports; Narrative and Dramatic Report Defense Reporting; Fundamentals of Defense Reporting; Gadgets used during War Reporting.

### **Reporting Beats**

Disasters; Communal Riots; New Role of Television in Election Coverage; Crime Reporting; Political Reporting; Foreign Ministry News Features.

### **Suggested Readings:**

1. Advanced Reporting: Skills for the Professional; Bruce Garrison; Taylor & Francis.
2. Advanced Reporting: Discovering Patterns in News Events; Donald Lewis Shaw; Maxwell E. McCombs; Gerry K; Waveland Press.

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## LESSON 1

### A SAMPLE FROM THE JOURNALISTIC CUISINE

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#### Objective

The first lesson will give you an idea of what an average day in the life of a reporter is. It is also essential that you know the difference between newspaper and TV journalism. This lesson will enable you to understand what your life would be – both as a print and a tv journo.

17 March 2002. Early Sunday morning. What a day, I said to myself. I had to go to the office, but I could afford to check in a little later than the usual time. Sundays are usually lax, with very few stories pouring in. Most of the government offices are closed and hence one could relax – something that is unheard of – on a weekday. With these thoughts in my mind, I started reading the Sunday edition of *The Statesman*. I had barely gone through a few lines, when the mobile rang. It was my bureau chief. “Natasha Sharma has been found dead in Hotel Hyatt. The crime reporter is out of station. Rush.”

I worked for the Zee News, India’s first 24-hours news channel. In exactly five minutes, I took a shower (poured a bucketful of water over my head), washed off the bitterness from my mouth and after twenty-five minutes I was standing outside the Hyatt. The camera crew had already arrived. I went inside. No hotel staffer would tell us the exact story. All the senior police officers of the area had left by then. But I quickly gathered a few facts from one of my old sources in the Delhi Police. They went like this: Natasha, 31, daughter-in-law of senior Congress leader Natwar Singh, left her home at Greater Kailash I at 11.20 p.m. on March 16 in her white Maruti, but returned to pick up a bottle of whisky and left again ten minutes later. She drove into the parking lot of the hotel at 12.35 a.m., and a Delhi-based fashion designer saw her in the lobby. Two waiters saw her near room 265 which she asked them to open to go to the terrace. When they refused, she asked them to open the fire exit. The waiters declined and escorted her back to the lobby. The police found the exit door handle broken. But Natasha is believed to have made her way to the seventh floor using the service staircase.

She sat in a corner of the roof, drank whisky, and sent messages on her mobile to a few friends and her husband. She then made her way to the top of the AC plant using a rusty iron ladder and jumped down. Natasha’s friend told the police that when she reached her on the phone around 1.30 a.m. she could hear a drone in the background; cops believe it must have been from the four large air conditioners.

Her body was still inside the hotel and would be shortly taken for a postmortem to the nearby Safdarjang Hospital. I immediately contacted my office and they arranged a live interview with me over the phone.

In a 24-hours news channel, every second matters. You have to break news before your competitors, do it in a more effective way, provide more information than they can and of course,

make the pictures run on the channel before everybody else. Now as a reporter who had ample experience in covering incidents like these, I knew that there were very few chances of getting pictures of Natasha Sharma’s dead body from the hotel. The police truck had gone inside from the backside of the hotel and nobody was allowed inside. The best shot we could get was that of the truck leaving the hotel and that was it. But how could I score and get the best, when at least six other camera crews representing various television channels were present on the spot, vying for space and a better foothold to capture shots. I called my office and asked them to send another camera crew immediately to the hotel. I also asked them to send an OB van (outstation broadcast van, through which one can send video feed live from the spot) to the hospital. When the reinforcement was in place, I asked my colleague to stay at the hotel and capture anything and everything that could come in his way. I asked him to keep his all senses open. I sat in the car with my cameraman and waited for the police truck. In between I did a number of phono interviews in the subsequent news bulletins. It was the headline of the day and probably would hog headlines for days to come.

Natasha Sharma’s body was loaded into the truck and nobody got even a glimpse. The truck moved and everybody turned cameras towards the truck. On the road, I followed the truck. Once it was out, and the policemen thought they were out of the journalists’ scrutiny, they relaxed. When it reached the mortuary, my car came to a screeching halt. The policemen were caught unawares, while shifting the body. I got a fairly long shot of Natasha Sharma’s swollen face. I rushed outside, put the tape in the OB van and in another thirty seconds, the shots were on air. I had put a big hole through the stories of other news channels. But I could not rest lest I become the proverbial hare. I would not let a tortoise beat me. So I dug in more. Natasha Sharma had lodged a complaint of harassment a few months ago and had sought police protection. There were other facts also... So I put them together and told them to the news hungry audience through live telecast and over the phonos. By the evening, the police had corroborated all the facts and declared that it was a matter of suicide and not murder, as everybody was suspecting. But the loopholes in its theory remained. But nevertheless, our report was the best and I got a pat on my shoulder from my editor. I reached home well beyond midnight and tomorrow was a long day, not far away.

This is just an example to portray the life of a television reporter. This also shows how a little bit of quick planning can make a difference in a story and subsequently in your career.

All of us, who are lured into the glamour of journalism, have to get a few facts straight into their mind, to begin with. Most of us are made to believe that journalism, more so in the television age, is a shortcut to fame. Well, it can make you famous, but remember, there are no shortcuts involved. Let me

talk about television since this is a reporter's handbook for television journalism. Being a part of a 24-hour channel means working for at least 12 hours a day – something that can stretch to 22 hours, for six days, if not seven and observing no Holi, Diwali, Id or Independence day.

On your first marriage anniversary, you could be at a place from where you cannot even call and wish your wife. I was married for seven days, when I was sent to Iraq to cover the Gulf war. Everyday is a day for an acid test. In a 24-hour news channel, I must repeat, every second counts.

You are at a press conference, representing 'A' news channel and there is an announcement that a militant was killed last night near the Prime Minister's residence. You have to call your office immediately and inform them, so that they flash this news on the channel with a 'Breaking News' tag. The details can follow later, as and when you get them. If you are a second late, a correspondent from 'B' channel will relay it before you and take all the credit. You have to move as if lightning has struck you, literally — no clichés meant. So let us begin by gathering clouds around us.

Before we move further, it is imperative that we understand the **basic difference between reporting for Print and reporting for Television.**

Suppose there is a function, where the Army Chief is the chief guest. Now there is a battery of journalists – both print and TV, waiting for him to respond to their queries. While answering a question, the General says that there is no let down in infiltration from across the border. Now this is fairly important news. Even if a print journo is not present there, he can take the quotes later from his counterparts and file the story.



But a TV journalist, first of all, has to be present there and he has to make sure his cameraman is recording the complete scenario and the mike is near the General's mouth so as to catch his audio in an effective way. After the Army Chief leaves, the print journo can mingle with other senior officers, enjoy a mug of beer or two and then leave as per their convenience. But life for a TV journalist is a battle. Firstly, he has to inform his office about what the General said, so that they put it up on the air, at least on the news scroll. Then he has to rush to the office to be

able to air the General's quote on his channel. Then assuming, the General has said something more important, say on Kashmir, then he will write the complete story, put relevant sound bytes, and edit the story – that will be a complete package; the kind of stories that you see on the channels. It will go like this:

Intro (This is read by the news anchor): The Army Chief General NC Vij on Monday said that the infiltration from across the border has not stopped and groups of militants are continuously sneaking into Jammu and Kashmir. General Vij also rubbished Pakistan's claims that there were no militant camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.

Then your story will start: (If you don't have adequate shots of General Vij, then you can use shots relevant to the story – in this case, you can use shots of border between Indian and Pakistan... like Army jawans on patrol, an officer watching the border through his binoculars etc...)

Voice Over: (Here you lay your voice on the corresponding shots) The Army Chief General NC Vij said that despite promises being made by Pakistan to stop infiltration, it continued unabated and with snow melting on the peaks, it was likely to increase.

Sound byte of General Vij, where he talks about infiltration (Make sure that you don't make him repeat the same thing in his byte, which you have already mentioned in the voice over)

Voice Over: General Vij is back in Delhi, after a visit to the forward posts in the Surankote area of Jammu Division. The Army has been involved in an Operation to flush out militants in this area. Terming the operation as a major success, the Army Chief said similar operations would be carried out in various areas along the border.

Sound byte of General Vij

Voice Over: General Vij also denied allegations of the Indian Army crossing the Line of Control in the hot pursuit of militants.

Anjan Kumar, 'A' News, Delhi

This is how a TV news story is organized, created and then telecast. The print journo, on the other hand will go to ten different places, meet people and then in the evening go to the office, sit at his desk and file the story. The story, no matter how important, will be carried only in the next day's newspaper. So he has only one deadline to meet. On the other hand, a TV journo has to file it as soon as he can. A print journo sits in front of his computer, types his story and bingo, his job is done. The TV journo will write the story, approve it from the input desk, then the output desk, then record his voice over, search for shots, and then sit with an editor to edit his story. It takes a lot of time and he has to be quick, lest his rival channels score over him. At the end of the day, he will be so tired that he will go home and hit the sack.

**Assignment:** Pick up any major story of a particular day. Watch tv reports related to the story and then compare it with newspaper report the next day. Write a brief report based upon your observations.



## LESSON 2

### WHAT IS NEWS?

#### Objective

Ok, now you understand the difference between print and tv. Now you must also understand what the intriguing world of news is all about. This lesson will deliberate upon various facets of news and it also tells you what really constitutes a good reporter?

What is news? News to me is something that people can talk about. A famous journalist described news as, "Anything that interests a large part of the community and has never been brought to its attention before." News is something that will force even a person who doesn't care much to take notice and read.

News is something that brings a change in the status quo. But does that mean that any change in status quo is worth reporting? Let us take an example. Suppose Sunita, a college student, does not reach home on time. That may worry her parents, but that is not news. Now if she is four hours late, then something may be wrong with her and that is news. She may be a victim of rape. She may have committed suicide, because of failure in love. So news is not merely a change in status quo. The end result is what may create news. Any change of consequence in the status quo is news.

There are seven major factors that help reporters in determining whether a particular event is news:

1. Impact of the event. How many people does the event affect? And how seriously?
2. Proximity of the event. An earthquake in Gujarat is far more important to Indian readers than a quake in Turkey.
3. Timeliness of the event. You cannot write a report which says, a businessman was murdered in Chandni Chowk three months ago. It only makes sense to report a particular event if it has freshly occurred.
4. Prominence. Big names make big news. Amitabh Bachchan injured during a shooting or an extra artist injured during a film shooting. Which event will make news? Do I need to explain?
5. Novelty of the event, the unusual. Dog bites man is no news. Man bites dog is worth a headline.
6. Conflict-Conflict has been the tour-de-force of great literature, drama and movies for all time. From the stories of Mahabharata to those of Mowgli, conflict has played a crucial role. Newspapers are no different.
7. Audience-Who is the audience? The answer to that question helps determine whether an event is news at all, and if it is, where it will be played in the paper. ensnare

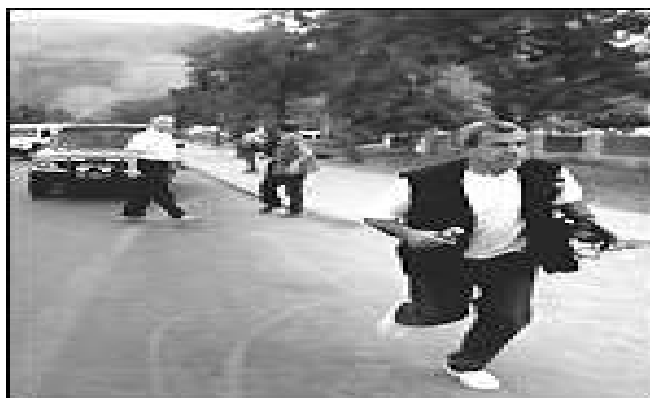


#### What it takes to be a good Reporter

Journalism is not a conventional job. If you want to be successful in journalism, you have to be absolutely in love with your profession. If you are somebody, who is looking for an average 9-5 job, then journalism is out of bounds for you.

To be a good reporter, there are various qualities that one needs to possess. The best reporters are bright, persistent, honest, curious and courageous. If you ask a good reporter to explain his success, this is how he will do it:

1. A good reporter is someone who can write about anything under the sun or above it. Even about it. He should be able to deal with any topic and he should also have the ability to talk with a cross section of people. He should have the ability to see the unobvious, the unusual and something ironic in every act.
2. A good reporter should be quick. Once he is assigned a story, he should have all the perseverance to go after it. A good reporter does not lose hope. For example, if he is trying to contact an official and after repeated calls, that official is not available, he keeps on trying. There used to be a signboard in Los Angeles Times newsroom that read GOYA – KOD. Get off your ass and knock on doors.



Read today's Indian Express. Identify one story, which you think is a fine example of good reporting. Write a brief report on why you selected that particular story/report.

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## LESSON 3

### THE CONTOURS OF BEAT REPORTING

#### Objective

A lot of students are complexed with what the beat system is all about. They have heard about it, but they are at odds, trying to figure out what it actually means. This lesson will throw adequate light on the subject and it also offers valuable tips on how to go about selecting a beat for yourself. It also explains what is expected of a beat reporter.

Every reporter in Delhi knew that before the Independence day, Kashmiri militants were planning to strike in a major way in Delhi. But only Inder Vashisht, a crime reporter working for a Hindi tabloid managed to procure information, when the Delhi Police, in a pre-dawn raid, managed to arrest three Kashmiri militants and seized a huge cache of arms and ammunition from them. The reporter had no magical wand in his hands. It was just that he called the DCP of that area as usual. He did it daily in his role as the tabloid's crime reporter, speaking to all the DCP's and other officers of the Delhi Police.

In newspapers, every reporter has at least one beat or area of interest to keep track of. "We have young reporters, who work on different beats," says Madhusudan Srinivas, Editor, Times of India. "Giving each reporter an area on which to focus helps them get acquainted with a new arena as well as bring us stories."

The advocates of Beat-system believe there is no better way to encourage original reporting. "Without beats, you end up doing stories from faxes, emails and releases," says Vishal Thapar, a Principal Correspondent with Hindustan Times. "You simply won't break many stories that way, and typically, you won't get much beyond the surface."



News editors say a beat structure helps reporters understand issues better, so their stories can provide readers with more depth and context. Another advantage of a beat system is that sources know where to direct tips so that newspapers don't miss stories.

Beats are taking root even in the smallest of newspapers.

Reporters who get to know an area deliver more relevant and comprehensive stories. Beat reporting is also important because when people identify the newspaper with a reporter, they feel more comfortable calling in with ideas and talking to someone they know. Beat reporters say the time they take to build relationships with key sources pays off in better access to information. Officials in government and other agencies or other public figures talk to you more if they know you're interested for the long run and not just a daily turn.

But beat reporting becomes hard to manage sometimes. Reporters need time to work the beat, to make contacts and sniff out stories, and scheduling that time can be difficult. "Every couple of months I'll pull them off to spend a whole day on the beat, meeting and talking with people," says Usha Mahadevan of the Statesman. "You lose a reporter for a day but it works out in the long run."

But editors monitor stories their beat reporters come up with. They constantly work with reporters to make sure they are not influenced by important people of their beat. And beat reporters need to accept the fact that, sometimes, they'll be asked to cover other stories when the news bureau is short-staffed and there's a must-do story that day. Reporters tend to protect their beats, and that's good but it can't be at the expense of the big story of the day.

#### Mastering Your Beat

A reporter on a new beat faces two challenges that sometimes compete: producing right away to gain the attention and respect of readers, sources and editors and taking the time to learn new sources and issues. These tips may be helpful in addressing these challenges on a new beat, injecting some life into a beat that's feeling too familiar or improving coverage on a beat where you or your editors want to elevate coverage:

#### Plan Your Beat Coverage

- **Make a plan**

If your editors didn't give you a job description, write your own. If they did give you a job description, perhaps you will need to add some detail. What public and private institutions and organisations fall in your turf? What topics and issues definitely or probably fall in your turf? What topics or issues that lie primarily on someone else's turf may sneak onto yours occasionally? Which regular meetings or other events will you always cover? Which regular meetings or events will you always monitor and sometimes cover? Which, if any, will you usually ignore? What will be your high priorities? What will be low priorities? (If everything is a high priority, then you haven't prioritized.) How much of your time will you spend on special stories? How much on daily news? What are some investigative opportunities? What are some feature possibilities? Discuss your plan with your editor, and discuss any differences in your



expectations. The plan should not be a straitjacket. As you learn the beat, you and your editors may need to adjust the plan.

- **Identify Potential Conflicts**

Where might your turf overlap with other reporters? Discuss these possible conflicts with the reporters and with editors. By addressing overlap in advance, you can avoid missed stories, bruised feelings and duplication of effort.



Learn the topic and the territory

- **Debrief Your Predecessor**

Unless your beat is new, ask your predecessor and other reporters who have worked the beat for advice. Ask what stories he intended to do someday but never got around to. Ask about helpful sources or difficult sources. Ask about confusing issues. You'll want to surpass your predecessor and bring a different approach to the beat, however good she was. You'll want to develop good relations with the sources she found difficult. But you'll also want to tap her experience.

- **Ask Lots of Dumb Questions**

You may know a lot about the beat, but you don't know as much about each piece of it as your sources do or as regular consumers do.

- **Confess Your Ignorance**

If you don't know the topic, don't pretend you do. Ask people to educate you. They will respect your honesty, and as you learn, they will respect your knowledge. If you pretend to be an expert before you are, people will know. You will lose respect and have a difficult time gaining it.

- **Learn the Jargon**

Each beat has its own jargon, acronyms and processes that a new reporter must learn. Read and ask so that you learn the terminology and the processes. But remember that you are writing for readers who may not know the jargon. You have to learn it to understand your sources. But you have to translate into English for your readers.

- **Be Curious**

Watch for changes or trends, especially as you're out on your turf. Construction or going-out-of-business sales may lead to a story. If you see something odd, ask about it. If you see something new, ask about it.

- **Read Exhaustively**

Identify local or national periodicals that you should take to stay current on your beat. Identify and obtain any books or articles that will help you learn the background of an issue, the jargon of the beat or the personalities. Identify and obtain reports that will help you learn about the beat and its issues.



- **Check the Clips**

Read your own paper's clips (and any competing papers' clips) for general background. And check them again every time you're pursuing an idea. You'll get valuable background and context. And you can save yourself from "discovering" a story that's been covered by every reporter who ever had the beat.

- **Surf the Web**

Find and bookmark Web sites of agencies and organizations, nationally and locally, that relate to your beat. Click around their Web sites to see which ones have statistics, background information, discussion groups and the like that might be helpful. If they have searchable databases online, search them and learn what is available. Ponder how you would use this data as the basis for a story. Ponder how you would use the data routinely on stories. Visit the Web sites occasionally to look for story ideas and sources. If you haven't visited a Web site recently, it may have changed, so don't assume a lame site will stay that way. A revamped Web site or a new service offered online may be worth a story.

- **Develop Files**

Create folders (electronic and paper) to store information on the various issues and organizations you will be covering. File away statistics, reports and studies so you can find them quickly on deadline.

- **Learn the Law**

Learn the open meetings and open records laws of your jurisdiction. Know which meetings you can attend and which records you can obtain. Learn how the open records law applies to electronic records. Learn who are the custodians of public records. Develop some rapport with them and let them know you are interested in the records and understand the law.

## Get to Work

- **Find Some Stories to Work on Quickly**

You'll need to spend some time in reading and source development, but you'll learn faster if you get right into the beat. Come up with a list of possible stories. They will announce your presence on the beat to potential sources and to interested readers and generate tips for more stories.

- **Use Each Story as a Chance for Long-range Learning**

The story itself might be a routine daily piece that you normally could crank out in a couple hours with a couple telephone interviews. Take an extra hour or so. Go to a character's office. Introduce yourself. Ask questions about the history of this issue and of the organisation and people involved. Read up on the context. Research the background of the issue. Identify related upcoming events. Identify related issues that might merit in-depth examination. Identify characters who might merit a newsmaker profile.

- **Write for Readers**

Your first responsibility, whatever your new beat, is to tell the story to your readers. Identify the people with the strongest interest and with potential interest in the area or topic. Choose stories of interest and importance to those readers. Keep them in mind as you decide the approach to each story and as you consider ways to present your stories and make them useful to readers.

- **Write for Sources**

Especially at first, you'll need to write some stories for sources. Don't write anything that won't be interesting or important for readers, but show your sources that you are responsive. Even if you just write a brief from a tip, you tell sources that you value their suggestions. If a tip doesn't pan out, get back to the source. Tell him what you learned and that you always want to hear tips, even if the source doesn't have all the facts. You'll spend some time debunking false rumors, but you'll also get some valuable tips. If you ignore bad tips, you won't get good tips.

- **Check a Gendas**

Check agendas of meetings of agencies you cover. By identifying in advance the issues that will be addressed, you can write stories about the impact of the agency's action, which usually is more interesting than the meeting itself.

- **Cover Your Tail**

Your inexperience on the beat will hamper your news judgment at first. So backstop yourself by running story ideas past your editor. Especially tell your editor what you're deciding not to write about. Your editor might save you from passing on a big story. Or if you do pass on it, you'll have company in the doghouse.

## Connect with Sources

- **Go "Prospecting" Regularly**

Your editors probably will give you some time as you start on the beat to make the rounds of major players and introduce yourself. Your first few stories will introduce you to a few more. Go further. Make at least one "prospecting" call per week. Arrange to visit someone with an office, agency or organisation

you haven't contacted yet. Lunch is often productive, but it's not necessary, and don't meet at the restaurant. Visit the office, shop or home, so you can learn the geography, picture the layout and meet other people. Prospecting calls don't involve a particular story you know about in advance, but try to bring back a story, or at least several tips. You will make a valuable contact for the future.

- **Follow Up**

After a prospecting visit, an interview or a story, touch base with the source again. Thank him for helping you. Ask what else is going on. Ask if he thought of anything else after you left. Follow up in a variety of ways: e-mail, note cards, phone calls, in person.

- **Diversify Your Sources**

If most of your sources turn out to be similar to you in race, gender and/or age, perhaps you are subconsciously connecting better with people like yourself. Or perhaps the official structures of the institutions reflect some discrimination. Seek out more diverse sources by contacting rank-and-file employees, people served by the agency, community groups that deal with the agency, groups organized by age, gender or race. Ask the minorities you do encounter whether they truly are that rare in the field you're covering, or whether you're looking in the wrong places.

- **Identify "Gatekeepers"**

Develop rapport with secretaries and other "gatekeepers" who control access to important sources. These people can be important sources themselves. At the least, good relations with them are essential at times to contacting the sources.

- **Develop National Sources**

Identify national experts who can provide perspective on issues or who can place local events in their national context.

- **Get lots of Contact Points**

Business phone number isn't enough. Get a source's cell number and home number, if you can. Get the direct after-hours number.

- **Run out of Business Cards**

Leave business cards with everyone you meet who might be a potential source. Collect their business cards and call them back.

## The Beginning in a Newspaper

You are normally absorbed in a newspaper as a Trainee Reporter. Initially, you are supposed to cover any low key event – say a mango festival at Dilli Haat. But in due course of time – say six months, you will be assigned a beat. As a cub reporter – you might be addressed as one – you will be given the secondary responsibility of a particular area. For example Crime. Secondary responsibility means that you will share the beat with a colleague of yours, who is already into it for few months. Handling crime beat will be his primary responsibility. That means he will be held responsible for any story emanating from that beat. Making sure no news is missed from that beat is also his responsibility. Now when you start, you will be required to make contacts in that beat. In case of crime, you will have to know a lot of police officers – senior and junior, both. It will be also imperative on your part to know and completely under-

**Assignment:** Collect a report from one particular beat – say Defence. Compare reports on one issue, as reported by correspondents of various newspapers. Say in case of Defence, compare reports by Vishal Thapar of the Hindustan Times, Rajat Pandit of the Times of India and Saikat Datta of the Indian Express. File a report based on your observations.

**Notes:**

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 30 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, providing a template for writing or drawing. The margins are consistent on all sides.

## LESSON 4

### THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING CONTACTS

#### Objective

The most important thing, I guess in journalism is the way you build your contacts. The wider your umbrella of network is, the more successful you are, as a journalist. In this lesson we will discuss the importance and the essence of building contacts. After attending this lecture, you should be able to start building your contacts – some of whom will turn into your life-long sources.

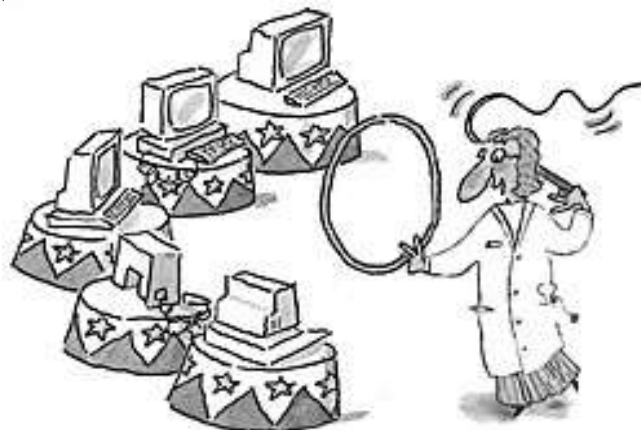
Suppose you are a reporter with a newspaper. You are assigned the job of filing a report on growing drug use in Delhi. In the process of filing your stories, you will have to meet a number of people – officials from the Police, Narcotics Control Bureau, NGO's and the users.

Now, you make a call to the DCP, Narcotics Control Bureau and fix up an appointment. You reach his office, shake hands with him and settle down for his interview. Now you must understand that the official is meeting you for the first time and he will not talk to you about anything that goes beyond his call of duty. He will give you the official figures etc. and that is it. The onus is on you to make sure that you establish a rapport with him so that he opens up with you and shares information with you. How do you do it?

After the Interview is over, you collect the rest of the information and file your story. You forget the DCP, Narcotics Control Bureau.

After six months, you want him again for another story. This time you call him and you will have to introduce yourself all over again. And when you meet him, he will again meet you formally. Such meetings can provide you nothing other than usual dry quotes and official facts and figures.

What you as a reporter are ideally supposed to do is that after your first meeting, you call him again. May be thank him for his time and tell him that your story containing his interview would be appearing on so and so date. After a week or so, give him another call and wish him. After two or three calls, go and meet him. You don't always need to be working on a story to meet important people. After a series of meetings, you will understand each other better. You will develop a camaraderie. Next time, when the officer has a sensational news and he wants to share it with media, you will be the first person he will think of. This is how you develop contacts, who become your sources.



The thumb rule for reporters is: make regular contact with sources. A reporter doesn't go to the source only when he is thirsty for news; he also goes there when he is not. There is no substitute for actually being there, for personal contact. A reporter must speak to his sources, speak to them when he needs something from them, but more importantly when he doesn't need anything.

But one thing must always be borne in mind. A reporter also needs to be careful. He must know how to walk a fine line between getting close but not too close. The distance doesn't have to be a concrete wall. It has to be in the mind. A reporter must remember that his job is to bring news to the readers and not serve the source.

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After months on a beat, working with the same sources, a reporter begins to think like them and talk like them. He will be sympathetic to their point of view. Be wary of this and of their efforts to use you. It is likely and legitimate that they will try to persuade you of the merit of their views, to sell you on their programs.



## Protection of Sources

Sometimes, rather most of the times, a source shares a particular information with you on the condition that you will not quote him anywhere in your report. He provides you information on the condition of anonymity. If you have obtained information from a source on the understanding that it is off the record, then it is. Remember, a source is a source for life. You may change beats, newspapers, even cities, yet your reputation will follow you. The only way to be a successful reporter over the long haul is to operate honestly. If you don't, you will be without that most valuable of all commodities, good sources. The wider your umbrella of network is, the more successful you are, as a journalist.

Protection of journalists' confidential sources in the public interest is not self-evident, but has to be argued for against public interest in identifying such sources. Such an argument needs to be rooted in the long-term value of protecting media's ability to play an effective role in a democracy. It also requires a system of conditionalities that should be applied before any legal compulsion is considered in regard to making journalists disclose their sources. The media needs to win public trust about the professionalism of its conduct, its independence and its diligence in making use of confidential sources. Journalists need to demonstrate that they are not abusing claims to respect confidentiality, such as by using secrecy as a smokescreen for hidden agendas or for laziness in locating individuals or evidence that would go on the record.

Protecting confidential sources is a complicated journalistic principle. It requires us to make fine, but important, distinctions between sub-themes. Protection of sources means, typically, concealing their identity. But after that, it becomes far more complicated. From whom do sources need to be protected? By whom should they be protected? And how? Why? Let us explore these in turn.

From whom comes the threat? We often think that journalists' duty to protect confidential sources is exercised against disclosure pressures emanating from the state. It often is. But individual citizens or private companies may also seek legal means to compel disclosure if they are pursuing civil actions (for example, in defamation cases) or if they believe such information can assist their defence in a criminal case. To be provocative, one might also ask if sources don't sometimes need protection against journalists themselves – such as where a source feels exploited, distorted or betrayed by guilty journalists themselves who refuse to accept that they may have abused the trust put in them.

The question also arises as to who should do the protecting. Should it be the journalists as bound by their private honour? The journalists as legally bound to do so in terms of a de facto legal "contract" with the source/s? The editors and/or owners as well? Should the state take responsibility to criminally charge journalists who reveal confidential sources and thereby damage the standing of the media and/or the sources?

How the protection should occur is a fraught matter. Assuming the journalist wishes to respect a confidentiality commitment to a source, then it is the journalist that now needs protecting. In such cases, the matter then becomes whether journalists should

enjoy qualified or absolute legal privilege to refuse to name such **sources**. Implicit in this is the question whether members of the media should be treated like any other citizen – or as a special category. In turn, this depends in part on whether a given constitution gives explicit freedom to the media (qua institution) in addition to freedom of expression to the individual.

It also depends on how you define disclosure. Does testimony by a journalist that stops short of revelation of actual identities still contradict the general principle of media remaining aloof and ethical? Answers to this question hang in large part on how the rationale for source protection relates to a wider concept about the role of media in a democracy.

In this paper, I investigate these questions by beginning with the rationale for the principle of source confidentiality. I then draw some lessons out of South African and US experiences. On the basis of these, I highlight some problems with the African Commission's declaration on freedom of expression, as it relates to protection of **sources**. In conclusion, I sum up the ground covered and make certain recommendations.

## 2. Rationales for Protection of Sources

Journalists worldwide generally agree that **sources** who are given a guarantee of confidentiality need to be protected from having their identities made public. A complex and often misunderstood set of protocols has evolved whereby journalists agree to receiving "off-the-record" information.

Confusingly, it is seldom clarified whether this status means (a) that absolutely nothing at all can be revealed; (b) that the information may be used as an anonymous tip-off if the journalist can get it confirmed by other **sources**; (c) that the information may be used directly, but without attribution to the specific source.

Be these variations as they may, the general **journalistic** ethic that spans all three interpretations is that once a commitment is given, at the very least the actual name of the source will be kept secret. There are some exceptions to this – such as when the source is regarded to have lied, journalists often feel released from their confidentiality commitment. (This was the situation in Zimbabwe several years ago, when independent journalists revealed a police source whom they said had knowingly set them up with false information about Robert Mugabe having a secret marriage).

Most journalists respect the confidentiality ethic, even if it means facing severe consequences – including imprisonment for refusing to reveal their **sources**. Mark Chavunduka (2001) has written that he endured torture by the Zimbabwean military for nine days in defence of the principle of protecting his **sources**. The reason for his silence? "Revealing their names would have betrayed and endangered our **sources**. And what would this have meant to the public's perception about the integrity of my newspaper, of me, and of journalists in general?"

Underpinning the power of professional (and peer) opinion on the issue is a passion amongst journalists that rests on a deeper understanding about their democratic role. In short, their arguments for maintaining confidentiality can be summarised under three headings:



## 1 Keeping the Confidence of Sources for Democratic Reasons:

Perhaps the most common argument in favour of why **sources** should be protected is the “chilling effect” one. This holds that if founts of information cannot trust journalists to keep confidentiality, they will simply dry up. The result is that the public will be the poorer, because many matters would then never see the light of day. The free flow of information essential to a democratic order would be adversely affected. The “chilling” of whistleblowers otherwise ready to “chirp” to journalists would be a set-back in terms of getting stories out into the open. The fact of the matter, it is argued, is that for various reasons, there are legitimate reasons why **sources** seek public anonymity. They simply would not come to journalists if they were required to reveal themselves. Writes Overholser (2004a): “To be trustworthy, one must keep one’s word.” She cites Watergate and recent corporate whistleblowers as examples of the benefit to the public of reporters sticking to their “pact of confidentiality” with **sources**.

It is, of course, up to the journalists to assess the agendas of such **sources** and whether the information merits publication regardless. It is also incumbent on them to seek independent ways and means to verify the information, and also to bargain with the source so as to at least locate the origin of the story as close as possible to the “deep throat” even without identifying it specifically. A host of other professional checks-and-balances have been recommended so as to minimise abuse and manipulation of confidentiality (see for example [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org)).

The main point, however, is that if journalists “burn” their **sources**, whether under duress or not, the media will be inhibited from playing its full democratic role. And where media freedom is enshrined constitutionally, this is interpreted by journalists as confirming that democracy confers on them a special status, privilege and responsibility regarding source confidentiality. The Minnesota Free Flow of Information Act, for example, states: “In order to protect the public interest and the free flow of information, the news media should have the benefit of a substantial privilege not to reveal **sources** of information or to disclose unpublished information. To this end, the freedom of the press requires protection of the confidential relationship between the newsgather and the source of information” (cited in Dalglish et al, 2002). Similar arguments are made by Price and Krug (2000) that an enabling environment for free and independent media needs to recognise the societal value of journalists’ protection of confidential **sources** and information obtained from those **sources**. This is a “fundamental condition of effective newsgathering in democratic society ... This situation can take on a constitutional dimension: that of the public’s right to receive information from the news media.” From this point of view, it follows that when a reporter agrees to confidentiality, it should bind the whole news organisation as a component of the institution of the media.

A further and distinctive take on this argument suggests that constitutional freedom of the media is something that applies to each individual. In consequence, inasmuch as it is a freedom

for everyone, special treatment can be justified because of the generic nature of the freedom (Trengrove, 2002).

Yet another take is that of Chapter 3, Article 1 of Sweden’s Freedom of the Press Act which makes it a criminal offence for a journalist to reveal **sources** without their consent. Exceptions are based on state security, or cases where media freedom is not the central issue, and where there is overriding public or private interest (cited in Rosa and Bronstein, 2000).

All these arguments, no matter the variation, are predicated on concepts of the democratic role of the media.

## 2 Keeping Separate the Functions and Institutions of Democratic Governance.

It is often argued that commitments to confidentiality should be respected by journalists not just in general, but particularly in regard to judicial processes such as court cases or commissions of inquiry. The argument here is that just as the Executive should not blur with the Judiciary, so the “Fourth Estate” should not lose its independence. Accordingly, it is not the responsibility of the media to do the job that is properly that of the police and prosecuting agencies. On the contrary, a “lazy lawyer” phenomenon has been identified with “litigation attorneys using journalists as fact chasers for their cases” (Dalglish et al, 2002). “(J)ournalists were not placed on this earth – or in our constitutional system – to do legwork for law enforcement,” writes Mauro (2003). (On the other hand, there is sometimes fair criticism that journalists themselves are guilty of using anonymous **sources** “as a labor-saving device” (Overholser, 2004b).

The main point in this particular argument is that for journalists to be enlisted into the logic of legal inquiries, especially those with legal sanctions entailed, would compromise their reputation as a separate institution, and reinforce the “chilling” effect on other **sources** as discussed under 2.1 above.

## 3 Providing Leeway and Security to Media Institutions To Pursue Newsgathering.

The argument here is a more practical one – that if journalists, as a matter of course, are required to reveal their **sources** to the authorities, they could end up spending more time in court than in newsgathering, or worse - they could be killed by news subjects wishing to remain unidentified. This underlines the previous point (2.2 above), and it further threatens to undermine the function of the media in a democratic society. As a distinct point, it is also argued (Dalglish et al, 2002) that journalists should not be discouraged from destroying unpublished notes and raw film footage, which they might do if faced with future subpoena prospects. This action, it is argued, could in turn affect the accuracy and depth of coverage, hence legal power to force disclosure is thus seen as a disincentive to journalists fulfilling their role as providers of reliable information.

It is further argued that if journalists are summonsed on the basis of being an eyewitness to an event (eg. a riot), this could endanger their safety at such events. Fear by misdoers that journalists could become witnesses against them in court could easily lead to pre-emptive murder of media people.

In all these cases, the media is seen as being inhibited from exercising its freedom in a manner befitting its constitutional status in a democracy.

It may be noted that points 2.2 and 2.3 above both range wider than the actual disclosure of names – they direct journalists away from giving any sign of work with the authorities, whether it is the supply of unpublished or unbroadcast materials, or giving live testimony that may even stop short of naming names.

In highlighting the stakes of even voluntary co-operation with the authorities, such arguments, however, sometimes prove to be unrealistic. Media people (supported by the public) have occasionally felt justified in handing over materials or tipping-off police – such as in South Africa when a broadcaster handed over a videotape of the infamous incident in which South African police trained their dogs by setting them on Mozambican refugees.

#### 4 Counter-arguments:

The rationale embedded in the arguments cited above relies ultimately on a public-interest principle as central to democracy. In other words, the assumption is that a democratic society confers special exemption on journalists from disclosing identities of **sources** because this is for the benefit of the citizenry at large. Media freedom therefore is not a freedom for an arbitrary class of individuals to remain silent about **sources**, but an acknowledgement that those who wish to join this group should be recognised as fulfilling a special function and mandate in a democratic society. In this perspective, therefore, a journalist subpoenaed in his or her private – as opposed to professional - capacity for information that was not gathered in the course of duties, would have no more privilege to refuse than would any other citizen.

Even with this interpretation, however, there are serious counter-arguments to **journalistic** privilege. The first objection holds that media's right to refuse to disclose **sources** has to be weighed against other rights – such as the right of an individual to dignity, to fair process, and access to information. The second objection is that it also has to be weighed against the duty of another institution – i.e. the state – to fulfil its mandate, which in this case is the maintenance of the rule of law and effective judicial process. In other words, against the media's claim of silence in the public interest, counter-claims can be made also in the name of speaking up in the democratic public interest.

In the course of history, a number of protocols have emerged to guide the balancing of such claims of public interest benefit, and these are discussed below.

Be polite but persistent with your sources. Insist on a responsive answer to your question. Follow slow-developing stories by checking periodically with your sources. If the event or issue is still on their agenda, it probably should be on yours as well.

Let us take the example of the Minister of State for Home Affairs, Mr. ID Swami. On issues pertaining to the internal security of the country, a reporter needs to contact him for information and comments/quotes. Say the Central Government has initiated talks with the Naga insurgents. Now to know more about the deal and get the government's stand on

the issue, the reporter has to seek an appointment with him.

That is very difficult at times, if you don't know the minister's personal staff – his private secretary, his personal secretary and others. Suppose you don't have an appointment and you reach his residence. He is not there and you have no idea when he will be back. During a time like this, only his personal staff will tell you the exact timing of his arrival. Knowing the small boy who distributes tea at the minister's residence also helps.

**Assignment:** Read an investigative report and study it thoroughly. (Copies of such report will be distributed in the class). Identify the probable sources in the report and discuss how you can build a rapport with such people.

#### Notes:

## LESSON 5

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

#### Objective

Reporters often shrug shoulders when it comes to research. They tend to forget that conducting research is an essential ingredient of reporting. You cannot write a substantive news report, without proper research. Through this lesson, you will understand how to conduct research and from where.



When it comes to doing research for a particular news report, a lot of journalists draw a blank. They think that their job is reporting and conducting research does not come in that domain. But you will be surprised that sixty percent of reporting involves conducting research.

When you become journalists (read reporters), you must understand that no story is complete without a proper research. Research provides food for thought and opens the readers' mind to the window of knowledge. It also removes confusion.

A lot of stories, these days, leave a lot of questions unanswered. For example, you are doing a story on Operation Blue Star. Now you write the story, and one of your lines reads as: *Initially, when the Indian Army tried to storm inside the premises of the Golden temple in Amritsar, they faced stiff resistance. Dozens of soldiers of the Madras regiment died, while trying to enter the compound.*

If you leave your story at this, you are leaving a fundamental question unanswered. Why? Why did it happen? To know the answer, you will have to research and then you will find out that it happened because of a man whose name was Sant Jarnail Singh Bindhrawale. It happened due to the military planning of Shahbeg Singh. Now find out who he was. For that, you will have to conduct research. Remember, as reporters, you may know a lot of things, but then, you are not writing for yourself. You are writing for a common man and his knowledge may be limited. So your story or news report has to satiate his thirst. Now why don't you go and read about General Shhahbeg Singh, to begin with.

Now research is of two types: Primary and Secondary. You conduct primary research, when you go to a person and seek information from him, first hand. In case of secondary research, you may consult news clippings, internet groups or conduct a search on a search engine.

There are three categories of people, from where you can conduct primary research:

1. **Press Officers**
2. **Spin Doctors**
3. **Experts**

Every government department or any organisation worth its salt has a **Press Officer**. He is supposed to be the interface between the organisation that he represents and the media. The media is strong enough in India today to turn this into a full time job. The role of a Press Officer is to put forward the organisation's thoughts or its policy to the media. This proves to be beneficial for a reporter at times. If you want to know anything about that particular organisation, call the Press Officer and you will get the information. But more than often, the Press Officer's job is not to tell you things. And even if tells you, it may not paint a completely true picture. So the onus is on you, as reporters, to use Press Officers to your advantage. There is no need to avoid him. A Press Officer can be perfectly used for research purpose. He is usually useful in finding out basic facts and figures. But you may need to talk to someone else to find out what these facts and figures mean. For example the Press Officer of the Indian Army, based in South Block. If as a reporter, you want to know about the number of militants infiltrating into Kashmir, he would give you the numbers, but he will be tight lipped if you ask him anything beyond that.

#### Spin Doctors

Spin Doctors are also a set of people who deal with the media. They are so closely linked to the centre of power they represent that they become part of it. They essentially have a clue of what is happening and more than often they are able to give reporters a deep insight into what is going on. Reporters tend to build a strong rapport with such people. And when it comes to publishing a story that may show that particular organisation or anybody associated with that organisation in bad light, the reporter is in a fix. If he goes ahead with that story, his relationship with the Spin Doctor of that organisation may turn sour. That is why this relationship can be difficult. For example Kanwal Sibal or Jairam Ramesh of the Congress party. I consider both of them great Spin Doctors. If you develop a relationship with them, there are times, when they can offer you exclusive tit bits of information about say the distribution of tickets among the party MLA's during assembly elections. But there are times, when they would expect you to return their 'favour'. That might translate into doing a PR story for Congress.

## Experts

Experts are usually interviewed to lend credibility to your news story. An expert is somebody who knows his or her subject well. For example, if you are doing a story on the spread of terrorism in the Jammu region, you may consult or interview a military expert, who could be a retired Army General. Experts are very useful people and they form the major chunk of a reporter's contact list. Sometimes, experts also share with you rare information – something they experienced first hand. For example, if you are doing a story on Sri Lanka's LTTE, you would like to interview JN Dixit, who has served as India's foreign secretary. He will tell you about the famous Rajiv Gandhi accord with LTTE supremo Velu Pillai Prabhakaran. He will also tell you how Prabhakaran came to India, stayed in Delhi's Ashoka Yatri Niwas and later met Rajiv Gandhi. And how as a parting gift, Rajiv Gandhi gave Prabhakaran his own bullet proof jacket.

Meanwhile, it would make sense, if you read more about LTTE and the crisis in Sri Lanka and India's role in Sri Lanka.

One of the first places to begin your quest for information (that would be verifiable factual data) is at the website I developed specifically for use by my students. Using the Internet, go to this page: <http://www.getasite.com/STG/index.htm>. Once at this page, click on the link to "Online Study Help." This will open up a page that contains specific links for each of the classes I teach. Look under JOURNALISM and click on the link to the "Journalism Resources" page and here you will find links to all the major US and world newspapers, the 3 major US news magazines, and a number of the television and cable network stations. There are other very useful journalism resources on this page, so if you are working at home, you might want to bookmark this page so you can return to it often.

## Assessing the Event

*Assessing an event basically means "taking stock" of a given situation. This means making an inventory of the actors or agents involved in the event, getting a good "picture" of the scene, determining the sequence of actions that transpired in the unfolding of the event. It is essentially asking the "journalistic 5" questions: who, what, when, where, and why? The "how" calls into question judgment on your part, so you want to refrain from any opinion about the event for now.*

1. Here is a brief discussion of the "journalistic 5" questions. Use them not only to assess an event, but also to aid you in the writing of your story:

**WHO** makes us think of the actor(s) or agent(s) involved in the event. What kind of person(s) is/was he or she, or them? Who was most responsible for the event?

Who was the leader? Who was first to act? Who was affected by the event? Who was most helped? most harmed?

**WHAT** may involve weeding out the legends and misunderstandings to see what really happened. Deciding what happened is difficult; it is a matter of putting together bits and pieces of evidence to construct a mosaic.

Sometimes we know exactly **WHEN** and where something happened, but asking

when something happened in relation to something else can provide a fascinating topic of **research**. For example, we don't know when Richard Nixon first learned of White House staff involvement in the Watergate burglary.

**WHERE** questions involve geography. For example, where are the rivers of France? of Germany? Why are those facts of important? Well, various historians have argued that the rivers of France provided a natural unity to the country; whereas, the rivers of Germany flow in such a way to cause Germans to remain disunited. Given the outcome of World War II, this is an interesting "where."

**WHY** - Always distinguish between the precipitating (triggering) cause and the background causes of a great event. Remember that causation is complex. Be cautious in your judgments of causes and motivations.

2. Read the highly informative article titled "Follow Your Curiosity to Find Better Stories"

by Valerie Hyman of The Poynter Institute. In this article, Hyman discusses using the

"journalistic questions" approach to either finding good leads for stories, or for

assessing the merits of a given event to find a good "angle" by which you can cover the

story as news ([http://www.poynter.org/research/rwe/rwe\\_curious.htm](http://www.poynter.org/research/rwe/rwe_curious.htm))

## Gathering the Facts:

*Gathering the facts basically means identifying sources you can use to get your questions*

*answered. Basic sources include: the library, the Internet, people, and observation.*

1. Locating useful resources available at the library — When you go to the library, search the electronic or regular card catalog there for books in the library's holdings. Browse in the book stacks and reference section. Consult the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature* for magazine articles. And don't be afraid to ask a librarian for help.
2. Skim written sources you find for answers to one question at a time. Pause to read carefully and to take notes when you find an answer. Then continue skimming for additional information that answers your questions.
3. Keep track of where you find information. Write down the author, title, publisher, place and date of publication and pages on which you found answers to a question.
4. Using the Internet for **research** involves all three of the previously listed steps, and a bit more as well. (See "Internet **Research**" in a later part of this Handbook.)
5. Prepare for interviews, whether you meet with the person or speak by telephone. (See "Conducting Interviews" in a later part of this Handbook.)
6. When making observations of your own, be aware of how your own background, experience, and emotions affect what you observe and how you see it. Test what you've observed by examining other evidence. Compare your observations with those of others.



- Before using ANY information you've found, evaluate each source you've consulted.

#### Checking the Reliability of those Facts

*Reporting the news is all about facts — obtaining them and then passing them on to others. That means that your news stories are only as good as the facts you put in them. If you use sources that aren't reliable, the facts you are reporting might not be reliable either, and you could end up reporting gossip instead of news. This is the reason it is very important to evaluate your sources of information, whether those sources are books, newspapers, magazines, or the Internet.*

- When you are deciding which library facts to use, ask questions such as the following:
  - What person or organization is the source of this information? What do I know about him, her, or it?
  - How could I check the source's reliability?
  - How current is the information; is any of it out-of-date?
  - Why is the person writing this piece? Is it for information, entertainment, opinion, or marketing/advertisement purposes? If for information, is the writer objective?
  - How does the information compare with information in other sources?
- When evaluating sources on the Internet, keep these points in mind:
  - Almost anyone can put information on the Web, so much information has not been edited or checked for correct facts.
  - Since anyone can put information on the Web, it is sometimes hard to know what the exact source of the information is, the source's reputation, or qualifications.
  - To some people, the Web is a place to voice opinions and not necessarily report facts. It is hard to tell if the sources are objective.
  - Dates of publication are sometimes not put on the Web site. If they are, the date could mean the date the information was first written, when the information was put on the Web page, or when the information was last revised. Because of this, it is difficult to know how current the information is.
- Keep in mind that you should use different kinds of sources to make sure you have accurate information. Don't use only library sources or rely just on personal accounts. For every Internet source you use, always cross-check it with a non-Internet source. For data collected via the Internet, don't miss two very important sites that help you determine the credibility of Internet sources: "Ten C's For Evaluating Internet Sources" at <http://www.uwec.edu/Admin/Library/Guides/tencs.html> and "Check Your Sources" at <http://www.usus.org/techniques/checkingsources.htm>.

#### Internet Research

There is a fairly decent tutorial at the University of Albany library called "Conducting **Research** on the Internet." You can locate this tutorial at the following web address: <http://www.albany.edu/library/internet/research.html>. However, I

would be remiss in my duty as your advisor if I did not impart to you my own wisdom regarding the use of the Internet for **research** ... so here goes ...

**New Mediums of Research:** "The Internet ~ The World At Your Fingertips, Literally." For several decades, the Internet was the exclusive domain of the Department of the Defense and academic scholars. Now that the "net" has been opened for commercial use (since 1994), the Internet and the World Wide Web are bringing more and more people to the new frontier of "cyberspace" or the "information superhighway." Quite literally, you and I now have the world of information at our fingertips. We can access documents produced by government agencies, by institutions of higher learning, and by organizations both for profit and nonprofit that are now a part of the "public domain." We are also thankful that many of our public libraries are now connected to the "information superhighway."

This exercise is not really an exercise, but more an "exposure" lesson so you might have the chance to "surf the net." There are three "areas" this assignment takes a look at with respect to the Internet: (1) search engines; (2) databases; and (3) directories. All are comparable to the types of traditional mediums we find in print form in libraries.

**Internet Search Engines** ~ There are a number of very powerful search engines now on the Internet. When you access a search engine and type in a "keyword" to conduct a search, the search engine sends out a "robot" or a "spider" that reads information contained on any given web page called META TAG data. The most powerful search engines can scan tens of thousands of web pages in a matter of seconds. The engine then returns on your screen a list of web pages that the robot found to contain the keyword(s) you requested. Some searches return 10,000+ documents. My recommendation for the most powerful and most selective search engine to use is AltaVista as you can refine your search by placing quotation marks around your keywords or by conducting a search by using a phrase and the number of returns you get will be much smaller. The following are some of the search engines on the Internet and the URL (or web address) where you can locate the engine. Go to several of these search engines, use the same keyword and conduct a search. Compare the findings you get with each search engine.

#### AltaVista

<http://altavista.digital.com>

#### InfoSeek

<http://www.infoseek.com>

#### BeauCoup

<http://beaucoup.com>

#### Lycos

<http://www.lycos.com>

#### Excite

<http://www.excite.com>

#### Magellan

<http://www.mckinley.com>

#### HotBot



<http://www.stpt.com>

**Internet Databases** ~ Just as its name implies, the databases on the Internet are comprised of hundreds even thousands of listings of websites and web pages that individuals, companies and organizations have submitted for listing in these databases. The best known Internet Database is YAHOO. The limitation of searching a database is that you will only get the information on your subject from the number of entries listed in that given database. Here is a brief listing of some of the Internet Databases.

<http://www.bguide.com>

<http://www.webcrawler.com>

<http://www.databaseamerica.com>

<http://www.yahoo.com>

**Internet Directories** ~ What do you do when you want to order a pizza? Pick up your telephone book, look in the yellow pages under pizza (or restaurants), and find a pizza shop in your area to call who then takes your order and delivers your pizza, right?

Just as we have directories, like the Yellow Pages in print, there are endless directories now “in print” in cyberspace. The main difference between a database and a directory is that the information contained in a directory is usually more “topic” or “field”

specific. Here are a few of the better known Internet Directories.

<http://www.555-1212.com>

<http://www.four11.com>

<http://www.tollfree.att.net/dir800>

<http://www.lookupusa.com>

<http://www.bigyellow.com>

[http:// www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com)

<http://www.femina.com>

<http://www.wwwomen.com>

Finally, I have a page online that discusses citing electronic sources which can be found at the following Internet address:

<http://www.getasite.com/pww/electronic.htm>.

**Assignment:** Conduct a research on General Shahbeg Singh's role in Operation Blue Star and write a detailed report.

## This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a template for handwriting practice or general note-taking. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.

## LESSON 6

### FOLLOWING UP STORIES

#### Objective

This lesson is about the importance of following up stories. After attending this class, the students will understand how and where to look for story follow ups.

There are times when journalists cover a major story – say the Uphar tragedy or the assassination of Bandit Queen Phoolan Devi. The event or the issue gains momentum for a few days, owing to the media coverage and then it dies down. The media runs after a particular story and then it is buried under the depths of public memory. But if you want to be successful as a reporter, it is imperative on your part to understand the importance of following a story.



Let me give you an example here. In 1997, a bus carrying school children plunged into the Yamuna river at the Wazirabad barrage, in Delhi. Many children lost their lives. After this incident, a lot of debate was generated over the safety of school-going children. Many recommendations were passed by committees. After all these years, doesn't it make sense to go back to that tragedy and take a fresh look at the safety measures



adopted for the safety of children? There are occasions, when reporters have done major stories, by just looking at events of the past and then deciding to do a follow-up. Let us look at one example. In last year's Akshardham operation in Gujarat, one of the commandos of the elite National Security Guard (NSG), was critically injured. The media portrayed him as a national hero for a few days and then he was forgotten. One year later, a correspondent from the Indian Express thought of him and he just made a few calls to check the fate of that commando. Just because he wanted to do a follow up, he stumbled upon a great story. He found that the commando, Surjan Singh Bhandari was still struggling for life in a hospital and nobody was doing anything for him. Here, I reproduce the entire report for your benefit:

Will someone get a hospital bed for this Akshardham hero in Delhi?

***So that mother can meet NSG commando son who's in coma***

**Ahmedabad, September 9:** While the Gujarat police are having a hard time plugging the holes in their version of who are behind the Akshardham strike, few are sparing a thought for this unsung hero.

Since the day he stormed the temple to help flush out the militants, 25-year-old National Security Guard commando Surjan Singh Bhandari hasn't woken up. Four bullets hit him, two in the legs, one in the brain and one in the neck. Almost a year later, he lies comatose in the Civil Hospital. And his family continues to wait.

Wait for him to be transferred to a hospital in New Delhi so that his it's easier for his mother-she lives in an Uttaranchal village-to see him more often.

Although Minister of State for Home Harin Pathak says all arrangements to move him have been made, nothing tangible has moved.

Said Surjan's younger brother Surjeet Singh who met Pathak recently. "We want Surjan to be shifted to Delhi as soon as possible and the Minister has promised assistance," he said.

When contacted, Pathak says: "I have spoken to the NSG director (R H Moosahary) and Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani and we will provide the best facilities to Surjan and his family."

Kanchan, Surjan's elder brother posted with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, is here to be with Surjan. "We are from Renou, a village in Uttaranchal. It's really difficult for us to keep moving between home and Ahmedabad, my mother wants to visit Surjan frequently but it's tough for her to travel from Uttaranchal to Ahmedabad," he says.

When contacted, Moosahary told *The Indian Express* tonight: "We have requested the All India Institute of Medical Sciences for a seat. AIIMS has not got back to us yet."

Sources said AIIMS has asked for details about the patient including his case history to determine whether shifting him would be possible.

While the AIIMS director was not available for comment, the official spokesman said he had no information about the issue.

“The patient is in a state where no surgery is required, he will just need nursing care which can be provided at any well-equipped hospital. There is a criterion for shifting patients in such condition. We have to make sure nothing goes wrong during the process of shifting,” said Shakti Gupta, Chief Public Relations officer at AIIMS.

Asked about the risk of moving him, Dr Jayesh Shelat who has been attending on Singh since Day One said: “It is not very risky to move him. If and when that happens, they will be carrying a portable ventilator, senior doctors will accompany him. The CAT scan done yesterday evening shows no change in his condition.”

Even officials at the Union Health Minister Sushma Swaraj’s office were unaware of the development. “The minister’s office has not been informed about the requests, we will speak to NSG authorities and try to resolve the issue,” said an official.

Surjan joined Garhwal Rifles in 1997. He was later inducted into the NSG and served a stint in Jammu and Kashmir.

“Akshardham was a big operation for him, he took it as a challenge and is still fighting to survive,” said Sehlat.

Doctors said his pulse is stable and he is given egg yolk, fruit juices and milk through a tube.

Earlier, the brothers had faxed a letter to Chief Minister Narendra Modi requesting the state government to bear Surjan’s medical expenses in Delhi too. “He came to defend the Akshardham temple, so the Gujarat Government should pay for him,” Surjeet said, adding that all have agreed to do the needful.

When, is the question.

**Assignment:** Learn more about the infamous Behmai massacre and discuss how Phoolan devi shot into fame after this incident.

#### Notes:

## LESSON 7

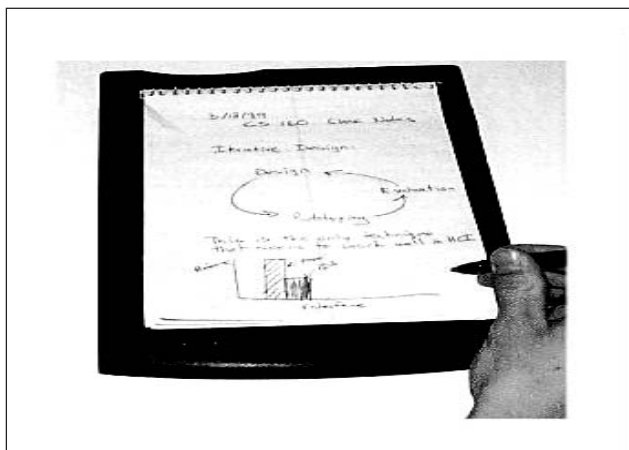
### LISTENING AND NOTE-TAKING SKILLS

#### Objective

This may sound very basic, but many-a-reports have been ruined because of the lack of listening and note-taking skills. This lesson aims at imparting practical knowledge to the students, so that they would not be caught dead with a blank mind and a blank note book.

#### Listening and Note-taking skills

Suppose you conduct an interview with an eminent politician and during the course of the interview, he opens up and gives you a lot of strong-worded quotes. You are very happy



and think of it turning into a great report. But the moment you reach your office, you cut a sorry figure. The reason: you don't remember the exact words of the politician. It is no use doing a brilliant interview if you can't remember a word of it, once you step outside the door. Some system is required to ensure that you remember what was said in order to write the story. That is where listening and note-taking skills come into picture.

Keeping this in mind, reporters are encouraged to make maximum use of their note books. Using a note book is easy. It is cheap and unlikely to be stolen. And the best part is – you can refer to your notes, even weeks after you write that report.

If you are covering a meeting, write the story slug and the date on the top of the page of your notebook. A slug is basically a title of the event/issue you are covering. Say if you are covering a press conference addressed by BJP leader Pramod Mahajan on Lok Sabha elections, your slug can be Pramod-Lok Sabha.

There are times, when you are covering a seminar, which is attended by half-a-dozen eminent personalities. For eg. The CII has organised a seminar on Indo-American military ties. You are sent to cover the event and it happens more than often that you mismatch names with the designations of people/speakers in the seminar. To avoid getting into such a situation, it is advisable that you write the names of the speakers along with their designation and the names of the company they represent.



For taking notes, it is not necessary to know shorthand. While taking notes, most reporters develop some form of speed writing or learn “desi shorthand.” Taking notes is most vital in case of developing quotes later in the newsroom. Quoting somebody means that you will have to exactly remember the words used by that person in order to be able to write them later.

Some reporters are comfortable with dictaphones. Using dictaphones seems to be easy, but it can be pain at times. Dictaphones – even the ultra modern ones – produce/absorb lots of irrelevant sounds in bargain that may render the interview useless. That means you cannot hear what the person has said. So it is always better to take notes.

Using a dictaphone also makes the person conscious and he is less forthcoming on various issues. The moment you switch on a dictaphone and keep it in front of a person, he will not be his real self. But yes, dictaphones can be real useful when it comes to what I term as “read between the lines”. For example a foreign diplomat makes a statement that drips of diplomatic language. So once you are back, you might have to analyse that statement and draw your conclusions.

The example of NSCN (IM) leader Thuengaling Muivah reiterating his party's stand on the issue of Greater Nagalim. (Read about the Naga insurgency and the issue of Greater Nagalim. It shall also be discussed in the class).

Note taking skills also make sure that you are credible. For example a man from Kashmir's Baramulla district will get irritated if a news report has not spelt the name of his place correctly. You tend to lose credibility in such case.

But sometimes, even taking notes can make an interviewee conscious. Putting your notebook on a table and leaning forward to scribble down details can be intimidating for him. You must realise that it is a game of body language. So you must know how to make the interviewee comfortable. Sit back in your seat and keep the note book on your lap. That keeps the note book away from the interviewee, allowing him or her to relax.

## Golden Rules of Listening

- Focus on what he is saying, not what you are going to ask next. Reporters who lack confidence often do not listen because they are too busy worrying about what to say next. They are afraid they might make themselves look foolish. You must remember that responding to the answers makes the interviewee feel that you are listening. It also makes the interview more conversational.
- Listen for what isn't said. When you are interviewing somebody, it also makes sense to watch them properly. Observing the other person's body language and the way he speaks is very important as that makes easy the task of painting a real picture. Learn also to listen with your eyes.
- Block out personal intrusions. Suppose, you are going to interview somebody and on the way, you get a flat tyre or you have a fight with your friend. When you reach the venue of the interview, the flat tyre or the fight will be in your mind and you will not be able to concentrate on the interview. That is why it is advisable to block all the thoughts at least till the interview is over, so that you can listen and observe properly.



## Golden Rules of Notes Taking

- Be prepared. Bring extra pens etc. Though it may sound very basic, but think of the embarrassment you have to face, if in the mid of an interview, your pen stops working.
- Use key words. Learn how to abbreviate. That is what shorthand is all about. Say you have to write President. Develop a habit of writing Pdt.
- Slow the pace. It happens sometimes that the interviewee has finished answering your question and you are still writing. But the silence seems so awkward that you jump to the next question. That is something you should avoid. Take your time to write and only when you are through should you proceed to the next question.
- Request repetition. If you haven't understood something or you haven't been able to note properly, don't hesitate in asking the interviewee to repeat that portion.
- Praise. Make eye contact. It is again very important that in the mid of the interview, you must sort of make the interviewee feel that the interview is just happening fine and you are able to understand. So if he says something,

which you like, don't hesitate in make a remark like: "that was interesting." Nods of the head, hand movements, gestures and facial expressions also make a lot of difference.

- Stand and deliver. More than often, you will be supposed to take notes, while you are standing. Research has proved that taking notes in a standing position is slightly difficult than taking notes while sitting. So you should develop a habit of taking notes, while you are standing.
- Save your notes. There are times, when you need to refer back to your notes, days or even weeks after, you file your report based on your notes. There are times, when your report may cause some controversy. At times like these, you would want your notes intact.

**Assignment:** In the class, a mock press conference will be held. After the presser, the floor will be left open for students to ask questions. Based upon that presser, the students are required to write a news report.

## A System for Effective Listening and Note-taking

You can **think** about 4 TIMES FASTER than a lecturer can **speak**. Effective LISTENING requires the expenditure of energy; to compensate for the rate of presentation, you have to actively intend to listen. NOTE-TAKING is one way to enhance listening, and using a systematic approach to the taking and reviewing of your notes can add immeasurably to your understanding and remembering the content of lectures.

### Before The Briefing

- Develop a mind-set geared toward listening.
- Test yourself over the previous lecture while waiting for the next one to begin.
- Skim relevant reading material to acquaint yourself with main ideas, new technical terms, etc.
- Enhance your physical and mental alertness: eat a snack before class, sit in the front and/or centre of the room, focus your attention on the speaker.
- Choose notebooks that will enhance your systematic note-taking: a separate notebook with full-sized pages is recommended for each course. You might wish to mark off the pages into one of the formats shown on the lower part of this page.
- INTEND TO LISTEN.

### During Briefing

- Listen for the structure and information in the lecture.
- Resist distractions, emotional reactions or boredom.
- Pay attention to the speaker for verbal, postural, and visual clues to what's important.
- Label important points and organizational clues: main points, examples.
- If speaker has an accent you find hard to understand or has mannerisms you find distracting, relax and attend even more carefully to the content of the lecture.
- Be consistent in your use of form, abbreviation, etc.
- Ask questions if you don't understand.



- Instead of closing your notebook early and getting ready to leave, listen carefully to information given toward the end of the briefing; summary statements may be of particular value in highlight main points; there may be possible quiz questions, etc.

#### After Briefing

- Clear up any questions raised by the speaker or by the colleagues
- Fill in missing points or misunderstood terms from text or other sources.
- Edit your notes, labeling main points, adding recall clues and questions to be answered. Key points in the notes can be highlighted with different colors of ink.
- Make note of your ideas and reflections, keeping them separate from those of the speaker.

#### Periodically

- Review your notes: glance at your recall clues and see how much you can remember before rereading the notes.
- Look for the emergence of themes, main concepts, methods of presentation over the course of several lectures.

#### Notes:

## LESSON 8

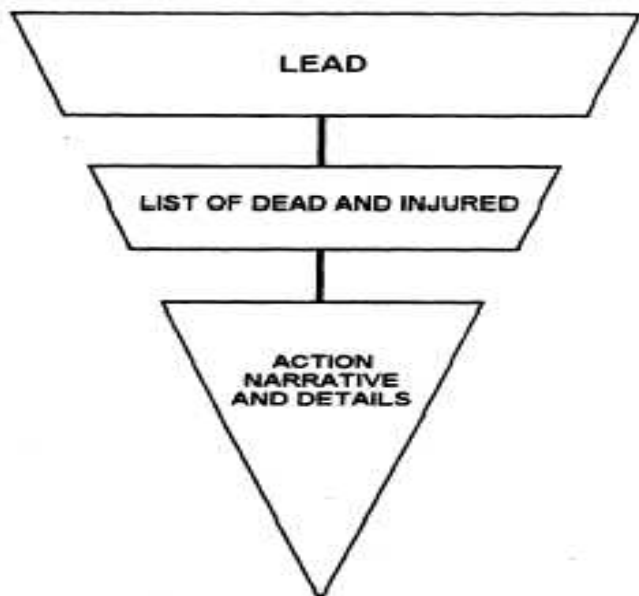
### THE STRUCTURE OF A NEWS REPORT

#### Objective

This lesson will make the students understand the structure of an average news report. After this lesson, students should be able to write a news report based on initial inputs with both hard and a soft lead.

#### The Structure of a News Report

To understand the structure of a news report, let us



take a look at the following news report, which appeared in the Delhi edition of the Hindustan Times:

#### Carjackers Leave Executive Stranded in Faridabad Car Robbery Near Pvr Anupam Cinema

HT Correspondent

(New Delhi, December 20)

Four men robbed a 45-year-old MNC employee of his Maruti Alto car and Rs 900 in south Delhi on Friday night. The men, armed with knives, forced into Robin Sarkar's car a few metres from the crowded PVR Anupam in south Delhi. They drove the car till Faridabad before throwing him out.

The incident took place around 10 p.m. on Friday. "We have certain leads in the case and expect to nab the carjackers within a day or two," said DCP (South) Vivek Gogia.

Sarkar, who works at Whirlpool had gone shopping with his wife Rini to the J-block market in Saket. Finding no parking space, he remained seated in the car (DL-2C Z 7275) while his wife went to the market.

The police said Sarkar had parked his car a little distance away from the cinema hall, in a secluded and unlit spot. He was standing beside the car when four men in their twenties came up and got inside

One of them took out a small knife and asked him to get inside. Sarkar did not resist. They drove to Faridabad where Sarkar was asked to hand over the money in his wallet. "After snatching the money they kicked him out of the car," said an official. The police believe the men were not professionals. Sarkar's wife had seen the men leaving with Sarkar and had informed the police. PCR vans had cordoned the road to Faridabad and also searched areas in Faridabad but with little luck. One of the police teams found Sarkar in Faridabad and brought him to home.

The first line in the report, which begins with "Car jackers...." is the headline of the report. The **Headline** plays a very important role. It hooks the reader to the story and forces him to probe further. It has to be catchy.

Now look at the next line, just below the headline. "Car robbery near PVR Anupam Cinema" is the **Sub-Headline**. It gives further information about the news report. It also serves the same purpose – it is a bait that lures the reader to read the story.

After the dateline (New Delhi, December 20), we move on to the main story. It starts with the focus of the story. What is the story all about? Ok this story... four men robbing a young executive of his car and money near a crowded place like PVR Cinema complex and then driving him off to Faridabad. This is the **Lead** of the story.

In a news report, the importance of **Quotes** cannot be overlooked. If there is some information you are giving, you need to attribute it to somebody – in this case a Police Officer. So in this story, you will notice that DCP South Delhi Vivek Gogia is saying that they have a few leads in this case.

Attribution tells the reader where you got your information. But take care not to attribute too much. It can clutter a report. So when should you use it?

- If you know the information is factual and you witnessed it or have firsthand knowledge that it is true, you may eliminate the attribution. If you received the information by telephone, as in Police stories, attribute it to your source.
- Whenever you are saying anything accusatory, as in crime or political stories, you must attribute the information. For example, a victim of an accident tells you that the Police reached very late. This is an allegation and you have to attribute it.

There are times, when you start the story with a **Soft Lead**. Take the same story... it could also be written in the following manner:

Robin Sarkar waited outside his car, with a hand on its bonnet. He was listening to devotional songs, while waiting for his wife to come back from Saket's J-block market. But only Gods would not come to his help.

Four men, in their twenties, came up suddenly and got inside. One of them took out a small knife and asked him to get inside. Sarkar did not resist. They drove to Faridabad where Sarkar was asked to hand over the money in his wallet.

Now in this case, I have started the report with a soft lead – basically a narrative lead. Then in the second paragraph, I am coming to the main news; the lead. This delayed lead, in such a case, is known as **Nut Graph**.

There is no set rule to determine whether you should use a hard-news lead or a soft lead. The choice is really a matter of judgement.

#### Leads to Avoid

There are some leads, which as a reporter, you should avoid. They don't work for a variety of reasons.

- **Good news – bad news leads:** Here is a sample:

Some good news for the beer lovers in Delhi: The administration has given indication that it might make Beer available in departmental stores across the city.

Now a lead like this is cliched and it is used so often that they are boring. They are also judgemental.

- **Crystal Ball leads:** These leads seem to be coming from an alchemist's kitty. Reporting is not about predicting the future. That is an astrologer's job. Sample this:

Suresh Kaushik never imagined when he boarded the Rajdhani Express that it was going to meet with an accident. Would he have been stupid enough to board it if he had known?

- **Nightmare leads:** These are also dream leads, usually relating to a past experience. Every bad experience someone has does not have to be compared to a nightmare. These leads appear in both hard and soft leads. Sample this:

The nightmare became reality for Shamima, when the soldiers of Indian Army knocked at her door.

- **Weather – report leads:** These leads set the scene by describing the weather. For example: It was a hot and humid day, when the Delhi Government decided to ban smoking in public places.

Avoid using the weather as a lead when it is not related to the story.

#### How to Find Your Lead

To find a lead that will work for you in a particular story, identify the nut graph first. Ask yourself what the main point of the story is. Then ask some of these questions to find your lead:

- **Reader interest:** What would the reader find most interesting about this subject?
- **Memorable item:** What was the most memorable impression or fact?
- **Focus on a person:** Is there someone who exemplifies the problem or issue? If you tell a story about this person or show the person in action, will it lead to the point in the nut graph?
- **Descriptive approach:** Will a description of the scene relate to the focus?

- **Mystery approach:** Can you tease the reader with a surprise that leads to the nut graph?
- **Build on a quote:** Is there a great quote to back up the lead? If so, write the lead so it refers to the quote without repeating it.
- **Contrast:** Would a then-and-now approach work?
- **Problem/solution:** Can you set up a problem so the reader wants to discover the solution?
- **Narrative storytelling:** If you were just telling a good story, how would you start? Can you reconstruct the events to put the reader on the scene?

Accidents can happen anytime and anywhere. Because they are unpredictable, unfortunate and undesirable as a source of news, the reporter who covers and writes accident stories must be especially careful in handling them. Accidents involve both life and death. They may cause human suffering, heartache and anxiety. Also, because accidents sometimes result from carelessness or negligence, they may injure reputations or lead to disciplinary action. A careless word or phrase in an accident story may cause great damage. Therefore, **accuracy is of utmost importance** in the accident story. In collecting information for a story, the journalist must be careful to avoid gossip and conjecture. You must be able to seek out proper authorities and get your information right the first time. You may not have the opportunity to verify it later. You must stick to the concrete facts, resist any temptation to hide or cover up legitimate news, maintain high standards of good taste and, above all, be familiar with security restrictions and other limitations. You must know what to release and what not to release. Never will your abilities as a reporter be put to a more exacting test.

#### Structure

In any accident where a number of persons are killed or injured, the quickest and simplest way of writing the story is to use the accident/disaster story structure shown in figure. This structure is adaptable to all types of accidents and enables you to get the most important facts into the beginning of the story. **Lead** Consider this example: "Two San Diego sailors were killed and three others seriously injured today when their automobile blew a tire and smashed into a tree on Highway 80, five miles east of El Cajon." Note that the lead answers all of the five Ws, but does not elaborate on any of them. The most important facts in any accident story are the number and identities of the casualties and the cause of the accident. This lead immediately satisfies the reader's initial curiosity about these facts, but more detailed explanations are saved for the body of the story. Since five people are involved in this accident, it would not be practical to list their names and complete identities in the lead. Therefore, they are included in the next segment of the story. **Casualty List** The casualty list contains the names, ranks or ratings, ages, next of kin, hometown addresses and other pertinent information available on the dead and injured. A casualty list for the

above lead might be presented in the proceeding manner (listing should be in alphabetical order to facilitate readers in scanning the list for known names): Dead are: Seaman Apprentice David K. Becker, 19, son of Mr. and Mrs. Daniel M. Becker of 821 Sherman Dr., St. Louis, Mo. Seaman Jackson B. Painter, 22, son of Mr. and Mrs. Carl H. Painter of 680 Deamond St., Elmsdale, R. I., driver of the car. 3-18

### Leads and Conclusions

These are the hardest parts of stories. They determine whether readers will commit to a story, and how readers feel when they put a story down.

### Beginnings

The key to a lead—whether it’s for reportage, feature, review or whatever—is identifying the *news peg*; that is, why are you writing the story in the first place? Why should readers care? And more than that, what parts of the story will the readers care about the most? Often there are side issues, or questions you’ll eventually need to answer in order to keep readers from finding the story incomplete. Tackle these things later in the story.

When you first get the story, figure out what the story’s news peg is (maybe with the help of the editor who assigned it to you), and keep it in the back of your mind all the time when you’re gathering information. List the questions that readers might ask and make sure you answer them as you go along.

Sometimes the news peg will be very abstract, and the lead will follow in kind: “Grinnell students can expect to pay higher tuition next year” does very well as a first paragraph. But in feature, account, review and opinion stories—that is, everything but hard news—you should find a more creative way to present the news peg.

Most account and feature leads, therefore, turn to concrete: they select an anecdote that somehow illustrates a central idea in the story. Here’s the beginning of a profile that focused on its subject’s application of the student-at-Grinnell experience to the prof-at-Grinnell experience:

When asked about her experience going from being a student to a professor at Grinnell, Sarah Purcell ’92, History, is disappointingly secure.

Any embarrassing first-day moments? No, the first day was surprisingly quiet, Purcell said.

Any big surprises? No, she said, life is pretty much as expected.

Reviews and opinion pieces can be harder to make concrete, but they should be no less engaging. Sometimes you can achieve this with an appealingly concise abstraction: “Credibility can bite my ass” was the first line of a CD review discussing Grinnell’s natural deficiency of musical indie cred. Other times, you can turn to a surprising fact. A column exposing the source of ARH’s desk-chairs began:

When an institution is an especially good client of a company, the institution is often recognized through discounts, partnerships, and even a branded line of merchandise. Grinnell College must be an excellent client of Iowa Prison Industries, because we got an entire suite of furniture named after us.

One final note about leads: honesty is more important in a lead than anywhere else. A whiff of artificiality in a lead is enough to contaminate an entire story. Often, writers are tempted to open

a story with a sweeping generalization or a zealous endorsement. Such cheerleading only interferes with the story. There is no need to open a feature story about an upcoming dance concert by praising the dancers’ skill; judgments aren’t facts, and they don’t make for interesting stories. Find the news peg, and let your readers make judgments for themselves when they attend the concert.

### Endings

Fortunately, these aren’t as hard as leads. The most important thing to remember is that, unlike academic papers, newspaper articles have *conclusions* without having *summaries*. Do all your summarizing in your lead and your nut graf. Instead, use the conclusion to bring a story into a circle—for example, by referring again to a character from your lead—or to open up a new perspective or synthesis. Often, a good quote can do the job: look especially for someone who has something relatively unexpected and insightful to say about the “big picture” of a story.

### Structure

#### Nut grafs

A lead, whether it’s abstract or concrete, can’t do everything on its own. You need to describe the entire situation behind the news peg, including the lurking facts that people may not be talking about very often. Feature leads, in fact, usually avoid mentioning the news peg explicitly; feature writers draw readers in with their creativity and then let readers know why the story is interesting several paragraphs later.

All this work should be done by a *nut graf*. Nut grafs add context and background to a story, and usually set up a frame for the story to work within. A nut graf in a story about two major changes to the college’s alcohol policy would mention them both and quickly explain any recent trends in alcohol consumption or policy changes.

Contrary to its name, a nut graf can be two or even three paragraphs long if it needs to be. A nut graf is usually very dry, so the sooner you can get it over with, the better. Still, the best nut grafs include vibrant verbs or metaphors that burn a structure for the story into the reader’s consciousness. Once this is done, readers can easily stack all the information you’re about to provide into the neat framework that you’ve built for them.

#### Inverted pyramids vs. hourglasses

The classic style of newswriting, with the ‘most important’ facts at the top, followed by less and less important facts in descending order is called the *inverted pyramid*. Inverted pyramid leads begin with who, what, when, where, why, and how, all in a few sentences. Then comes the nut graf, and so on.

This style was developed by the first national newspapers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and at the time it was ideal. Because news from across the country was so hard to come by, newspapers were often the only source for hard facts, and readers could get those efficiently from inverted-pyramid leads. Moreover, when newspapers were laid out on printing presses, the process of arranging stories on the page was devilishly complicated, and inverted-pyramid style let editors chop off the bottom of the story—the narrow “point” of the pyramid—without having to worry about losing the most important facts.

As described above, however, the inverted pyramid has disadvantages. Its artificiality can seem distant and dispassionate, and the decreasing order of importance gives readers little motivation to read a story beyond the first few paragraphs, causing them to miss important complexities or powerful details. Arranging facts into order of importance, rather than chronological order, breaks up the narrative flow of a story and can make it more confusing. Finally, news analysts have increasingly realized that facts don't have objective 'importance'; that's a subjective, and therefore unreliable, value judgment.

All these problems are mitigated in first-rate inverted-pyramid stories: reportorial prose need not be boring, and putting the important facts up front is certainly convenient for the reader. The best reportage crackles sharply enough, without distracting from the subject matter, to give the reader a reason to read on, if only to enjoy the writer's skill. All the same, many of these problems are solved by a newer structure for news stories: the *hourglass*.

The name refers to a modified inverted pyramid; hourglass stories start with some important facts, move into minutiae for a while, and then set up an important conclusion at the end. But good hourglass stories aren't just inverted pyramids that have been rearranged: they advertise their nature with a more creative feature lead (see above) and move naturally from one area of inquiry to another before drawing the reader up to the conclusion. To do this, they often employ narrative techniques like chronology, dialogue, and characterization to drive the story forward.

The *SC&B* sometimes runs inverted pyramid stories, for harder news pieces where the facts tend to speak for themselves, but most of our content is more hourglassy.

### **Transitions and subheads**

Stories should flow intuitively from one area of inquiry to the next: after you present a given piece of information, anticipate the questions your reader will ask, and answer them in the next section. Use a sentence or two of your own prose to bridge one area of inquiry to another: "faculty members thought otherwise" or "meanwhile, the city council was debating the same issue."

Sometimes, especially with very long or complicated stories, you simply can't include everything without a sudden jolt at some point. That's all right. You or your editor can insert a *subhead* within the text of the article, signifying that a new topic will be brought up.

**Assignment:** In the class, a report will be provided to the students. The students will be required to change the lead of the story and convert it into a soft lead. The students will also be required to identify the nut graph of the story.

### **Notes:**



## LESSON 9

### HANDLING INTERVIEWS

#### Objective

In this lecture, the students will get familiar with various types of interview. They would also get a hang of the kind of preparations needed to be done before conducting an interview. From dressing to homework, the lesson has it all.

Interviewing is the backbone of reporting. It is a skill, which every reporter must acquire and acquire well. Interviewing is almost certainly the most important way that reporters get the information that forms the basis of their news reports. Like playing a guitar or dancing on a beat, some people seem to have a gift for it, while others do not. Yet for all these activities, there are basic principles to learn, and those who spend the time learning them will be better than those who do not. Being a brilliant interviewer may be an art form; being a competent one is not.

A newspaper reporter conducts an interview for mainly two reasons: One, as a research for a news story. Two, as a performance; part of the news report. Based upon these, interviews can be categorised into following types:

1. **The one-to-one short interview:** Suppose you are covering a bomb blast. After speaking to eye-witnesses, it is important for you to speak to a senior police officer, who is present on the spot. By doing this, you will get the required quotes and may be some information too. For example, the presence of a mysterious man in the area, just before the blast.
2. **The one-to-one interview:** Ceasefire has just been declared on the Line of Control, between Indian and Pakistan. As a reporter, you may want to speak to somebody, to know the situation on the ground. This may involve fixing up an appointment with the Defence Minister. Such interviews are long and detailed.
3. **The Press Conference interview:** Many-a-times, politicians or high ranking government officials call a press conference to put forward their point of view. For example former Chattisgarh Chief Minister Ajit Jogi called a press conference to make his stand clear in the infamous Cash-for-MLA scandal. An arrangement like this is very convenient for the organiser because he is able to address many journalists at the same time. For a reporter this may prove to be an anomaly, because in a press conference, reporters from various media organisations get the same information.
4. **Vox Pop:** It is a Latin term meaning 'voice of the people'. Suppose, the Indian Government has refused to let the Indian cricket team play with the Pakistani team, till Pakistan ends what India terms as 'cross-border terrorism'. On an issue, like this, a newspaper may decide to take the view of people into account. So a reporter will speak to a cross section of people and take their views. So someone

may say that sports should not be sacrificed at the altar of politics and somebody might be of the opposite view: no cricket till Pakistan stops aiding militants. Similarly, on a budget day, reporters may be sent to know the views of the people. Here, a housewife may complain about the increasing prices of domestic gas, while an executive may call cutting down sales tax on electronic goods as a welcome step.

5. **Grabbed Interview:** There are times, when to a reporter, finding a suitable quote, reaction or a comment may seem difficult because the person or the official involved may not be wanting to speak to the Press. At times like these, that person or official gets mobbed by members of the Press Corps. Put under such a trying situation, a word or two may escape from his mouth. That amounts to getting what is known as a grabbed interview. An example of this is the case of RK Sharma, the prime accused in the murder of the Indian Express journalist Shivani Bhatnagar. When he was being tried in the court, he refused to speak to the Press, but after repeated attempts by the media, he was almost forced to open his mouth and say, "law will takes its own course."

#### Preparations for an Interview

##### Fixing up an Appointment

The first thing you need to conduct an interview is fixing up an appointment with the concerned person. A reporter needs to call ahead to schedule an interview. And if you think ahead, deadlines almost always allow it. Even on daily newspapers, most articles are not written the day and hour an event occurs. When you call a person, identify yourself by name and publication. Give the nature of the news report.

##### The Art of Dressing

Dress with respect for the person you are interviewing. Make sure that you are dressed in formal clothes. Always remember, first impression is the last impression. There are times, when you may not be taken seriously, if you are not dressed properly. If you are handling beats like Business or Defence, it becomes altogether more important to dress formally. There have been incidences of people refusing to grant interview to journalists who did not deem it necessary to dress for the occasion. Suppose you have to cover a defence event, involving the takeover of the Army by a new Chief. God save you, if you are wearing a jeans, torn at the knees and a crushed T-shirt, which reads 'Hit Me'.

##### Conducting Research

With the mechanics of setting up and dressing for the interview taken care of, it is time to consider how to conduct the interview itself. Planning is important here. Preparation allows you to ask good questions and signals your subject that you are not to be

dismissed lightly. Read all that is available. Talk to those who know the subject.

Do your homework. There is very little more embarrassing than arriving for an interview and not knowing what has already been written about your subject. A question on the order of, “Well, Mr. Sharma, what is your portfolio?” almost guarantees a poor interview. Mr. Sharma almost immediately begins to look at his watch to try to figure out a way to get out of this. A far better question, in the same area, may be, “Can we talk about the changes that have occurred during your one year here at the Department of Northeast Affairs?”

A reporter from a reputed television channel went to famous artist Jatin Das and asked for an interview. “Ok fine,” said Jatin Das, “but do you know who I am?” The reporter had done no research and she replied, “Yes Sir, you are the father of Nandita Das.” Jatin Das was so infuriated that he asked the reporter to get out. Anybody would have done that. Now Jatin Das also happens to be the father of actress Nandita Das. But that is not his identity. He is known for his paintings, not as Nandita’s father. If the reporter had done some research, she would have known who Jatin Das is. As writer Tom Rosenstiel said, “A common ingredient of the superb interview is a knowledge of the subject so thorough that it creates a kind of intimacy between the journalist and the interviewee.”

#### Time Management

Respect your subject’s time. It is probably as valuable as your own. Try to schedule an interview at the source’s convenience. Make sure that you reach on time. If the appointment is for 5 p.m., be there at 4:55. Sources become irritated when they are kept waiting, and it makes a good impression to be just a few minutes early.

#### Establishing a Rapport

Think of your meeting with the subject as a structured but friendly conversation, not an interview. Try to establish a rapport with the person early on. You may want to wait a bit before pulling your notebook out. This meeting stage may determine how the rest of the interview will go. Do you share a common interest or friend? If so, mention that. Give some serious thought to the information you want to get from the news source and how to elicit those answers. But don’t be so focused on the point of the interview that you jump right in with substantive questions. An interview is also a social interaction; the best ones start with a minute or two of polite small talk about the weather, Tendulkar’s game or castrated bulls on Delhi roads.

I will give you an example from my own life. CPI leader AB Bardhan is supposedly a tough nut to crack. Reporters have always had a tough time, trying to extract a suitable quote or a substantive interview from him. One fine afternoon, I found myself in the lift of Ajai Bhawan, the CPI headquarters in Delhi, to be lifted up to Bardhan’s room on the second floor. After signalling me to take a seat in front of him, Bardhan got busy, looking at some documents. While my cameraman was setting up the camera, I looked around. I saw a towering portrait of revolutionary communist leader Che Guevara. “That is the most impressive picture of Che I have seen so far,” I

remarked. Bardhan looked at me and a faint smile passed through his lips. “A delegation from Lithuania gifted it to me.” In another two seconds, we started talking on diverse issues – from Mulayam Singh to Fidel Castro. The ice had melted and I had one of the most comprehensive interviews, any journo had with the communist heavy weight.

#### Dealing with Questions

Before you leave for an Interview, it always makes sense to make pointers on various issues, you’d be asking the interviewee. Experts advise against putting questions on paper. Reading from a list of questions guarantees a mediocre interview. It is one of the clearest signs of a beginner when a reporter arrives with questions all written out. It is far better to let the conversation follow its own path, with a little steering and nudging from the interviewer. If you put questions on paper, it will so happen, in most of the cases, that while the person is answering your question, you will be concentrating on your next question. Focus on what the source is saying, not on what you will ask next. Your next question will be better if you heard the answer to the last one. Listen critically.

#### Off and On Record

Generally, everything a source says in an interview is on the record, which means it can be used in a news article. By identifying yourself as a reporter and making it clear that you are doing a article, you have put your subject on notice that you are asking questions for publication and that whatever the subject says may well wind up in print. Most of a reporter’s work should be fully on the record. After all, your task is to find out things and tell your readers, not find out things and keep them to yourself. Sometimes a source may ask to tell you something off the record and you’ll need to do a little bargaining. When people say ‘off the record,’ what they usually mean is that the reporter can use the information but cannot attribute it to the source. A reporter should agree to “off the record” information only if there is no other way to get the information.

An anonymous source may be better than no source, but it is certainly not as good as an identified source. That is because the reader can judge the credibility of a source only when the reader knows the source’s identity. But people have all sorts of reasons for not wanting their names associated with information. People can get in trouble with their bosses if they speak to reporters if they are not supposed to. Whistleblowers may wish to expose something bad going on in a government office but fear for their jobs or even for their lives, as Satyendra Dubey’s case has proved. Any information that is negative about a particular person should never come from an anonymous source. If one politician wants to criticize another politician in public, for example, the critic should not be allowed to hide behind anonymity.

Assume that the conversation is “on the record.” If the subject asks for parts of it to be “off the record,” try to convince him/her otherwise. If unsuccessful, make sure you and the subject understand the ground rules. Does “off the record” mean you can use the material, but not with her name attached to it? Can you go to someone else and get the information on the record? Or does “off the record” mean you cannot use the information,

even without his name attached, and you can't go to someone else to get the information?

#### Using Direct Quotes

Direct quotes from your subject are essential for your story. They allow your reader to "hear" the person you are writing about. They also create the impression of objectivity, that you, the reporter, are simply telling the world about something that happened. But quotes must be 100 percent accurate. If you are not certain of every word of the quote, remove the quote marks and paraphrase. However, it is permissible to "clean up" bad grammar within a quote.

#### The Reality

Figure that there is material that your subject knows, will tell you and will let you report. That is the "reportable reality." There is another reality that the subject knows, will tell you, but will not let you report. This is the "private reality." There is a third reality that the subject knows but will not tell you, much less let you report. Strive to discover through every legal and ethical means this "actual reality" and report it. Remember, journalism is what somebody doesn't want you to print. Everything else is publicity.

Here is an example of a good Interview with supercop Kiran Bedi, conducted by an Internet journalist:

**Kiran Bedi**, the first and highest ranking woman in the Indian Police Service, turned 54 a few weeks ago. Bedi spent her birthday in New York, where she serves as Civilian Police Advisor to the United Nations. When Bedi escorted her interviewer from the front gates of the UN to her office, it was difficult for her to keep up with her pace. "Do you know you walk faster than an average New Yorker?" Bedi, a former Asian tennis champion, was asked, to which she promptly replied, "If I could I would never walk. I would just jog or even better, run."

Age has made little difference to the woman who was governor of the largest correctional (predominantly male) facility in the world — Tihar Jail in Delhi — which housed more than 10,000 inmates. With exceptional vision, Bedi implemented what are still considered revolutionary measures to reform prisoners, including yoga and sports activities.

Little wonder, then, that when Bedi walks the streets of any big city in the US, she gets "hundred percent recognition from Indian faces."

A few days before she left for a mission to Kosovo in Europe, Bedi spoke to our Correspondent.

What was your reaction at being offered the job at the UN?

It was a mixed bag. I was in the Special Commission in the Delhi Police. It was a very good position and a nice assignment. I had a good team and it was home. I got my promotion and was part of a core team. But the UN position was outstanding for an Indian. It was considered with general enthusiasm and I received it in a similar way.

How is your work different now?

My job at home was more hands-on and I am more comfortable with that. Here there is more pen and paper. It's more

theoretical though I have a great team which encompasses 16 nationalities. The challenge as far as diversity presents (*itself*) is exciting. At home, I have a ready team, whereas here I have to build one.

How have the past six months in your new job been?

I kept delaying my field missions for months because I wanted to thoroughly understand [*the UN's*] headquarter operations because you know, you don't want to make a goof. I wanted to find out what kind of advice they wanted.

How is the UN using your expertise to deal with policing issues in countries like East Timor?

My whole experience is beneficial to the UN. We are looking at the concept of country policing in failed States which requires not only a refurbishment but a renewal of their systems. It is like a back to school program for failed States where they have to unlearn their skills after their collapse and work with the UN to build new ones. The biggest indicator of good governance is security. No security means no growth. We deal with everything from recruitment to training to setting up police academies to management to administration to establishing procedures and so on.

Is that Overwhelming?

It isn't overwhelming because you have resources to back you up. We are only one part of a 500-strong peacekeeping force which in part of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We have a huge backup as far as military and logistics are concerned.

Since you now deal not with one country but several all over the world, is your job satisfaction greater than in India?

Job satisfaction is greater back home because there is greater visibility of the receiver. Here we have more anonymity. Over [*in India*] you cook for somebody and see them enjoying and tasting it. Here you cook and you don't know if it's liked, who is eating it or whether it is being eaten at all. The joy of satisfaction which I am really used to is not here.

What is it to live in New York City alone?

When I came here before, I used to shop all the time. Now the focus is on work. Work and back home. Work and back home.

During your book launch, you read a story from your book *As I See* about Indian-Americans coming together for a cause to benefit India. Is that something you feel strongly about?

I would love to see them coming together and take up a cause for India. I find them very well organized and prosperous but in segments. I would love to see them have a common program. They can take up one individual cause like girl education. That will be visible and impacting. It will then not be a drop in the ocean but rivers and lakes. Not little pipes or rivulets, but big ponds and oasis.

What would you say about the changing face of the Indian woman?

As far as their development is concerned, it's a natural process. If you want to hasten that process, you have to create lakes [*smiles*].

You joined the Indian police force more than 30 years ago. Have things become easier for women to join and be a part of it since then?

It was always easy. Now mindsets have opened and yes, there are many more capable women now.

How do you explain the paradox where the Indian police is on one hand considered irredeemably corrupt and on the other is one of the few in the world that has been conducive to the success of a woman like you?

It is this paradox that attracted me to the police force. The moon is dark on one side and bright on the other. It is the brightness of the Indian Police Service that attracted me and that brightness, as I saw it, was the power to correct. I saw the corrupt side but I knew what I could do with what I had.

You mean what you did at Tihar?

Yes. What we did at Tihar is unparalleled. It was a holistic program which had everything from training to education to ethics to spirituality. We created an inbuilt program that though not compulsory was trusted and attended by everybody.

Do you think it has been managed well after you left?  
Maybe not as enthusiastically.

Was it difficult to leave the jail and the program where you had invested so much?

I am a Gemini. We have split personalities. While at work, I am fully in it. I can be attached yet very detached. I have no feelings of remorse.

Wasn't It's Always Possible [a collection of Bedi's experiences in India and the US] to be written by a ghostwriter?

Yes, but it was not good work. There was no information and the spirit was missing. They (*the publishers*) changed the writer midway. I asked them, 'Am I going to now train the other one all over again?' I fought back, saying it's unethical and it's not acceptable to me. They (*the publishers*) sued me. Ultimately we had an out of court settlement.

I am not writing for money, I am writing to document. I was tremendously satisfied with the result. I was surprised that I liked writing so much. Now anytime I get an inspiring thought I immediately write it down.

As a writer who mostly writes about her experiences, does memory serve you well?

Yes, quite well.

Can you remember your first day in the police?

My first day in the police was July 16, 1972. I was the only woman in the IPS. I remember getting a lot of questions. Are you sure you want to do this? Have you thought about your family? Why did you choose to be here? There was a lot of amazement and doubt. I kept telling myself 'don't change your mind.' I was going by my *svadharma* [self-religion].

Will you miss New York after your one-year appointment with the UN comes to an end?

Never. I may miss it but home is home.

Which question are you asked most often?

I am usually asked about the dichotomies and paradoxes of India. I explain to them that India is a continent with three sections — the underdeveloped, developing, and developed. According to your experience you may find any of these situations true.

Where does what happened in Gujarat last year fit?

What happened in Gujarat is the product of a politicized system. It was a situation where a person allowed himself to be used by a user. It was not a systemic failure but a situational failure.

**Assignment:** Write a news report based on Kiran Bedi's Interview. The report should not exceed 350 words.

**Notes:**

[illegible]

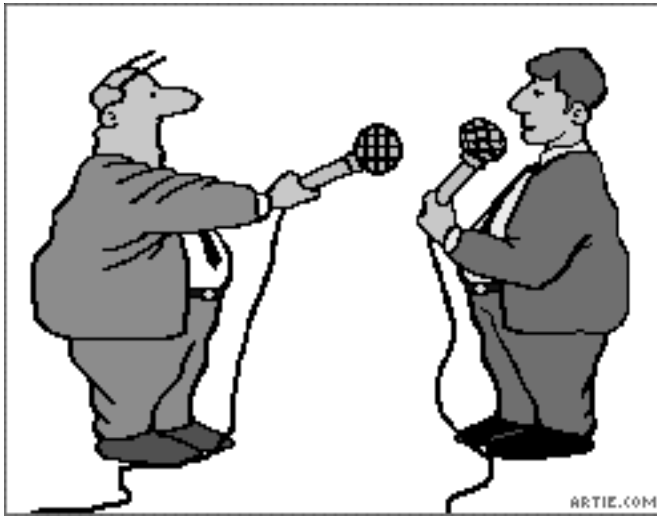
## LESSON 10

### INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

#### Objective

This lesson will throw light on various problems being faced while conducting an interview. These techniques are original and will come handy during various interview sessions.

While you are conducting an Interview, there are times, when you have to take care of few things. Here, I am discussing with you a few potential problems, you may face while conducting interviews and also their antidote. There are a few techniques and if you acquire the know-how of these techniques, you will never come back to the newsroom without a substantantive and effective interview.



#### These interview techniques are:

**Baghon mein Bahaar hai (Alternative Question) technique**  
There are times, when a politician or a public figure is involved in some sort of controversy and the last thing he wants to do is appear in front of a tv camera or a news-hungry journo, holding a notebook or a dictaphone in his hand. In a situation like this, if a reporter calls that person for an interview or a comment or a remark, the person will plainly refuse. More so, in front of the television cameras. Here, the alternative question technique comes into picture. You call that person and he refuses to come, because he knows that reporters will be asking him questions on a particular controversial issue. But if you tell him that the interview is regarding some other issue, he will come to you.

Let me make you understand with the help of an example. The Chief Minister of Karnataka SM Krishna had attended a function in his constituency, where children were made to marry each other. Now all of us know that the child marriage is a criminal offence. A local newspaper reported that the newly wed child couples were blessed by the Chief Minister himself and this created a furore in the state assembly. From there, the news

reached the political circles of New Delhi. Immediately after this incident, Krishna happened to be present at a Iftaar party hosted by the Congress supremo Sonia Gandhi. There the reporters trailed him and he plainly avoided the media. Then a reporter came to him all of a sudden and told him that he wanted his interview regarding Bangalore becoming the hub of Information Technology in India. Now this is an achievement and Krishna loved to talk about it. He fell into the trap. The reporter (in this case a tv journo) asked him a few questions regarding that irrelevant subject and then his third question struck Krishna like thunder and he could not escape it. I call it *Baghon mein bahaar hai*, based on the popular bollywood song in which the hero lures the heroine by asking her a few insignificant questions and then traps her into saying that she actually loves him.

#### Silent Treatment

At times, you are interviewing somebody. The interview is going fine and then it comes to asking the interviewee an emotional question. This is a tricky situation. Let me again you an example. Suppose Shahrukh Khan wanted to join the Army, but he was rejected by the services. Now this is an emotional subject for Khan. In the process of interviewing him – say on his latest movie, the reporter asks him a question about his past; the fact that he wanted to join the Army. When he is asked this question, he stops and doesn't speak for few seconds. The reporter assumes that he does not want to speak on this issues and moves on to the next question. This is something which a reporter should avoid. Give the interviewee some time. It is more than often that he wants to speak about the issue, but it takes him some time to jog through the memory lane and then answer a particular question. This is the silent treatment interview technique.

#### Interviewing

Journalists are writers, but writing is really only half their job. More difficult is the legwork of actually finding out what you're going to write about: the reporting. If you do a good job gathering information, your story will be easier to write and more interesting to read.

#### Preparation

##### Research

Find out some basic information both about the person you're interviewing and the topic you're interviewing the person about. Being at least semi-educated about the issue will help you establish a semblance of professionalism and will also help you prepare better questions. "Non-interview sources" on p. 8 for places to find this information.

##### Dress

This is entirely up to you. Just keep in mind that if we want to be taken seriously, we need to act like it sometimes. That means



that if you're meeting with a trustee to discuss diversity on the faculty, you might want to dress up a tiny bit.

#### Location

This depends on what you're working on. If you're writing a basic news article and you simply need the facts from a busy administrator, just go to her office. On the other hand, if you're doing a profile on a student with an interesting hobby, you'll get better notes if you actually arrange to *go* somewhere with him and have him show you what he does.

#### Establish Conditions

Tell the interviewee about how much of his or her time you think you'll need. Talk about recording if you think you'll be using it. Ask the interviewee for anything you should read to better prepare yourself for the interview. If you need to talk to someone off campus on the phone, talk to your editor: the *S&B* has a long-distance code, which is a lot easier to use than to try to get reimbursed later (though that's also an option).

#### Prepare Questions

There are two basic kinds of questions you'll use in an interview—*open-ended* and *closed-ended*. Open-ended questions allow the interviewee to be flexible and non-specific in answering. They're the "whys" and "hows" and "explains." Keep in mind that vague questions invite vague answers. Closed-ended questions pin down details. You don't often get good quotes from closed-ended questions, but you need to use them to make sure you have the correct information. An often-used strategy is to alternate between closed-ended and open-ended questions, rephrasing each time in order to get the kind of answer you need. Looking slightly stupid to the interviewee is much preferred to being wrong in print and looking stupid to everyone.

#### Once you're there

##### Establish Rapport

Think about the relationship you want to establish with the interviewee. Chances are he or she will be slightly uncomfortable being interviewed so it's often best to start off with some sort of non-threatening (read: boring) small talk. If the person is busy, however, this can backfire. It's often good to tell the person why you're talking to him or her; maybe somebody else you talked to said that this person would be an important and trustworthy source. Maybe it's important to get their perspective in order to get a balanced view of the topic. If you have a reason for talking to this person that might not be immediately apparent, get it out on the table.

##### Note-taking/Taping

Note-taking often makes interviewee nervous, so be discreet. Learn or create a shorthand of some sort or at least learn how to write in your notebook without having to look. There's no real way to learn to take good notes except by doing it a lot. You might try just taking notes from NPR or a boring class: writing down quotes without looking at your page. It'll get easier. Don't be afraid to use "could you say that again" or "just a sec" or "could you tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_" as stalling mechanisms to buy yourself time to catch up when writing. These continuations will often provide you with the greatest informa-

tion from the interview because they invite the subject to say it again or to continue in greater depth.

#### Confirm Details

Even if you think you know how to spell everything and where it is and when and such, ask anyway. We don't want to be wrong. Get names spelled slowly, even easy ones (even Smith has been known to be Smythe, for example), and recheck basic facts.

#### Don't just Listen for Quotes

Use all your senses. You should have notes other than just what the person said in your notebook. What was the person doing? looking at? What expressions were on his face? What's the setting? Were there sounds in the background? Even touch and smell can be useful. If you need to take your reader to a setting, there's nothing like the smell of fresh cut grass or hot asphalt.

#### Follow-up Questions

Don't be afraid to stray from your list of prepared questions. The interview should not proceed exactly as you expected, so follow it where it (and the interviewee) leads. Just make sure that you have covered everything you knew you needed to cover before you leave.

#### After you leave

##### Review your notes

If you tried not to look at your notebook while writing, it's probably a mess. As soon as you leave an interview, sit down, look at your notes and copy over what you think will be the important quotes. It's no fun to look at them the next day or whenever you want to write and find that you have no idea what any of it says.

#### Go Back

Don't be afraid of returning to your source via phone, email or even another interview if you have some holes that need to be filled or a later source brings up some issue you didn't cover. Some profile writers, in fact, swear by follow-up interviews: it's often the only way to find the right facts to bring a broad-ranging story into a coherent narrative. And again, it's better to look dumb to your source than to the whole campus when the paper comes out later.

#### Internet Interviewing

The possibilities offered by the Internet are great when it concerns social relations. Journalists are given the advantage of being able to get in contact with a lot of people throughout the world and gather first-hand information from the original sources - that is, by making virtual interviews with people wherever they are in the world, and at a very cheap price. Several of the tools which have been dealt with in the previous sections - email, IRC, or MOOs and MUDs - allow you to make virtual interviews. What you will find here is an assessment of the pros and cons of each tool that enables us to make journalistic interviews.

#### A Basic Distinction

For practical reasons, we will assume a basic distinction about the possible tools for virtual interviews. We will distinguish between real-time communication tools, such as IRC and the

IRC and MOOs and MUDs allow people to meet and interact. IRC is aimed at providing chat, enabling its users to literally talk to each other, in the sense that questions and answers actually follow each other. MOOs and MUDs are virtual environments where people can interact, based on telnet. You visit a MOO, meet interesting people and have a conversation with those people. In both cases, remember to always choose private communication with your interviewee, instead of the public kind which is also possible.

What are the pros of these means of communication for us as journalists? A considerable, interesting point is the environment they are based on. You can choose from an enormous number of IRC channels, which allow you to easily find people related to specific topics - any kind of topics. The same applies to MOOs: among the educational or research-oriented MOOs, you are quite likely to find who you are looking for. Without moving from your desk. Second and most important, both IRC and MOOs and MUDs allow real-time communication, unlike email. In real-time interviews, your interviewee can answer your questions immediately, and you can interact. That makes a difference.

The shortcomings of real-time communication tools are related to their interactivity. What we are used to, as real-time talk, is immediate question and answer. That is possible only partially on IRC, for instance. There still is a considerable delay between the subsequent messages, which sometimes makes the communication quite strange: you might ask a question and get an answer which was intended for the previous question. You have to type your message and submit it quickly, so it is not 100 % interactivity. However, the development is very fast and we are getting closer and closer to “true” real-time.

The alternative to the previous methods of virtual interviewing is email. With email, you formulate your questions, mail them to your interviewee, and patiently wait for an answer. Let's directly deal with pros and cons.

The pros, first of all. Remember what we said about real-time communication on the Net: it's still in progress, and the meaning of "real-time" should be taken with some caution - there are still delays and lots of possibilities for misunderstanding. An email user does not expect any interactivity. He/she will formulate the questions as clearly as possible, and very straightforwardly, to reduce the chances of misunderstanding. Moreover, the interviewee has all the time to answer the questions, can reflect about it, and thoroughly explain details. Email is great for research interviews, dealing with complicated or controversial matters. And remember, you can protect your sources and yourself by encrypting the messages with PGP.

Email also has a few shortcomings. Among them is of course the time delay between the mail containing your interview, and the mail from your interviewee. Moreover, nothing guarantees that your mail will be answered promptly, and in some cases it might be unsure whether it will be answered at all. A lot of people receive such large amounts of email every day that they have to choose which ones to open and read.

The interview is not the only tool available to journalists.

Interviews can provide quotes and some information, but unless you have infinite time and patience to schmooze and track down professors all day long, you'll need more in-depth information for some stories. Also, interviews are not the best place to find specific facts and numbers, especially about broad (national or international) trends. You can get numbers from interviewees, but always ask for citations. It's a lot more credible to cite the Center for Disease Control than a biology professor.

Paper research can be invaluable in providing background information, as well as specific data to include in your finished story. Look in old issues of the *SEB* (in the publications building for recent years, in Burling Library back to the 1800s), other newspapers, magazines or journals. The internet can be useful as well, but as always, be careful what you believe. You should usually cite online sources rather than simply treating them as fact.

Simple observation can be useful too. If you're writing an in-depth story on a sports team or a play, ask if you can sit around on the sidelines or in the back row during practice. People will become comfortable with your presence, making interviews easier later; you'll have more to talk about in those interviews; and you'll see interactions between the players that you can use in your story. Dialogue is a good technique to steal from fiction.

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## LESSON 11

## REPORTING FOR STORY AND MAINTAINING FOCUS

**Objective**

This lesson will enable students to understand the importance of maintaining focus and re-writing. After this lesson, the students should be able to identify the hidden news and establish focus, when it is not clear. Also, they should be able to effectively re-write a copy.

Now, let us talk about reporting a story. We don't write with words, explain writing coaches. We write with specific, accurate information. During my initial years, my editor urged me not only to bring basic information but also the sights and sounds. That is:

How did it look?

What sounds echoed?

What scents lingered in the air?

Why did people care?

You must develop a habit of getting out of the office. Storytellers are not tied to their desks. They are out in the streets. They are the reporters who show up before the news conference and hang around after it is over, the ones who interview the victim two weeks after an accident. They know that stories don't end after the arrest or the election.

There were times when a friend of mine, a Correspondent with the Hindustan Times, would not know what he was going to write about. But he knew, if he could go somewhere, he would be okay. It is important for reporters to witness when they write. And when you do witness, then you know there is no way the story won't be interesting.

Before you start writing, look for revealing details that put people on the page. In a good story a serial psychopath killer doesn't just hear imaginary voices, he hears them say, "Go kill a policeman."

Use the five senses in your reporting and a few others: sense of place, sense of people, sense of time, sense of drama. Write while you are reporting. Listen for quotes, find details, uncover information that you know will be in the story.

**Find a Focus**

The most important thing in the story is finding the central idea. Once you find that idea or thread, all the other anecdotes, illustrations, and quotes are pearls that hang on this thread. The thread may seem very humble, the pearls may seem very flashy, but it's still the thread that makes the necklace.

Don't wait until you're back at your desk to figure out what your story is about. Find your focus in the field, so you can search for the details, scenes, quotes, that support it. The deadline storyteller must be a radar screen, forever monitoring for information that is the heart of the story.

Good writers know that a story should leave a single, dominant impression. On deadline, finding a focus quickly is even more crucial.

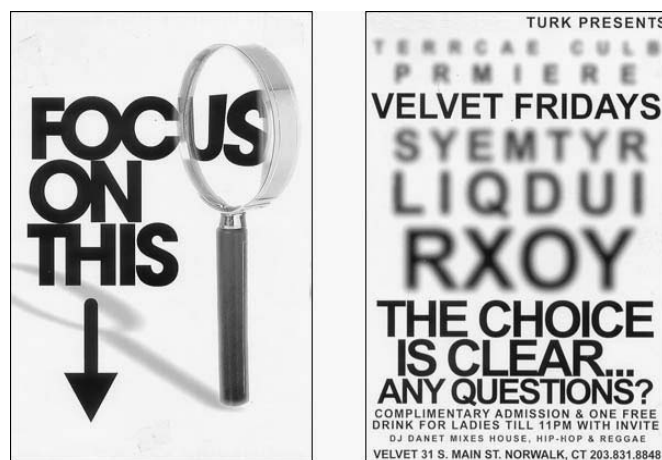
An effective focusing strategy came to me one desperate afternoon in The Zee TV newsroom as I battled to meet my deadline and the expectations of my editor for a newsy, well-written story. They are the two questions that help me keep track of the focus of my stories as I write and read and rewrite. To this day, I still write them at the top of my blank white sheet, even before the dateline. They are:

What's the news?

What's the point?

Answering the first question is usually easy. The second is often more difficult, but is more crucial. Forcing yourself to describe, concisely, what your story is about, its theme, may not only give you the focus; you also may hear the voice of your story.

Although by now I had my focus, rescue by an unlikely savior, I still didn't have a lead until I answered those two questions.

**Plan on the Fly**

Finding your focus will give you a destination. Now you need a map to get there. Some writers make a formal outline. Others jot down a list of the points they want to cover.

Writers are always looking for a new way to tell their story, to stretch the traditional forms, to experiment. Writing the lead often helps writers devise their plan of attack. Effective leads “shine a flashlight into the story,” as John McPhee of *The New Yorker* puts it. It is the first step of a journey. Just as important, if not more, is the last step, the ending. Create your own form.

Before you begin writing, make a list of the elements you know you want to include in your story. Number them in order of importance. Structure your story accordingly.

Look for pivotal moments that make story beginnings dramatic and irresistible:

- When things change;
- When things will never be the same;
- When things begin to fall apart.

“Think ‘short’ from the beginning,” advises Roy Peter Clark, co-author with Don Fry of *Coaching Writers: The Essential Guide for Editors and Reporters*. It’s a suggestion echoed in *The Elements of Style*, Strunk & White’s indispensable guide: “You raise a pup tent from one sort of vision, a cathedral from another.” Staying faithful to an 800-word length will help you jettison irrelevant information and avoid reporting detours that might be interesting but that will consume valuable time.

Once the writer accumulates a wealth of material—statistics, quotations, differing opinions—confusion often sets in. What does it all mean?

Clark offers several other strategies for keeping on track:

- Conceive and re-conceive the story in your head.
- Rehearse your lead on the way back to the office.
- Give yourself three minutes to write a five-word plan to structure the story.

#### Lower Your Standards

The discovery of the story continues when you sit down to write it. Writers use the draft to teach themselves what they know and don’t know about their subject. Saul Pett, a veteran feature writer for the Associated Press, once said, “Before it’s finished, good writing always involves a sense of discipline, but good writing begins in a sense of freedom, of elbow room, of space, of a challenge to grope and find the heart of the matter.”

- Write like hell, Clark says. Wait for the adrenaline to kick in.
- Put your notes aside before you start to write. “Notes are like Velcro,” says Jane Harrigan of the University of New Hampshire, author of *The Editorial Eye*. “As you try to skim them, they ensnare you, and pretty soon you can’t see the story for the details.” Her advice: Repeat over and over, “The story is not in my notes. The story is in my head.”
- Follow the advice Gene Roberts, legendary editor of *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and now managing editor of *The New York Times*, got from his first newspaper editor, a blind man named Henry Belk. “Make me see.”
- Lower your standards. Of course, you and your editor must apply rigorous standards—of accuracy and clarity, among others—but ignoring the voice that says, “This stinks” is the first step to producing copy on deadline in

time for revision. The wisest advice on the subject of writer’s block comes from poet William Stafford:

I believe that the so-called “writer’s block” is a product of some kind of disproportion between your standards and your performance...One should lower his standards until there is no felt threshold to go over in writing. It’s easy to write. You just shouldn’t have standards that inhibit you from writing.

That’s not as paradoxical as it seems.

With 35 years’ experience at deadline writing, AP correspondent Saul Pett said he stopped spending so much time on leads as he used to. “We make a mistake when we’re younger. We feel compelled to hit a home run in the very first sentence. So we spend a lot of time staring at the typewriter. I’ll settle for a quiet single, or even a long foul, anything that gets me started.”

#### Rewrite For Readers

Good writers are rarely satisfied. They write a word, then scratch it out, or in this computer age, tap the delete key, and try again. “Non-writers think of writing as a matter of tinkering, touching up, making presentable, but writers know it is central to the act of discovering,” says Don Murray, author of *Writing for Your Readers: Notes on the Writer’s Craft* from The Boston Globe.

The writing process isn’t a straight line. Often the writer circles back to re-report, re-focus, re-organize. Good writers are never content. They’re always trying to find better details, a sharper focus, a beginning that captivates, an ending that leaves a lasting impression on the reader.

- Role play the reader. Step back and pretend you’re reading your story for the first time. Does the lead make you want to keep reading? Does it take you too long to learn what the story is about and why it’s important? If not, are you intrigued enough to keep reading anyway? What questions do you have about the story? Are they answered in the order you would logically ask them?
- Shoot for a draft and a half. Write your story once through and then go back to polish, to re-order, to refine. If your time is limited, I’d argue that it’s best spent on your ending. That’s the last thing readers will experience. Make it memorable.
- Write as you Report

If you’re working a story by phone, you’re going to have some dead time, maybe a few seconds at a time when you’re on hold or waiting for someone to answer, maybe a few minutes while you’re waiting for people to return calls. Start putting the information from your last interview into story form. Even if you don’t know where it will go in the story yet, start writing paragraphs that will fit somewhere. Write a lede based on what you know so far. In addition to starting your writing, this helps sharpen the focus of the reporting that remains. Writing as you report allows you to continue your reporting closer to deadline. Writing in chunks, with frequent interruptions as you return to reporting, can lead to choppy writing. You need to fix this by using some of the time you save to read back through the story to polish and make it flow smoothly. If you are at the scene and need to run back to the newsroom to report, you can’t physically write as you report. But start writing or outlining the story







## LESSON 12

### THE IMPORTANCE OF RE-WRITING

When it comes to writing, all of us sit in front of the computer, think for a while and start punching. After a few minutes, the body of a news story starts emerging and then we stop. The news story is complete and we are happy. Everybody loves the way he or she writes and all think that their copy needs no revision. But that attitude doesn't pay. Experts say that only through repetition does the art emerge.

As Japanese artist Hokusai said, "All that I made before the age of 65 is not worth counting. At age 73, I began to understand the true construction of animals, plants, trees, birds, fishes and insects. At 90, I will enter into the secret of things. At 110, every dot will live."



You've spent hours gathering material and writing your story. Now it is time for the third step in the process—rewriting. To illustrate the value of rewriting, imagine that you are suddenly asked to sing Raag Bhairavi. You have no training or experience in music, so the experiment is likely to be a disaster. But suppose you have expert instruction and two months to prepare. No doubt, after this kind of practice, you will be much more successful.

So it is with writing. Writing takes practice. Your first draft will never be as good as your second draft, and the second will never be as good as the third. Remember, there is no such thing as good writing, only good rewriting. Or, as Roscoe Born, former *Wall Street Journal* editor, says, "What you have written is only preparation for what you are going to write." Here are some ways to improve your first draft:

**Read your story aloud.** Reading aloud is a great way to test for clarity and grace. Are your sentences too long? Is a paragraph confusing? Is your work conversational or stilted? "By reading

aloud you can hear every word. You also discover where the little words bump into each other and destroy the rhythm. Remember, an essential element for good writing is a good ear. You must listen to your own prose.



#### **Check to make sure your sentences are not too long.**

Sentence length should vary, but the average should be below 25 words. Reader comprehension decreases as sentence length increases.

**Check your writing for clutter.** Is your work full of twisted phrases, jargon, redundancies, long words where short ones will do, unnecessary qualifiers and modifiers? Strip every sentence to its cleanest components. The gardener knows that he must thin his plants after the first seedlings appear. Otherwise, his entire crop will suffer. The same holds true for writing.

#### **Make sure that you have used the subject-verb-object**

**construction** in most of your sentences. Avoid backing into sentences with long dependent clauses, especially introductory ones. Roy Peter Clark calls this "throat-clearing." Get to it.

The careful writer is precise. As Mark Twain said, "The difference between the right word and the nearly right word is the same as that between lightning and the lightning bug." A mechanic uses a 9/16-inch wrench because no other will do. A writer must be just as selective with her words. Ask yourself these questions to make sure you have been precise:

1. Are my sentences simple and strong? Write simple sentences, where the subject is close to the verb. Rely on strong nouns and verbs, not adjectives and adverbs. As Strunk and White said, "The adjective hasn't been built that can pull a weak or inaccurate noun out of a tight place." They have their place, but "it is nouns and verbs, not their assistants, that give good writing its toughness and colour."
2. Have I been concise? Prefer the short word to the long, the familiar to the fancy, the specific to the abstract. As English poet Robert Southey wrote, "If you would be pungent, be brief; for it is with words as with sunbeams—the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn."

3. Is my writing correct? Your work must conform to the basic conventions of grammar, spelling and punctuation. These are the grease that lubricates the wheels of communication. Without them, communication becomes difficult, if not impossible.
4. Do my sentence lengths vary? If you want to convey a sense of action, tension or movement, use short sentences. A series of long sentences slows down the reader and conveys a more relaxed mood. A good writer uses a variety of sentences—long ones, short ones and those in between.
5. Have I used transitions? Lead the reader from one section to the next with transitions. They are your bridges. They assure the reader that you have a plan. Repeat key words or phrases. Use words like: now, but, and, however, since. These are the links that tie a story together.
6. Have I been sensual? Appeal to as many senses as possible: sight, sound, smell, taste and touch. Let your reader see what you saw and heard what you heard. You did note the sounds, smells and textures while you were reporting, didn't you? "We must put all our senses to work," said James Kilpatrick.
7. Have I used comparisons? Compare and contrast your subject to something familiar. Do this with a simile or its first cousin, the metaphor. With these devices, the writer draws a word picture.
8. Have I provided examples and dialogue? Tell the story through the words and actions of your characters. This allows your reader to be an eyewitness. "An ounce of example is worth a ton of generalization," said Henry James. And from Tom Wolfe: "Realistic dialogue involves the reader and defines character more completely than any other single device."
9. Have I written about people? Write about people, not programs, policies or procedures. The latter are worthy subjects, but only as they apply to people.

#### Principles of Rewriting

*Recognize the basic principles of rewriting a story in terms of improving copy, updating the story, transforming informal reports, localizing, combining stories and shifting emphasis.*

interview — before a finished product can be turned out. have to convert a feature story — or a poor attempt at a feature — into a news story. Therefore, a reporter should The principles of rewriting are the same as those for good newswriting. If a story does not conform to acceptable newswriting standards, it should be rewritten and made to do so. In other words, you take what someone else has written poorly and convert it into usable news copy. When you are assigned to a command publication, such as a ship or station newspaper, you will find that a certain amount of your material comes from contributors who do not write in journalistic style. Other material comes to you as handouts and from outside sources, such as clip sheets, naval messages, directives and official correspondence. If you want your publication to contain readable and consistently good material or if you have a local angle and want it to be accepted by commercial news media in your area, it is often necessary to rewrite it. To transform

informal reports into properly written news stories To localize general information To combine two or more stories To change story emphasis **IMPROVING COPY** Often, a person's first attempt at writing a story produces dismal results. Some members of a public affairs office staff may not be thoroughly skilled in the writing craft. Also, material for intended release is often received from other staff offices or departments. These articles frequently need the professional touch of a rewrite reporter. A rewrite reporter organizes a poorly written, improperly arranged item into a sequentially logical finished product. A rewrite reporter may have to turn a straight news story into a feature. In this event, the rewriter often needs to acquire additional information and can expect to spend some time on the telephone — or in a face-to-face interview. There are times, too, when the rewrite reporter may be proficient in both types of writing before assuming a rewrite assignment. One of the most frequent faults of badly written copy is the writer's failure to give ample play in the lead to the dominant news element of the story. The rewriter must dig through the story, find the proper lead, put it at the beginning where it belongs and, finally, organize the remainder of the story in coherent form. **UPDATING THE STORY** Often, the rewriter must update a story that has already been printed. So naturally, this person needs a fresh angle to perform this feat. For example, assume that a military aircraft crashes with three people aboard. Two crewmen are killed and the third is missing. A story based on these facts would be released as soon as possible. Then suppose the third man is still alive, that he had managed to parachute from the falling airplane. The following are six basic reasons for rewriting copy: To improve poor copy had made his way back to a highway, caught a ride, telephoned the base and reported his experience. The news of a survivor is the fresh angle needed by the rewriter to update the story of the crash.

#### Find a Hook

Even the best writer can find it hard to get a reader's interest when the story seems foreign to the reader. Is there a hook, some common ground or relatively unknown link, that might get someone interested in a subject?

On the Peruvian elections - a Q&A with Benjamin Bratt, whose mother Eldy, is Quechua Indian from Lima, Peru.

On the China story about selling body parts - a story not just about the horror of the sales, but about where the body parts are going and who is using them.

What is the thing readers need to know if they know almost nothing about the subject but it matters?

#### Give it a Different Structure

##### *The Hour Glass*

Writer Roy Clark has identified this structure. It is a hybrid of narrative and inverted pyramid. You begin by telling the news, and then there is a break in the pyramid, and a line that begins a narrative, as in, "it all began when ..."

You can begin to turn the characters and plot into something more interesting. And in the end broaden the piece back out and come back to the point at the top.

*Fly on the Wall*

This approach involves being there with the story's main characters when the event in question happens. What is the conversation between them? What are their reactions? It may take special access, which requires planning ahead, getting permission, and even special agreements, such as allowing subjects to see a draft of your story ahead of time, but, it may be worth the pay off.

*In Their Own Words*

For one of the biggest scoops of Watergate, Jack Nelson agreed to have one source tell his own story in his own words. Nelson interviewed him, taped him, wrote the story and then let the source edit and put his own byline.

**Principles of Composition****Strunk and White**

Strunk and White's "Elements of Style" has been read by high school and college students for decades, but in its pages are lessons that are valuable to anyone at any age who writes. Listed below are the rules the book sets out for good composition.

Choose a Suitable Design and Hold to It. Planning must be a deliberate prelude to writing. Foresee or determine the shape of what is to come and pursue that shape.

Make the Paragraph the Unit of Composition. Large blocks of print can look formidable to readers. But breaking them up too much can look like ad print. Moderation and order are the main considerations.

Use the Active Voice. It is generally more direct and vigorous than the passive.

Put Statements in Positive Form. Avoid tame colorless language. Use the word "not" as a means of denial or in antithesis, not as a means of evasion.

Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language. The surest way to arouse a reader's attention is by being specific. Use words that call pictures to mind.

Omit Needless Words. Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words. A paragraph should contain no unnecessary sentences.

Avoid a Succession of Loose Sentences. In particular this means sentences made up of two clauses. The style can become monotonous for the reader.

Express Coordinate Ideas in Similar Form. Parallel construction allows readers to more readily recognize likeness of content and function.

Keep Related Words Together. The position of words in a sentence in the principle means of shoeing their relationship. Brings words together that are related in thought.

In Summaries, Keep One Tense. Don't switch back and forth. Choose one and hold to it.

Place the Emphatic Words at the End of the Sentence. The proper place in the sentence for the word or group of words that the writer desires to make most prominent is usually at the end.

**Writing Clearly on Deadline**

Steve Buttry, No Train, No Gain

Write as you report.

If you're working a story by phone, you're going to have some dead time, maybe a few seconds at a time when you're on hold or waiting for someone to answer, maybe a few minutes while you're waiting for people to return calls. Start putting the information from your last interview into story form. Even if you don't know where it will go in the story yet, start writing paragraphs that will fit somewhere. Write a lede based on what you know so far. In addition to starting your writing, this helps sharpen the focus of the reporting that remains. Writing as you report allows you to continue your reporting closer to deadline. Writing in chunks, with frequent interruptions as you return to reporting, can lead to choppy writing. You need to fix this by using some of the time you save to read back through the story to polish and make it flow smoothly. If you are at the scene and need to run back to the newsroom to report, you can't physically write as you report. But start writing or outlining the story in your head or in your notebook during moments when you find yourself waiting. The story will come faster when you sit down to a keyboard.

**Identify the minimum story.**

Decide early what your minimum story is, the story that answers the basic who, what, when, where questions. This is the story that meets basic levels of journalistic competence and allows you to keep drawing a paycheck next week. This is your first goal.

**Identify the maximum story.**

Decide early what your maximum story might be, the story that readers will be talking about at work and in coffee shops the next day. This is the story that your editors and readers will remember, that marks you as a star performer. This story may answer difficult how, why, so-what or how-much questions or it may address the who-what-when-where questions in greater depth. The maximum story may have such enticing elements as setting, plot, characters and dialogue. You are looking for elements might make this story especially memorable. This is your ultimate goal.

**Secure the minimum, then pursue the maximum.**

If you're not on deadline, you might gather the information for the minimal story fairly early, then build incrementally to the maximum story. Or you might start with some of the information for the maximum story and spend a lot of time with that, knowing you'll be able to fill in the basics later. On deadline, you want to identify immediately the potential sources who could provide the information for the minimum story and get the information from them as quickly as possible. Then you zero right in on the sources who might provide the maximum story. Maybe you can't get the maximum story on deadline. It might be a second-day story or a Sunday follow-up. But go for it. If you don't land the maximum story, you're likely to gather material that will improve on the minimum story.

**Reassess frequently.**

Before and after each interview, assess quickly what you still need to nail down the minimum or maximum story. Go

quickly to those elements in your questioning. Go to the sources who will provide that sort of information. Also assess whether your new knowledge changes the maximum story you are pursuing.

#### **Avoid redundant interviews.**

If you don't have time to interview all the desired sources, avoid those who will waste your time with information that is largely redundant. For instance, in a crime or disaster story, one official source may provide all the basic information for your minimal story. Once you get that information, you might want to focus your energy on unofficial sources who can give your story greater human dimension, rather than going to other official sources. If you have time, the other official sources will provide valuable detail, but the maximum story often rests with unofficial sources. However, if you haven't identified the unofficial sources yet, other official sources may help lead you to them.

#### **Anticipate deadlines.**

The most routine deadline writing for many reporters is covering evening meetings, then returning to the newsroom for a quick turnaround for the morning paper. See how much reporting and writing you can do before the meeting. Meetings in themselves are not interesting. That's why you won't find many people at most of them. But the meetings deal with important issues. Take some time before the meeting to examine the agenda and do some reporting on issues to be covered. Let's say the meeting is about possible cutbacks in the school district's program to teach English as a second language. You talk to ESL teachers, students and parents beforehand and to advocates of mainstreaming students who don't speak English. You do most of the reporting and writing before the meeting on a story about changes in the ESL program. And your writing after the meeting is simply a few paragraphs adding the outcome of the vote and a couple quotes from the meeting.

#### **Write, don't ponder.**

One of the biggest time-wasters on deadline is the lede. Don't ponder the lede while you look at a blank screen. Write a simple declarative sentence: "The school board voted Tuesday to cut funds for its program to teach English as a second language." That will get you launched. Keep writing. Maybe halfway through the story, you will think of a better lede. Then you can go back and fix the lede, and maybe that will require fixing a few other grafts. You will have more of the story written than if you had tried two or three ledes and stared at the blank screen for a while. You don't have time for that on deadline. Write the story, and hopefully the writing will bring out the best lede. Even if it doesn't you probably will have a better story with a simple declarative lede followed by a full, well-written story than with a polished lede reflecting heavy labor, followed by a story that was rushed and incomplete.

#### **Notes:**

## LESSON 13

### WRITING TOOLS

#### Objective

The objective of this lesson is to make the students familiar with few writing tools, that would make their news writing skills more appropriate, as per the industry needs.

As journalists, you must understand that there is a thin line between journalism and writing and that line is getting diluted with each passing day. So it would help you to think that writing is like carpentry. That way, you can work from a plan and use the tools you have stored on your workbench. You can borrow a writing tool whenever you'd like. And here's a secret: you don't have to return it. You can pass it on to another writer without losing it.



Here is my list of 20 writing tools. I've borrowed these from reporters and editors, from authors of books on writing, and from teachers and coaches. I've learned how to use many of them by reading the work of storytellers I admire. In this space, I can offer only the briefest description of how to use the writing tool, but I hope it is enough to help you build your own collection.

#### Sentences and Paragraphs

1. Begin sentences with subjects and verbs, letting subordinate elements branch off to the right. Even a very long sentence can be clear and powerful when subject and verb make meaning early.
2. Use verbs in their strongest form, the simple present or past tense. Strong verbs create action, save words, and reveal the players. Beware of adverbs. Too often, they dilute the meaning of the verb or repeat it: "The building was completely destroyed."
3. Place strong words at the beginning of sentences and paragraphs, and at the end. The period acts as a stop sign. Any word next to the period plays jazz.

#### Language

1. Observe word territory. Do not repeat a key word within a given space, unless you intend a specific effect.

2. Play with words, even in serious stories.
3. Dig for the concrete and specific: the name of the dog and the brand of the cola. Details help readers see the story.
4. When tempted by clichés, seek original images. Make word lists, free-associate, be surprised by language.
5. Prefer the simple over the technical: shorter words and paragraphs at the points of greatest complexity.
6. Strive for the mythic, symbolic, and poetic. Recognize that common themes of newswriting (homecoming, conquering obstacles, loss and restoration) have deep roots in the culture of storytelling.

#### Effects

1. For clarity, slow the pace of information. Short sentences make the reader move slowly. Time to think. Time to learn. See what I mean?
2. Control the pace of the story by varying sentence length. Long sentences create a flow that carries the reader down a stream of understanding, creating an effect that Don Fry calls "steady advance." Or stop a reader short.
3. Show and tell. Begin at the bottom of the ladder of abstraction, at the level of bloody knives and rosary beads, of wedding rings and baseball cards. Then ascend to the top to summarize and analyze, discovering meaning in the world's random details.
4. Reveal telling character traits and the glories of human speech. Avoid adjectives when describing people. Don't say "enthusiastic" or "talkative," but create a scene where the person reveals those characteristics to the reader.
5. Strive for "voice," the illusion that the writer is speaking directly to the reader. Read the story aloud to hear if it sounds like you.

#### Structure

1. Take advantage of narrative opportunities. You want to writestories, not articles. Think of action, conflict, motivation, setting, chronology, and dialogue.
2. Place gold coins along the path. Don't load all your best stuff high in the story. Space special effects throughout the story, encouraging readers to find them and be delighted by them.
3. Use sub-headlines to index the story for the reader. This tool tests the writer's ability to find, and label, the big parts of the story.
4. Repeat key words or images to "chain" the story together. Repetition works only if you intend it.
5. In storytelling, three is the magic number. Four is too many. Two is not enough.
6. Write endings to create closure.





Want to write narrative? Think in movie mode. Playwrights do it. Screenwriters do it. Novelists do it. Journalists should be doing it. We've been so programmed to write and think like journalists that often we're reluctant to remove our 'Press' hats and occasionally try a new approach. Yes, narrative writing requires more time and a willingness to invest in characters and scene-building, but the end result is worth it for your readers.

It's always interesting how we go to a movie on the weekend and then return to the newsroom on Mondays to rave about the flick to our colleagues. We describe the setup, characters, drama and plot. And, oh yeah, how the movie kept us guessing until the end, or gripped us with suspense.

Imagine if we did that with our stories? Ramgopal Verma, look out!

Fact is, we as journalists view amazing storytelling techniques whenever we go to the movies. We just never think that such approaches can be adapted to our work. They can.

Next time you set out to try narrative writing, switch to movie mode and start thinking like Bollywood. And if it helps, buy a bag of popcorn. Now please take a seat. The show... I mean story... is about to begin.

**Try these techniques to better prepare your approach to narrative writing:**

- **What movie are you making?**  
Ask yourself: Am I writing a comedy? Am I writing a love story? Or is it a thriller with a surprise ending? Is it going to be a 3,000-word epic? Or a 500-word tale? Consider your approach.
- **Think like a screenwriter:**  
That means it's time to consider your opening, scenes, plot, theme, main characters and supporting characters, dialogue and your climax. Make an outline. All good movies start with a good plan. Ask yourself: What

elements are needed for my script? Ask yourself: "If I was to make this story into a movie, how would it evolve? Where would I start the story?"

- **Think popcorn:**  
We've all sat through a boring movie. Try to remember what was boring. What would you have done to make it better? When you're writing, ask yourself: "If I was in the theatre watching this story, what would make me stay in my seat?" If you don't continually ask yourself that question while writing, you won't spin an effective story — and your viewers (or in this case, readers) will grab their popcorn and leave the theatre. Or in the case of newspapers, stop reading and flip the page.
- **Details, details, details:**  
While reporting, take notes that capture examples of taste, smell, sound, hearing and sight. Your eyes must become a camera, recording images and senses that can be turned into words. If we're scene building, we need everything possible in our arsenal of notes to be able to take readers to the scene of the action. Draw a separate line down a page in your notebook. Make that your "Five Senses" space for notes. Fill it. No matter how small the detail, jot it down.
- **Get Dialogue:**  
We're talking dialogue, not quotes. There's a difference. Investing in characters means getting them to recreate the dialogue between characters. Dialogue from an exact point in time is most critical to building a scene. If two people survived 72 hours floating in the shark-infested waters of the Indian Ocean, what do we want to know? We want to know what was going through their heads at that exact point in time. We want them to retell those thoughts as if they were happening now - yes, while you're interviewing them bedside at the hospital. It's this dialogue that we can use to shape the drama of the moment, putting the readers in the water with the helpless people. Ask your subject: "Take me back to that point in time. . . now tell me what was going through your head. . . tell me what you said to XXXXXXXX."
- **Think about your ending first:**  
Now that's a real departure from how we're programmed as journalists. Never mind the lead first. We're building a story. If you know how you want to end it, you'll know how to get there. Remember Titanic? Director James Cameron ended his movie with the sinking. He began it by introducing an old woman and a necklace. Then he weaved a tale of two main characters. The climax — three hours later — was the disaster. The ending was the old woman and the necklace. If the movie Titanic was a 10-inch newspaper story, a journalist might have written: "Two thousand people perished in the frigid waters of the North Atlantic after their luxury liner crashed into an iceberg." Narrative writing is about rethinking your approach.
- **Get into the field:**  
Spinning an effective narrative means you have to see your subject in action, or interview them in their setting — not your setting. By being in the same setting, you can easily

**Assignment:** The students will be provided inputs of a particular event/issue. Based on those inputs, the students are required to write a story, using the narrative reporting technique.

[illegible]

## LESSON 14

### MILITARY REPORTING

#### Objective

This lesson aims at providing an insight to the students on the much coveted Defence beat. After this lesson, the students would get a fair idea of what military reporting is all about and using the tips provided in the lesson, they should be able to identify various story leads within the beat.

#### Ideas & Insight on Covering the Armed Forces

In writing about the critical role of a free and responsible press hundreds of years ago, Thomas Jefferson said, “The basis of our government being the opinion of an informed people and the very first objective should be to keep that right.”

While freedom of speech remains an inalienable right, issues of national security sometimes pose a challenge in war coverage. Military experts often have to juggle getting the word out with national security threats. There’s no question the landscape has changed dramatically since terrorists slammed civilian airplanes into the World Trade Center’s twin towers on September 11, 2001. This particular incident has given birth to a cottage industry – of books deliberating upon the impact of this incident on the world order. Back home in India, Defence beat became the much-talked about area, during and after the Kargil war.



As tensions on the Indo-Pak border become the cornerstone of daily reporting, it may be more important than ever before to develop relationships with military officers and defence experts.

Each military service has its own public affairs specialists. Professionally trained, they are skilled in media relations. But the problem is that they don’t give out much except the usual press briefings and visits of military dignitaries from other countries. As reporters covering defence beat, defence analysts, who may be retired military officers, will surely help you flush out a story idea. Taking time to cultivate a relationship with them could mean getting to the guts of the stories no one else has thought to write.

The potential for hard news and feature coverage in defence beat is limitless. And although the Defence motto has long been “maximum disclosure, minimum delay,” there is now a caveat to that policy ... “except where matters of national security are at risk.”

That means you may have to work harder to get a good story. Check in regularly with public affairs specialists and with your unit contacts. Don’t wait for the press release to hit.

Personally speaking, there has never been a better time for military journalists and civilian journalists to share ideas for good war coverage and other defence related stories.

Sipahi Appa Rao of Indian Army’s 22 Grenadiers was deployed to Batalik Sector in 1999. In his absence, his wife gave birth to a son in South India. Thousands of kilometres away from his son, Rao fought a number of important battles for his country. Though his wife sent him a few pictures of his son, but it was after months, he could actually meet his baby.

Doesn’t that get you thinking? What about soldiers and officers who have been recalled several times during Operation Parakram, post December 13<sup>th</sup> attack on the Indian Parliament? How do they cope? What strengths from the civilian world do they bring to the table? From suits and scarves and golf clubs and gin with olives to guns and ammo - how does their life change in a minute? Take this: On 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1999, Colonel SVE David has just retired to his bunker in the Ganderbal area of Kashmir, after killing a dirty dozen of militants by blasting the entire house in which they had sought refuge. While struggling to open his sleeping bag to close his eyes for sometime, the phone lying at his bedside rang. Sixty minutes after that phone call, Col. David and his entire unit waited for the transport to take them to Drass. Operation Vijay had begun. Later in the war, they lost one of their officers, Lt. Col. Vishwanathan (he is the highest ranking officer to have died during the Kargil war), who was responsible for laying dynamite to bring that house down in Ganderbal.

To get an insight, you will have to be on board. Visiting forward areas give you a pretty clear snapshot of life while deployed. It’s not necessarily the war arena, but it’s similar.

And there is the recreation angle.

What do these folks do for fun? In the old World War II movies, it was poker and a few precious cigarettes. From the Indian perspective, it is etching double-meaning couplets on trees and decorating barracks with posters of Madhuri Dixit and Urmila Matondkar.

Following is the report, I filed from Pallanwala Sector, along the International Border in Jammu and Kashmir:

## Nothing Quiet on the Western Front

### Memoirs from the Pallanwala Sector

**Rahul Pandita**

The Kargil war had just ended. To reap the immediate benefit of patriotism that had swept the entire India, the BJP government announced general elections. The politicians filed their nominations papers and the campaigning began. In a situation like this, I landed in Jammu, to file pre-poll reports for my channel.

*Jammu diyan kandiyan barkeha lagdi....* sang a bard on Jammu Radio as Naresh drove us from the airport to the hotel in his black-yellow taxi. The mood in Jammu was surprisingly sombre. On the way, I tried to gauge the general festive mood, typical of a state that is all set to go for polls. I was disappointed. There were no rallies and no garlanded politicians. No folded hands either. The buntings on roads were few and the election posters put on fewer walls. I was so depressed I slept off for hours in the hotel. Evening was nothing great. It brought no hope of news or colour usually associated with elections. I knew I could hardly churn stories from the city. I had to think of something else.

What can a defence correspondent think of? The sound of Bofors guns in Kargil was still echoing in my mind. I could taste the gun powder on my lips. Next afternoon, I called up Naresh. Jammu was a territory that I knew like the back of my hand. I asked Naresh to take me to Pallanwala.

Pallanwala lies on the International border between India and Pakistan, around twenty kilometres ahead of the Akhnoor town. Akhnoor is roughly sixty kilometres from Jammu city, as the crow flies. Pallanwala, at that time, was the hottest sector in the entire region, after Kargil. People living in villages along the border had left their homes. The Pakistani shelling had become too intense to let them stay back. On my way, I saw people travelling on the rooftop of buses with their belongings. They were going to places, which they could never call home.

After travelling on dust ridden roads and on what seemed to be illusion of roads, I reached Pallanwala. Naresh stopped at one point. I looked ahead. It was an Army barricade, which meant we could not travel further ahead. My problem was that I did not even have a clearance from the Army Headquarters in Delhi, which is a pre-requisite for visiting such forward areas. There was not even a dime of a chance that I would be allowed in, leave alone filing reports. But I did not lose hope. I asked the gate sentry to let me speak to the adjutant. He directed me to wait inside the barracks, adjacent to the barricade.

Inside the barracks, few soldiers sat on their beds, writing letters to their families. Some of them were reading (read watching) film magazines. The front wall was adorned with a picture of Goddess Durga and her space was shared by a poster of Madhuri Dixit. I closed my eyes in uncertain reverence. In a few minutes, I was called. The deputy commander is on the line, I was told. After I had wished him a good afternoon, a slurring voice greeted me from the other end.

“Yes Rahul, how can I help you... this is Colonel RS Bhandari..”

I explained to him the *raison-de-etre* of my visit.

“Hand over the phone to the sentry,” he said, after lending me a patient hearing.

I did the needful. I was expecting the sentry to ask me to turn back from there. And then...

“Sir, please wait... a vehicle is coming to escort you inside...” the tamil sentry told me in english, laced with the accent of his mother tongue.

I could not believe my ears. It was much more than being sheer lucky.

In about ten minutes, a gypsy arrived and we were asked to follow. In another ten minutes, the gypsy stopped in the thick of nowhere. I looked around. Nothing was visible barring the dense vegetation of trees and camouflaged bunkers, manned by attentive soldiers. I was led to a man, who held a glass in his hand. Gin with olives, I thought. He took a few steps towards me, with a gait, which he later described as *Mor ki chaal* - the peacock's style of walking. That was Colonel Bhandari for us, unlimited. He held my hand, warning my cameraman not to record anything, which in any case he was not. He stopped in front of a tree and pointed towards the bark. Something was etched on it. More close and I found out that a sentry, probably on a night patrol, had given an expression to his sexual frustration. Few other trees in the close vicinity also bore crude couplets in hindi, complimenting a woman for her assets. By the time, we settled on chairs outside what was an underground planning and comand room, Colonel Bhandari had helped himself with another drink. He also insisted that we give him company. He was tipsy. But nobody seemed to mind. Not even the Commander, Brigadier JS Singh, a tall Khalsa of 52 Brigade, as he later confessed. I was told that the Colonel was due to retire in a fortnight, so everybody was taking it easy.

It was September and Diwali was a couple of months away. But at dot 4 P.M., the fire works started. You bet, it could have given a complex to the crackers burnt in Delhi on Diwali. The Pakis had started delivering their daily quota of shelling and firing. As I contemplated on what course of action to follow, Colonel Bhandari got up from his seat and said, “let us roll.” We followed him. He asked his driver Poonam Singh to sit in the back with my cameraman. He took to the wheel and I sat besides him. He put his entire weight on the accelerator and the gypsy ‘rolled’.

“We are going to visit a forward post,” he declared.

As we went deeper, the shelling became more intense. But more than the shelling, I was apprehensive about the way Colonel Bhandari drove the gypsy. It was virtually flying, defying centrifugal and centripetal forces on non-existent roads. In the middle of a deserted village, he stopped the gypsy. It came to a screeching halt.

“Let us have some water,” he said, with a benevolent smile on his face. Poonam Singh promptly took out plastic cups from the rear of the gypsy and four of us went inside a mud house. It was deserted like the rest of the village. In the middle of the courtyard, there was a hand pump. I looked around and found a forlorn goat trying to climb a tree out of fear.

All of a sudden there was a deafening explosion. A shell had landed somewhere close.



“Poonam Singh, how far,” Colonel Bhandari asked his man, while sipping the muddy water, as if it were scotch on rocks.

“50 feet, Sahab,” Singh replied.

Another odd thirty seconds or so, when there was another loud thud. The earth shook beneath our feet. I looked at Colonel Bhandari. He was looking at ether, tossing the ‘nectar’ of his glass over and below his tongue.

“How far Poonam Singh,” he asked again.

“Hmmm. roughly 30 feet, Saaar”, he replied.

I performed a bottoms up to my glass, hoping Colonel Bhandari would follow the suit. But he stood there as if transfixed by a spell. Another forty seconds passed. And then...

Before I could hear the sound, I saw smoke coming out of the rear of the house. I was too shocked to move, but my legs started shaking.

“Behind the wall Sahab.” This time Poonam Singh informed us, without being asked. He was pointing at the boundary wall of the house. Before I could plan to abandon Colonel Bhandari and run away for safety, good sense prevailed upon him. “Let us move,” he said.

Later in the evening, a mixture of militants and Pakistani regulars attacked an Indian forward post PP3, taking advantage of the elephant grass. In the ensuing gun battle, five of them were killed and their bodies were left behind in the jungle. These were later brought down to the base headquarters for display. One of the militant’s head was blown as a bullet hit the handgrenade, that he was holding in his hand. At the hospital, I heard the cries of the lone Indian soldier who was injured in the attack. Sharpnels had pierced through his throat. The young army doctor assured him that he would get well soon and there was nothing to worry about. As he was being taken to the base hospital in Akhnoor, the doctor rang his colleague in Akhnoor hospital, telling him that the soldier would not survive. Next morning, I learnt that he died in the hospital.

Brigadier JS Singh told me of one incident, where two Indian soldiers were killed due to the shelling from Pakistan. In retaliation, they shot at one Pakistani officer who was trying to climb up an observation post. As the bullet hit him, he lay dangling on the iron rod, in the middle of the post. The Pakistanis made numerous efforts to bring his body down, but the furious Indian Army men thwarted their every attempt by heavy firing. “It has been fifteen days and the body is still lying there,” the Brigadier told me.

After bidding them a good bye, I arrived at Jammu, the next day. Colonel Bhandari, I am told, lives in Meerut Cantonment, after his retirement. He is not a part of the seminar circuit so far. But who knows, in which way he prefers his gin with olives, these days.

Military coverage isn’t any harder — it’s just harder to penetrate the surface. Like good narrative journalism, the stories aren’t always obvious, they’re lurking a bit beneath the surface. And please learn the accurate title of a person, ship or piece of equipment. There is a difference between an Sukhoi 30 – MKI and a MIG – 21 or a Machine gun and a Insas rifle.

## Other Story Ideas

### Medical

How does a military doctor set up a mobile medical unit? How do they handle bullet injuries? What have been their experiences in places like Siachen, where on an average one Indian soldier dies everyday?

All of this translates into interesting fodder for newsy features or even hard news. My friend and former Indian Express Correspondent Gaurav Sawant (now with Star News) met two lady doctors in Siachen in 2001 - Captain Archana Apoorva and her colleague Captain (Dr) Rama Gupta. They were the only two lady doctors posted at the Siachen glacier and Turtuk sub-sector, arguably the most difficult field station for any army. A little over five-feet, Apoorva stood tall as she treated battle-hardened soldiers, fighting not just the Pakistan army but the forces of ‘General’ glacier in temperatures far below minus 20 degree Celsius at altitudes around 12,000 feet.

She and Rama Gupta had been posted there since two years. They were not in the same hospital but were more than 80 kilometers apart in the world’s highest battlefield. They replaced each other every month at the Medical Aid Centre (MAC) Hunder (near Partapur) and civilian aid hospital at Turtuk. The two friends would be seldom together, except of course for a few hours once every month. The rest of the times they treated patients both army men and civilians. Here is another story he filed from Siachen, a must read for every student, who wants to be a journalist:

*Into Thin Air* (By Gaurav Sawant: Indian Express, 8-5-1999)

The story is too bizarre to be believed, or dismissed. But in Siachen soldiers say it is true. On a recent visit to the glacier we heard the story. “Death waits at every step here,” an officer said before telling us the story of the rope. The rope that ties soldiers together as they walk from one point to another carrying weapons, ammunition, food and the Siachen liquid gold, kerosene oil.

It was a freezing December morning when eight soldiers began their march from the base to a post. The temperature was a few notches below minus thirty and the special Siachen clothing could barely keep out the chill, which pierced the body like a thousand needles. They walked in a single file, keeping a 7 ft distance between each other, the rope tying them together. The troops were carrying kerosene oil and food for a forward post almost 60 kg of dead weight on a vertical climb. Taking each step was more difficult than the previous one. The soldiers wanted to stop to rest but their commander, a young major, knew better.

To stop would mean their sweat would freeze and form a thin layer of ice inside their clothing, and that in Siachen can be fatal. They kept on. The fact that the post was barely 3 km away and hot tea awaited them there kept the boys going. Digging their ice picks into the ice before taking the next step, they trudged on. Until seven men crossed a patch of what they later realised was thin ice. The ice came loose under the weight of the seven men and their luggage and as the eighth man crossed, it gave way and he plummeted deep inside a crevice.



The rope pulled the seventh man and he fell, inching closer to the crevice where the last man dangled, the rope acting as his lifeline. The sixth and the fifth were dragged towards the hole too. The fourth and third tried in vain to dig their ice picks in. They tried to pull the man out of the crevice. But his weight, coupled with the weight of the kerosene oil he was carrying, made it impossible. Slowly they all were slipping towards a certain death. Then the team commander took the decision: “Cut the rope,” he shouted to the penultimate man.

They all looked at him in horror. But that was the only way out. With his hands shaking, the man took out his knife. He saw the horror in the eyes of the soldier dangling in the crevice, shut his eyes, said a silent prayer and cut off the rope. The jawan got stuck in the crevice as it narrowed a little around his waist.

The commander had the presence of mind to radio the base and inform them of the incident. He even gave the precise location of the accident.

Fortunately it was still late afternoon and two helicopters immediately took off to rescue the jawan. The rescue team commander, a young captain, had his orders clear. Try to rescue in half-an-hour and come back before evening when the weather closes in, making it impossible for helicopters to fly. Sliding into the crevice, the officer spoke to the jawan. He tied a rope below the jawan’s chest and using snow scooters arranged from the post, tried to pull him out.

The heat from the jawan’s body probably melted the ice around him for a few seconds but then it hardened again and he was trapped in the vice-like grip of ice. The young captain tried to break the ice with an ice pick but in the narrow crevice, he could barely move his hands. The chopper pilots were getting panicky and it was time to go.

“Don’t leave me to die, sahib. I have old parents, a wife and two little daughters,” the jawan whispered. The captain almost cried. “Kill me, sahib, here it will be a slow painful death. And please don’t tell my family how I died,” was his last wish. And minutes later the choppers took off. “Then what happened?” we asked our storyteller, horrified. “The captain never told anyone whether he pulled the trigger or let the jawan freeze.” Nobody knows.

#### Religion and Faith

The Army employs religious teachers and there is a cache of interesting stories attached to them. For example, in Batalik, during Operation Vijay, whenever the Indian soldiers launched an assault, they used to be led by a preacher, who held a picture of Goddess Karni in his hands. He had no role in the actual fighting.

#### Traditions Within Units

Is there a mascot? What special logos has the unit designed? Does the unit have an ombudsman - someone who keeps in touch with families while loved ones are deployed?

#### And Finally

Navigating the alphabet soup of terminology, designators and names can be unwieldy at first — but even that makes for a good story. How did ships get their names? What is the history of seafaring verbiage? Compile a list of good contacts, subject matter experts and start calling them. They may be a treasure

trove of good information.

How have military uniforms transformed in the past 50 years? What is the significance of the ribbons, insignia and medals? Have some fun with the military world. Get out on a cutter, a boat, a helicopter or a tank. Be creative and ask the less obvious questions.

#### Tips on Covering Defence Beat

- Accuracy remains a problem, say many military officers: “Journalists don’t seem to take the time to learn the correct name or spelling of a unit or a piece of equipment.”
- Have realistic deadlines: The Defence PRO is juggling a lot of calls and must get clearance to get you “behind the scenes.” Try giving him or her a few options for interviews whenever possible — especially on features. Be available when someone calls you back — and always leave your telephone number.
- Have fun! Recently, I’ve been looking into whether I should carry a talisman, or good luck charm, on deployments. I’m looking at whether other military folks do the same. It’s a story that is taking some time, but yielding interesting results.

Usually in any war zone only ten percent of the journalists want to go out and actually cover a war. Most of them are hotel room warriors and that’s why there’s a great deal of enmity between those of us who spend all of our time in the field and the majority of the press that doesn’t.

The problem is that when media organisations send reporters to cover a conflict they have no experience at all, they have no language skills, they can’t even tell the difference between a Shaktiman and a Gypsy. And this really hurts the coverage because they just don’t have either the skills or the self-confidence to strike out on their own.

And that’s what the military really fears. It fears the independent reporters who break free from the pack, who have their own transportation. We saw this in Afghanistan, we saw it in the first Persian Gulf war, and in the recent war on Iraq as well. As a military officer lamented “In wartime, the press is always part of the problem.”

Partly. If you go back and look at the role of the press since the Crimean War, when the modern war correspondent was invented, the press has almost always seen itself as an important part of the effort to sustain morale and promote and support the war, whatever war effort it is.

The press gives war a kind of mythic narrative that war, in fact, doesn’t have. We have seen it in a distant land called Bosnia. Some of the wars I reported did not involve Indian soldiers - they were conflicts in which India wasn’t involved, so that if I went into a town in Kirkuk in Iraq, or Sierra Leone, I reported straight out what I saw: the bodies in the central square, the burning houses. But if an Iraqi or somebody from Al-Jazeera went into the town, they saw it through the lens of their nation or community at war. So they went and searched for that hometown hero, or the refugees or displaced people from their ethnic group who had been liberated, or evidence of the perfidious crimes carried out by the enemy. This happened to Indian

journalists during Kargil war also. They gave it a kind of story, they gave it a kind of narrative that war and combat usually doesn't have.

During war time you need a hero. The Americans turned Jessica Lynch (read about her) into a hero. We turned Flight Lieutenant Nachiketa into a hero during Operation Vijay. That mythic narrative of war boosts ratings, it sells newspapers.

During the recent Gulf war, a journalist wrote:

The phrase "collateral damage" is notorious, but there are lesser variants that have the same effect, making the abominable seem downright benign. "Civilian casualties" itself is a pallid little phrase that evokes none of the horrors — or the human beings — it contains.

We saw in Afghanistan what happened when the *Washington Post* reporter Doug Struck was trying to investigate civilian dead outside of Kandahar. A Special Forces unit threatened him at gunpoint, said they were going to shoot him if he went any further.

**Assignment:** The students are expected to read about Captain Vikram Batra and write a story, based on gathered inputs.

#### Notes:

## LESSON 15

### IN THE LINE OF FIRE: WAR REPORTING

#### Objective

This lesson makes the students familiar with the war zone and the occupational hazards.

Caught in the Yom Kippur war, author Saul Bellow turned a war correspondent for a US newspaper, and found himself visiting the battle front and being briefed in the evening by Israeli officials. Over the days he discovered three French correspondents also doing the reporting, but not stirring out of their hotel foyers. Somewhat puzzled, Bellow ventured to ask one of them how they operated. "It's simple," he said. "We deduce". These descendants of Descartes had known everything just by this process of deduction.



Back home, during the 1999 Kargil War, also known as Operation Vijay, such deduction had no place. In this most transparent of operations, when there was live reportage from the front, where images of women anchorpersons chatting with jawans were brought to the drawing rooms as the shells kept falling in the background, the newspapers were also not behind as the drama unfolded hour by hour. While the television images faded away, some of the newspaper reports lingered and the images stayed for a longer duration. Candidness, spontaneous reactions and sheer daring - all combined to make for some exciting coverage.

The recent war on Iraq opened up new avenues for journalists. In the age of television and Internet, they came to be known as embedded journalists - journos who accompanied various units of coalition forces towards their march towards Iraq.

#### War Reporting: What is to be worn and carried

As journalists' preparations to report from a war zone enter their final stages, they become increasingly detached from the normal world mentally and in appearance. To cover a war you have to be physically fit - you should be in a position to wear a heavy bullet proof jacket that seems to bring your shoulders down and still manage to run like a rabbit, if need be. A few changes of clothes, a few luxury items and toiletries, a lot of moisturising cream, electronic gadgets like a laptop, a

videophone, a couple dozen notebooks, and a sat phone - usually you carry all this with you in a war zone.

In the middle of all this, there will arise the question of war-zone fashion. In a war zone, as it became clear in Kargil and Iraq, there is a big divide among the media over whether to remain distinctly individual and independent or go more military and fit in. In World War II, there wasn't much question about it. Ernie Pyle and all the others wore military fatigues with "War Correspondent" shoulder patches and carried sidearms. But then, that was a less complicated time.



In a situation like this, it is always advisable to wear something different from the combatants - you'd not want to be mistaken for one of those Joes and shot down. Keep you ID card handy - you will have to brandish it, every now and then.

During Iraq war, we among the media fraternity, shared tips on how to ensure access to power for charging phones and how to keep the dust from clogging up laptops and lenses. We devoted a tremendous amount of attention to how to make all the accessories of modern media operations compact enough to carry by hand and hardy enough to be strapped to the side of a Bradley infantry fighting vehicle or shoved in a Humvee.

The making of the news, like making war and sausage, is not pretty. But even in the midst of what threatens to be a hot war, with the potential for tremendous suffering on both sides, Journalists wouldn't count on it. Just as in military operations, accidents and missteps in coverage will happen, and there will be aspects of it that will produce outrage or disgust.

Should David Bloom, the father of three young daughters, have been in Baghdad in the first place? Should any journalist with dependents volunteer for an assignment in harm's way?



According to his colleagues and competitors, Bloom was wired for story, energized and ambitious, in mid-flight of a meteoric career as a broadcast journalist. Even a battlefield medic, alarmed by Bloom's condition, could not get the warrior reporter to evacuate.



"He was unstoppable," testified his NBC colleague Tim Russert. "You would have to chain him to the desk."

"This was going to be his war," said CNN correspondent Walter Rodgers. "He was going to make his mark. He knew he was going to elbow the rest of us out of the way."

"He was one of the most competitive and aggressive journalists I've ever met," said NBC News President Neil Shapiro. "He was a rising star here."

So when the war broke, there was no way to keep David Bloom off the front lines, even with three young daughters back home. "I want a piece of this war," he told his boss early on. We thus inherit a tough truth to consider: that Bloom's sense of duty to country and profession has left his children fatherless.

Was it worth it?

Perhaps Bloom's legacy to his children, even in death, will be more beneficial than that of the living and breathing editors or news directors, whose work obsessions make them physically or emotionally absent to the family over decades.

And maybe there's a larger question lurking here: Is journalism a way of life?

It's true that being a reporter is a hell of a lot less dangerous and stressful than being a soldier, a police officer, or a firefighter. No one would argue that members of dangerous professions should remain childless.

David Bloom did not have to ride atop a tank recovery vehicle through the Iraqi desert. He chose to do that. Had he not been there, someone else would have brought us the news. Had he not been there, his future as a broadcast journalist would have remained secure. Then why did he go? Why did all the journalists choose to go?

The most idealistic interpretation, according to me is that the journalists who went to Iraq had some sense that they were going to be telling one of the most important stories of their generation, that they would become the eyes and ears of the world. But let's not kid ourselves. When it comes to the big story, duty is often mixed with ambition. The reporters hoped they would be treated like champions upon their return, that their war experience could be a rung on the ladder to better assignments in their own shops, or to better jobs with higher salaries in bigger organisations.

Here is a personal account by *Jules Crittenden*, a senior journalist, working for the *Boston Herald*. Jules has covered wars including ethnic conflicts and other issues in Kashmir, Kosovo, Israel and Armenia. During the Iraq war, he was embedded with the U.S. Army's 3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division.

### **Embedded Journal: The dividing line.. Bullets fly.. The distant war.. Dust everywhere.. Print vs. TV**

April 1, 2003

Although media embeds are sharing the hardships and hazards of the soldiers' lives in the Iraqi war, there is one comfort we have that may be the most important: the ability to call home. Soldiers look at my laptop and satphone arrangement, ask what it costs, how it works. They say, "So you can just pick that up and make a call anywhere in the world." "Yeah," I tell them. Most leave the broad hint right there. A few have suggested they would pay or barter for the service. I explain that the CO doesn't want me doing this.

As we share the same conditions and the same exposure to hazards, it may be the single biggest dividing line, underscoring my status as a civilian. It is not that I am a non-combatant. They regard that as my misfortune, that I don't have the same opportunity to kill the enemy that they do, and that I must ride out fights impotently. It is not that they must obey orders while I float somewhere outside the chain of command. In the stratified world of the military, they accept that some people have status and perks that they don't have, or job descriptions that spare them some unpleasant tasks. It is my ability to communicate with the outside world and loved ones when they cannot. They envy it but so far, they don't seem to begrudge it.

March 31, 2003

Good news about the embed process. The military — at least the people I'm with — won't hold you back if you want to jump out of the track and join them where the bullets are flying. I found myself in the middle of a battlefield-clearing operation gone wrong today, and the only admonishment was that perhaps I might care to step behind that palm tree, they hadn't quite killed them all. Any cop reporter will tell you that this doesn't happen in the civilian world. This is good news because this means they are comfortable with us, and this project — from the media's perspective — can be a success. We will get the unadulterated stories and images of war we came here for.

March 28, 2003

All wars have their lulls, and many wars have their false starts before the horrors of combat become known to the soldiers. In this lopsided contest, where the world's most technologically advanced force is facing an army with antiquated and poorly-maintained weapons, one side is already fully acquainted with death and mayhem, while the other side has been experiencing it in small numbers or from afar. For those of us among the forces still positioning themselves for battle, it is still September of 1939 or early August 1914.

The soldiers remark with a sort of gee-whiz wonder that they will be war veterans when they go home, and debate about who they will tell that they didn't actually see combat, if that is what happens.



Reporting on this still-quiet sector of the war — the frequent sound of outgoing artillery and sight of smoke plumes on the horizon notwithstanding — can seem as frustrating and futile as “fighting” the war seems to soldiers who have accomplished a record armored road march of hundreds of kilometers in a few days but now find themselves playing the old Army game of “hurry up and wait.” But I suspect it is also a time I might look back on fondly or perhaps with some wistfulness or sadness after the tank battles we are awaiting come to pass. I am almost tempted to stop filing, but find myself unable to do that, and figure there must be some value in recording the idle actions and thoughts of soldiers inching toward their first combat.

In any case, it is important that the wise-ass remarks of soldiers such as Pvt. Robert Baxter, 22, “Southern honky,” of Cairo, Ga., be recorded for posterity.

March 27, 2003

I remember my mother telling me a story she had heard from an Australian soldier back from the North African campaigns of World War II. He had tried in vain to protect a treasured watch. But the dust got into everything. It was one of those phrases from childhood that stuck with me.

”The dust got into everything.” Into their boots, into their clothes, into their food. I have an image in my head to this day of some Australian soldier, in his khaki shorts and desert boots, his digger hat with the brim pinned up on one side, shaking dust out of his watch. I think she must have meant Jim, a squinty-eyed outback horseman that her friend Kath had married, because he had been a soldier. She had told me he was the model for “The Digger,” a bronze bust of a soldier at the Australian War Memorial.

So here I am out in another part of the desert that stretches from Afghanistan to Morocco. Last night was the most intense of the dozen or so duststorms I have experienced in my two months here. The air turned brilliant yellow and orange in the afternoon, red at dusk, and pitch black at night. Stepping out into it, none of the surrounding vehicles were visible at all. A buddy standing a few feet away was a dim shadow. Grit flew into my mouth and formed a layer of mud on my lips.

Through my dust-covered goggles, I made out something darting around my feet, a desert rat that looked like it wanted to climb up the leg of my J-list chemical warfare suit, our required attire out here.

I had tried to transmit with this laptop and my satphone for about an hour in the afternoon, but for the first time, it was impossible to get a connection. Duststorms had never stopped me before, but this time the column of dust must have been too high in the sky, and the volume of dust, the size of the bits of dirt flying around, were too much for my Iridium. Dirt poured in the overhead hatch of the medics’ truck where I was working, with the satphone perched on the roof. It coated the keyboard and the screen of this laptop ... nothing new about that, except that this time, immediately after blowing it clear, I’d feel a new gritty layer under my fingers.

The sky finally cleared at midnight, and I crawled over the bodies of the soldiers I live with, three of us crammed in the back of the Bradley, forced in by the storm instead of outside

under the stars. Up in the turret, I found the laptop wouldn’t start up. I finally figured out that the pin-sized “standby” button was stuck, and I struggled to free it with a paintbrush bristle, until I finally hit on the expedient solution of turning over the laptop and slapping it. Other keys have been sticking, but so far, this laptop is hardier than I have any right to expect. I use the wet wipes that come with MREs to clear the coating of grime from the screen.

This morning, we all began our personal cleaning rituals. “Whore baths,” as the GIs call them, with baby wipes or washcloths; bucket laundry; shaking stuff out. My enduring memory of Iraq might be blowing clumps of mud out of my nose and wiping the waxy grime out of my ears. You have to be careful cleaning the crust of dirt around your eyes, or they’ll become red and inflamed. Dust is perpetually trapped in the scales and cracks of my dried-out hands, leaving them ashen. Despite multiple layers of plastic bags, everything in my ruck has its dusting. The dust gets into everything. Near as I can tell, the only thing that remains dust-free is the inside of my waterproof diver’s watch. Nothing special about this \$70 G-shock, but I think I’ll keep it.

March 26, 2003

Note to print colleagues: It turns out our TV brethren can be just as big a pain out in the middle of the Iraqi desert as they can be when you’re doorstepping a tragedy-stricken family back home, making your low-key approach, and suddenly half a dozen of them show up with their cameras.

All of us here are guests of the military, and presumably all of us are trying as hard as circumstances allow not to make nuisances of ourselves. But one TV network, which shall remain nameless but belongs to an Australian-born media mogul, is now threatening to detract from the war effort.

Informed sources report that the network’s civilian Hummer (see “Chase Vehicles”) has broken down on the hard push north, and to accommodate the media, the higher brass has determined that a line company must surrender one of its Humvees to carry the network’s not inconsiderable load of electronics, Jujubes and makeup or whatever it is they have crammed in the back.

“They’re taking my Humvee,” said a beleaguered lieutenant. “Now, they’re not saying it’s for the TV guys, but their little super Hummer is broken down, and now Brigade needs mine. Seems like a bit of a coincidence. Our chief went down to fix theirs so they won’t take ours.

“Why would the media want this? It’s obviously a military vehicle. It’s a target,” the lieutenant said.

“Well,” I explained, “Usually they want anything and everything they can get their hands on.”

“It sucks. It’s embarrassing,” the lieutenant said. “It’s one thing if they want it for soldiers who need it.”

The lieutenant has a tank he can ride in, but the two maintenance men who had been using the Humvee to sleep in, run critical maintenance errands, and follow the convoy will have to find something else to ride in. Too bad the M88 tank hauler is also down, another casualty of this road march.

**Assignment:** The students are expected to know more about David Bloom and write a report.



## LESSON 16

### HI-TECH WAR REPORTING

Improvement in equipment used by reporters travelling in a war zone translates into viewers getting unprecedented access to a war as it unfolds.

Small satellite phones, laptop video editing software and light digital cameras are helping journalists file broadcast-ready reports direct from combat zones.

Before now, many journalists in war zones had to put reports on tape which then had to be carried far behind the frontline before being broadcast.

#### Two-man Team

Just as computers have shrunk to a size that can easily be carried around so have many of the devices that frontline journalists use to file their reports.

In 1991, during the Gulf War, satellite phones existed but weighed up to 40 kilograms and had to be powered by mains electricity or a generator.

The devices were luggable rather than portable and made it hard for reporters to deliver pictures of events as they were happening.

Mark Tyrrell, manager of resources and development in the BBC's Newsgathering arm, who helps to kit out reporters in the field, said technology had improved considerably by the time the recent Iraq war began.



He said reporting teams that were travelling with troops could only be made up of two people; one reporter and a cameraman, who also doubled up as the technical editor. In case of a newspaper, it could be only one – the reporter, who doubles up as a photographer too.

As a result, he said, the equipment they carried had to be easily portable.

#### Powerful Package

Now satellite phones are little bigger than a laptop computer and could easily be moved around.

Even better is the fact that the phones are battery powered, allowing journalists to spend more time in the field.



The quality of the video and audio sent back is better than before because the satellite phones use ISDN which gives them more bandwidth than is available via ordinary phone lines.

“Once you get on the public ISDN network you can do file transfer and start using audio coding and decoding devices to give you studio quality audio,” says Tyrrell.

The satellite phones can also do live, low-quality video conferencing via ISDN.

The ability to send back these reports is changing the way that wars were reported.

The poor quality of these reports is outweighed by their value. The information is more important than the medium by which it is carried.

The satellite phones allow reporters to send back much higher-quality video, too, albeit slowly.

## Drip Feed

The phones can stay in constant contact via the Thuraya network which uses geostationary satellites whose footprint covers the Middle East and Europe.



As a result, large files can be dripped back slowly to the newsrooms for broadcast and for use in news bulletins.

Reporters are also equipped with Iridium satellite phones that connect via a constellation of spacecraft orbiting around 675 kilometres (420 miles) high.

In addition to satellite phones, reporters used the Panasonic ToughBook, a ruggedised laptop, to edit video and audio reports in the field and prepare them for transmission.

The laptops could survive life on the frontline but the biggest danger to the laptops was sand.

## From Vietnam to the Middle East

When American soldiers and Marines finally make their move against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the journalists riding with them will have unprecedented opportunities to report from the front line in real time.

The combination of satellite technology with the broad access the military is giving journalists in this war means that the reporters, photographers and camera crews "embedded" with the troops will — in theory, at least — be able to transmit portions of the war either live, as it's happening, or within minutes or a few hours of the action taking place.

It should provide television viewers in the United States and around the world with an unprecedented view of the battlefield.

"This is going to be historic. It really is," said Ross Simpson, an Associated Press radio correspondent embedded with the 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Division.

## Vietnam: Access, But No Technology

Much has been made of the tensions that built up between the press and the military in Vietnam. But when I was a young war correspondent in Vietnam between 1967 and 1970, I can honestly say I never experienced it.

In those days, we had almost total access to the troops. We traveled aboard U.S. planes and helicopters. We rode with the Army and Marines in their trucks and jeeps. We slept and ate with the troops. Out in the field at least, the relationship couldn't have been better.

Back then, television journalists used film, not videotape. Our film reels had to be carried from the battlefield back to Saigon; then shipped by plane to Hong Kong, Bangkok or Tokyo; then trans-shipped to Los Angeles and, ultimately, to ABCNEWS headquarters in New York.

There the film was processed and edited. By the time it got on the air, two and a half to three days would have passed. Satellite technology was still in its infancy; and we almost never had access to it.

## Desert Storm: Technology, but Little Access

By the time of the 1991 Gulf War, we had moved on to videotape and satellites were readily available, allowing us to report live from Kuwait or Saudi Arabia.

However, the U.S. military gave journalists little or no access to the fighting. The 43-day war was a brilliant victory for the United States, but most of us were never able to report on it directly.

The only pictures Americans saw of the ground war were of the aftermath — like the graphic footage of Iraqis killed while fleeing Kuwait along the "highway of death." They saw nothing of the fighting that preceded the retreat.

After the enormous success of Operation Desert Storm, senior U.S. military officers were not happy about the fact that there had been no one on the battlefield to record the actual war. They want to be sure that doesn't happen again.

## This Time: Broad Leeway, No Censorship

From what the Army has told us, we'll be operating under generous ground rules this time. As long as we don't include operational details that could be helpful to the Iraqis, we're being given pretty much of a free hand.

We won't be showing you the faces of American casualties. For obvious reasons, the Pentagon wants time to inform next of kin. Families shouldn't be learning about injuries or worse from television reports.

Such ground rules have existed for decades. For the most part, they are perfectly sensible and reasonable; indeed, most news organizations adopted them long ago in their own guidelines for reporters in combat.

There isn't expected to be any actual military censorship in this war.

"We are going to rely on you to use your judgment," said the commander of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division, the force I am embedded with. "We're going to make some mistakes and you're probably going to catch it on film. If that's what happens, you're free to show that."

## Taking a Risk

The military is taking a risk. "If some squad shoots a group of civilians by mistake it's entirely possible that could get carried

live now,” said Michael Kelly, who is traveling with the Army’s 3rd Infantry Division for The Atlantic Monthly.

But the military also understands that having independent observers on the scene — including foreign journalists from foreign countries — can protect them from allegations that might come from Saddam’s regime and other governments opposed to the U.S. campaign.

They learned from the bombardments of Baghdad in 1991 and Yugoslavia in 1999 that the public — at home and abroad — does not always believe the military’s account of its own operations when it comes to civilian casualties.

Also, if U.S. forces come across evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, having foreign reporters witness it could help convince the world that the U.S. campaign was justified.

What’s totally unpredictable, of course, is the impact that all this coverage will have back at home and around the world. If the campaign doesn’t go as quickly or as well as anticipated, if friendly casualties are high, if some of the reporting is deemed too critical, or if some of the information proves inadvertently helpful to the Iraqis, the military may quickly rethink the value of having us journalists along.

#### How Well Will the Technology Work?

We won’t know how well the system works until we are a couple of days into the operation. There are huge logistical problems still to be tested.

The 3rd Infantry Division, for example, plans to be moving hard and fast for most of the first two or three days of war, stopping only to refuel. We don’t know whether we’ll be able to transmit while we’re moving.

Much of the fighting will take place at night. Our cameras are equipped with nightscope lenses, but how much we can actually shoot from moving vehicles in the dark is anybody’s guess.

If the Iraqis use chemical or biological weapons, we’ll all be wearing masks and protective gear, including rubber boots and gloves. Can we even videotape under those conditions?

This is the season for sandstorms in the desert of southern Iraq. Recent storms had winds of up to 70 miles an hour, with visibility as low as 5 feet. We don’t know what impact that will have on our equipment. We’re carrying two portable satellite ground stations, one video phone, eight cameras and several satellite phones. Will it be enough? Will they function? We’ll find out.

The AP’s Simpson raises another potential problem: “We’ve been told that if we get slimed, if we get some kind of chemical or biological agent in the area and we get contaminated, everything that’s not in a Ziploc bag — meaning your laptop, your satphone, all of it — gets junked. So essentially you’re out of the ballgame. It’s over for you. You have a pad and pencil.”

Referring to Ernie Pyle, the legendary World War II correspondent, Simpson said: “Those of us who carry the latest in electronics may wish we had Ernie’s old typewriter so we can manually peck out the story.”

#### Notes:

## LESSON 17

### THE ROAD TO BAGHDAD

Rahul Pandita

Bush *Khanzeer*.... Bush is a pig, said Mohammed, while taking a sip from the plastic cup filled with Turkish coffee. Then he pulled a mouthful of smoke from his Marlboro cigarette and switched on his car stereo. In one of those Arabic news bulletins, Mohammed's namesake, the Iraqi information minister Mohammed Saeed Al-Sahaf, the ultimate PR guy, who knew how to take a bullet for his client, echoed similar sentiments. After listening to him, Mohammed put his two fingers to his lips and created a kissing sound. That was for Sahaf for calling Bush a crawling insect. As Bush's evolution and devolution from one form of life to another continued, my mind wandered elsewhere, not very far from where I was.

We were approaching Ruwaished – a small town on the Jordan-Iraq border – my taxi driver Mohammed, my cameraman Manjit Singh and yours truly. The Coalition forces had entered Baghdad and the operation in the city was running on oiled castors so far. In Jordan, particularly in the sleepy Ruwaished, they had made journalism a cottage industry. Much before the war scenario in Iraq had steamed up, journalists lay a siege in this bordering town, waiting for an opportunity to cross into Iraq. Very few of them, including us, had managed to procure the visas and our countless efforts in getting one had failed.

As Al-Jazeera beamed live pictures from all over Iraq, the only restaurant in Ruwaished was filled with news hungry journos with empty bellies. On one wall, the owner of the restaurant, one Turkish fellow named Nijim, who reminded me of that Jew merchant in the Shakespearean drama, had showcased on a wall the visiting cards of journalists who had visited him so far. *Marhaba* – he would welcome you inside and then your wallet shed weight in Dinars. Even for washing your hands in a dirty basin, Nijim's son, who stood nearby like a fidayeen, would demand half-dinar. That in Indian currency translates into shelling out approximately 34 rupees.

I had been camping in Amman since the dawn of the Operation Iraqi Liberation. As smart bombs rained in Iraq, people came out on streets to protest against Bush and his comrades. A sizeable number of people living in Jordan, like my driver Mohammed, are of Palestinian origin and they saw this somewhat similar to Israeli operation in Palestine. So every Friday, after the afternoon prayers, they would come out in a procession and raise slogans in favour of Saddam Hussein. The portraits of Bush were spit at, showered with blows from shoes and burnt. During one of such demonstrations outside Jordan's Al-Husseini mosque, an Arab told me that America was even responsible for the standoff between Al-Hind (India) and Pakistan. I could only nod my head in agreement.

From Ruwaished, we had to drive another 70 kilometers to Al-Karama check post and after crossing the No-Man's land, we would be inside the Iraqi territory. To achieve that at a time when nobody was allowed to go beyond Ruwaished - on the

pretext of the area being a military zone – was a puzzle that lay solved before us. Greasing a couple of sweaty palms had never been so difficult, but nevertheless, we had managed it. As my stomach rumbled with a lunch of rice and peas at Nijim's hotel, we drove forward. The highway patrol vehicle on the way stopped us, but after checking our car number, the Jordanian soldier passed a benevolent smile and let us pass. An hour or so at the check post to complete formalities and we were inside the No-Man's land, left entirely on the mercy of the almighty. A few meters ahead, a towering picture of Saddam Hussein stood guard at the Iraqi point and we saw a few Iraqi soldiers in battle fatigues. Leaving us there, our car raced back. Before turning back, Mohammed looked at me as if it would be the last time he saw me. He could not control his emotions and pecked me on my cheeks like Arabs do. With a smile on my lips, I approached the Iraqis. "*Marhaba*," I greeted them and their faces still remained stone. My heart missed a few beats. "Were we about to become prisoners?" I asked myself. They were about eight Iraqi soldiers and I could not see a weapon on them. But still, they were Iraqi soldiers and we had heard so many stories of horror, that not even the remote idea of defending ourselves from them, if need arose, came into my wildest thoughts. They asked for passports and we handed them over. They flipped the pages looking for an Iraqi visa, but found none. And then... I broke into a song that I had learnt from Mohammed. *Bush, Bush, shili dek, hadal bacchi mai fedaik* (Bush don't put your hands into Iraq, you will burn them).... Like sun coming out from dark, gray clouds, smile appeared on their faces. I knew we were saved. But they still didn't let us get inside. Before a car came from the Iraqi side towards Jordanian border and they ordered us get into it, I was asked by their chief to sing the song at least a dozen times. But it was worth it. And then we came back inside the Jordanian territory. I was frustrated beyond resurrection. I wanted to get inside the war zone and now. Very soon my wish came true.

Just two days after this adventure, Mohammed Saeed Al-Sahaf failed to appear on the television and we knew, Iraq had slipped out completely out of Saddam Hussein's hands. We packed our bags, hired a car and moved towards Ruwaished. By the time, we reached Al-Karama, a convoy of seventy odd cars had gathered on the point – journos raring to move inside. After continuous pressure from all of us, the Jordanians finally relented. We were asked to spend the night in the No-Man's territory in a tent and then proceed ahead with the first ray of sunlight. On the border, we were asked to sign an undertaking stating that we were completely aware of the risk we were taking in negotiating the road from Al-Karama to Baghdad and the Jordanian government in no way could be held responsible for whatever happened to us.

This time, there were no Iraqi soldiers on the border. It was taken by the Airborne Division of the U.S Army. In the night,





## LESSON 18

## WHEN RULES CHANGE EVERY MINUTE: REPORTING FROM A WAR ZONE



As Northern Alliance troops were driving Taliban soldiers out of northern Afghanistan, an official at the Alliance's Foreign Ministry in Khoja Bachoudin told journalists that the key city of Taloqan about 40 miles to the south had been "liberated." The Taliban had been chased out of town and out of the region.

When the news — hungry asked if they could go there, they were told "No problem." The official scribbled out the permission slip that would allow them to pass their checkpoints en route to Taloqan.

That night, a television correspondent discussed it with his producer and the camera crew. They consulted their "fixers," the local translator-liaison-arrangers who are indispensable in places like Afghanistan. They learnt that the road to Taloqan was heavily mined, and parts of it might even be under Taliban control still — contrary to they had been told. They took a vote and elected not to go.

The next day, the correspondent ran into an Associated Press reporter who had just come from the Foreign Ministry. She told him that an official had warned her, "if you go to Taloqan, you will die."

Two days later, the team from another U.S. network drove to Taloqan — at night, no less — and narrowly missed being caught in a roadside firefight.

By the time the media moved en masse to Taloqan a few days later, there was still fighting going on inside the city.

The biggest problem foreign journalists faced in Afghanistan was relying on the guidance and protection of the Northern Alliance. And, simply put, its officials could not always be depended on and what they said could not be taken at face value — either out of arrogance, self-deception, macho posturing or simple errors of judgment. They had a tendency of exaggerating their prowess and even the number of troops they had.

In any war zone, foreign reporters have to rely first on their instincts, then on the fixers' knowledge and, finally, on the goodwill of the host country or group.

But in Afghanistan, each of these was flawed. Reporters' instincts were typically based on conventional ideas of warfare. The brand practiced in Afghanistan is much more volatile, anarchic and brutal than what journalists from other countries are accustomed to.

Reporters used to be considered non-combatants, essentially off-limits. Not anymore. And especially not in Afghanistan where the Taliban reportedly announced that journalists with the Northern Alliance would be treated the same as the enemy soldiers.

The dilemma for journalists is that all of them want to cover the story, or else they would not have accepted the assignment, but it is inherently risky. The fixer who was with the journalists killed in one of the incidents in Afghanistan later revealed that the local commander strenuously warned them the trip was dangerous.

"They said, 'Good. Then it might make a great story,'" he said, shaking his head in disbelief.

The truth is, nowhere in Afghanistan is entirely safe. But traveling on its roads anywhere is especially perilous.

As an American journalist said, once you eliminate stupid behavior from the equation, whether you survive — and especially in a violent arena such as Afghanistan — is "basically a matter of luck, good or bad."



MSNBC

## Danger Ahead

### Reporter's Notebook:

#### When Journalists Become Targets (ABC News, VK Malhotra)

**J A L A L A B A D, Afghanistan, Nov. 26 — It was under the dim light of the crescent moon that we entered Afghanistan.**

Traveling at night was not the original plan, but in this part of the world things do not always go as planned. Nothing ever seems to go as planned. We knew the road to Kabul would be dangerous, but we never imagined how closely that danger would hit home.

We drove through the uncertain night with a small but well-armed militia-for-hire. It's about as close as one can get to a proper police escort in this newly "secured" region of Afghanistan. There were about 30 men, if you could call them that. They were boys, in fact — most of them younger than my 27 years, armed with Kalashnikov assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades.

They traveled crammed together in the back of dusty pickup trucks. Scarves covered their faces to protect from dirt and dust. The scarves only made them look more menacing. My security detail was making me feel insecure.



#### Success Is Staying Alive

Success in this part of the world usually translates to staying alive. Our descent into Afghanistan from Pakistan had been a success. We were promised six rooms at Jalalabad's Spinghar Hotel, but were given only one. That only after bribing the desk clerk. War profiteers are everywhere.

A few of our team stayed in the room, some of us slept in the hall, and I was lucky enough to find a spare bed in the room of a fellow journalist. The camaraderie of journalists traveling in a war zone often serves up gracious hospitality.

To say we enjoyed a good night's sleep would be a lie. To say we enjoyed a much-needed night of sleep would be the absolute truth. One day in Afghanistan feels like two days anywhere else in the world. We awoke early and decided to push on with our journey down the road to Kabul.

There was a carefree ease to our travel. We admired the beautiful landscape, waved at the young children and elderly men that lined the road to get a glimpse of the foreigners. At one point we even stopped for our cameraman to shoot footage of a group of camels being shepherded through the dusty terrain by a young girl with a stick.

We felt no fear. We felt only a sense of adventure. How many jobs allow an opportunity as rich as this, I thought to myself.

Perhaps it was my naivete that allowed me to drift through my thoughts and daydream of the exotic land of Afghanistan. Perhaps it was my naivete that allowed me to forget the perils that hide themselves along this road. It was about one hour into our journey that my innocence and adventurous spirit were shattered, and my vision of Afghanistan was changed forever.



#### A Message of Murder

A small white sedan approached us in the distance. It was traveling at top speed, leaving a thick cloud of dust in its wake. As the car sped closer, it was apparent that something was awry. We were being flagged down. There was a young man hysterically waving his hands out of the passenger-side window. He was screaming. He was screaming in horror. Our vehicles screeched to a halt just as we were to pass one another.

"Go back! Go back! They killed them," he cried. "They killed four of us. They killed journalists!"

A hollow, cold fear shivered through my body. I searched my colleagues for a reaction, I was met with only a mirror. They, too, were in shock. The shock lasted only moments, but felt like an eternity.

There was no debate, there was no conversation. “Turn the car around. Get out of here,” I heard someone in our vehicle say. I can’t even remember who said it, but I’m glad they did.



We raced back to Jalalabad. Confused, scared, no one spoke. We tried to attach some sort of logic, some reason why such a terrible thing could have happened. We came up with nothing. My fear had turned to anger. I was angry that I had been shocked into fear. I was angry that I hadn’t been more attuned to the treachery of my travel. I was angry that they, whoever they were, had killed journalists.

As we drove back through the small towns and once-beautiful landscape we had passed only an hour ago, we waved to no one and we spoke of nothing. I felt betrayed. “Why hadn’t you warned us?” I wanted to scream at them. “Why do you continue to smile and wave to me?”

Back at the Spinghar Hotel, our team became the bearers of bad news. As we told our fellow colleagues what had happened, the place dissolved to frenzy. Who? Where? Why? The questions blared at us. We had no answers for them. We all struggled to do our jobs, to find details, to confirm rumors. As more journalists retreated from the road to the hotel, details of the horrific act of violence began to unfold.

#### Journalists No Longer Immune

Witnesses told of how their vehicles had been stopped along the road by men with guns. They were pulled from the vehicle, beaten, dragged off the road and executed. Three men, one woman, all journalists — why? No more journalist bravado. No more feeling of immunity. We were targets. We were not safe anymore.

The rest of the evening, and late into night, was a blur of meetings, press briefings, interviews with crazed drivers and angry journalists. We asked the local *mujahideen* to retrieve the bodies, to find the perpetrators of this heinous crime. Not our province, they said. Not our problem.

We all managed to file relatively thoughtful pieces about the death of these innocent journalists. I still struggle to find a reason. That same camaraderie that had found me a bed in a room with a relative stranger now forced the horror of war, the turmoil of Afghanistan, and the fragility of life into a new light.

Like a naked light bulb hanging from the ceiling of a dark room, it was a harsh light that hurt my eyes.

It’s easy and perhaps even more comfortable to cast it off as a stroke of bad luck in a war-torn land. I’m not quite sure why it happened, but it did happen, and we were only 10 minutes behind them on the road to Kabul.

#### With the Warwickshire Yeomanry During World War One

The following is an extract from the ‘Evesham Journal’ and Four Shires Advertiser, Saturday, September 18, 1915 (<http://www.macs.hw.ac.uk>)

Mr. G. Shear, of Honeybourne, has received the following graphic letter from his son George, who is in the Warwickshire Yeomanry:- “We landed here in Gallipoli on the 14th, and we had not been on shore many minutes before they dropped a few shells amongst us. They happened to be bad ones and did not burst, and nobody was hurt. It came rather as a surprise to us, as we did not know the landing was within their range. We made a dug-out camp behind a hill where they could not reach us, and were here for about a week. They were always shelling round the landing, and there were sometimes a few casualties when the troops had to go down for water or rations; that was when young Arthur King from Broadway got wounded. There were several battleships lying a few hundred yards out to sea; they often make it warm in the Turkish positions up there in the hills. There were two enemy aeroplanes came almost to our camp the night after we landed, but the ships’ guns made it too interesting for them and they went back; one of them was damaged and dropped in the Australian lines. We made our first appearance in action on Saturday, August 21st, and they gave us rather a hot time. We had to advance over about a mile and half of open country in the daylight. We made the first half mile without seeming to be noticed, and then they let go at us with shrapnel fire; it seemed as thick as hail, and it is almost miraculous so few of us were hit. We lost a considerable number killed, wounded and missing, out of our regiment as it was, but our first line took three rows of otherwise almost impregnable trenches while their fire was directed at us. Poor Wally (Coldicott) stopped one with his leg, but I do not think it is at all serious. Arkell (Coldicott) had a piece of shell go through his pants without touching his skin. Nothing hit me but dirt and dust that the shells were kicking up. We were all pretty well beat when we got into the shelter of a hill where they could not reach us. For one thing we had not had a chance to get used to our infantry equipment, and some of us had picks and shovels to carry besides our little entrenching tools. I had one. We also had our rifles, ammunition, two days’ hard rations, and our water bottles. We rested in our shelter hill till it was getting dark, and then the division was split up to reinforce our front line positions. We spent a hell of a night tearing about all over the place without much apparent object — bullets were whirling continuously, but we could not fire a shot as our first line trenches were in front of us, and anyhow we had a very foggy idea of the enemy’s whereabouts, though they seemed to have a very fair idea of where we were. We lost a squadron leader and a lieutenant that day, both wounded. In the small hours of the morning we were ordered to retire. At

the time we were huddled up in a seven foot trench trying to keep our heads out of the way of an enfilading fire from out left, and the fire from out front and expecting to get the order either to make or receive a bayonet attack any minute. It never bothered me very much when we were under the shrapnel fire, but I am quite willing to admit I had the wind up then, and so had everyone else, as we did not know why we had to retire. We could hear from the rattle of the maxims not more than 60 yards away that the Turks were making a terrific counter attack, and wounded came back to our trench with the news that our first line were losing heavily, and we thought that our order was really to retreat, and we had no idea of course of the lay of the land. We found, however, that the whole division had the same order, and we all went back together to our starting place. By the time we got there we were absolutely played out, having had nothing to eat since dinner time the day before, and it was then about four in the morning. We had had no sleep the previous night either, as we had been marching from the landing place to the position. We started our advance from \_\_\_\_\_. The next day we came back there again, but it was dark, and we received no opposition, and we are now in dug-outs in a very safe place, getting good grub, and altogether enjoying ourselves. We make all sorts of messes with our army rations, bully beef, biscuits, stew, biscuits pounded fine make real good porridge. I tried to make some pancakes with pounded biscuits, but I own they were a failure—they didn't cake—they would persist in boiling, so I bunched the whole lot together and mixed in a tin of bully beef and boiled it. It was fine. We get desicated vegetables, which are very good, only they take such a lot of boiling. I should like some oxo tubes if you could send them; they make good soup without much trouble; also a lighter, as there is a match famine here. I don't think many of our wounded got bad wounds, and there were not more than three or four killed, though the 2nd Brigade lost heavily. Now be sure and not worry about us. We are about as safe as we were in Egypt and certainly contented, and I don't think we shall see any action again for a deuce of a time, and perhaps never. They talk about sending our horses out to us, but I would rather not be plagued with them. We are living in dug-outs, out of reach of stray bullets. Our worst trouble here is shortage of water, as you will see by the colour of this paper. We get all we want for drinking purposes—not for washing. I managed to get a shave last night—the first for a week. Plenty have older growth than that. We are a dirty rough looking lot, but are hoping for a chance to clear up pretty soon”

#### Notes:



## LESSON 19

### COVERING DISASTERS

#### Objective

The objective of this lesson is to make the students understand the complexities of disasters. It would also make them familiar with the kind of strategies they need to adopt while covering disasters.

What if...

A late night fire broke out in a disc in Delhi, killing nearly 50 people, and injuring scores of others?

A rain-soaked roof collapsed on shoppers in a mall?

A MIG-21 crashed in a busy market place?

Militants struck at a popular restaurant?

Sadly, as news bureaus in Delhi, Jalandhar or Mumbai know, these are not hypothetical scenarios.

Indian planners and security experts have been advocating the need to have a disaster plan. Newsrooms need one too, if they are going to rise to the challenge that disasters pose.

#### Flood the Zone

On December 13, 2001, a group of terrorists stormed the Indian Parliament, only one reporter in Zee News was present there. Rest of them were busy with other stories.



But within five minutes, Zee News reporters were racing to the Parliament, while other colleagues staked out Prime Minister's residence, his office and other important places, where some related development could take place.

When there is breaking news, media organisations have tended to have a culture where reporters just go all out. Every single newspaper and television office has a lot of reporters trained to think that way.

Few years earlier, in June 1997, a similar team effort by the staff

of the Zee News paid off when fire broke out in Delhi's Uphaar Cinema, killing 59 people and injuring dozens of others.

With reporters racing to the scene, "We involved all the reporters in the effort," recalls Rakesh Khar, former news editor of Zee News. "We start to brainstorm after that initial 30 minutes of getting everybody immediately on the street. What are the components of this story? What are the logical questions that readers are going to have, and let's start thinking ahead to reporting out those lines."

If disaster happens and you are a reporter - how ready would you be - to flood the zone?

#### Narrative Strategies

A critical part of any disaster coverage planning is considering this question: What are the most effective ways to tell this story?

By now, reporters should realise that by the time the reader picks up the morning paper, he or she has probably already heard the top stories of the day, from the radio, television or an online news source.

When that happens, some news organisations consciously decide to take a different approach.

Let us take this example, which I read recently in a magazine. *The Miami Herald* chose to be different in 1995 when a deranged man hijacked a school bus carrying disabled schoolchildren.

"We had a problem here that newspapers have more and more these days," said *Herald* senior writer Martin Merzer when he was being interviewed for *Best Newspaper Writing 1996*. Merzer wrote the paper's award-winning story drawing on reports from more than a dozen of his colleagues. "This thing happened at 8:30, 9 o'clock in the morning. We couldn't get it in the paper for another 24 hours. All the local TV stations were already on it full-time. ... Local news was on it, it was on CNN live, and we still had 24 hours to go."

Merzer and his editors agreed there was no sense in writing a hard news lead — *Police shot and killed a man who hijacked a bus and held 13 disabled children hostage Tuesday morning after a tense low-speed chase through rush hour traffic.*

Their reasoning: "No one's going to read into the third paragraph because they figure they know that." The *Herald's* only hope, Merzer said, was "to try to tell it better, in more detail, so that people who think they know a lot about this story figure out real soon that there's more to know, and we're going to tell it to them. I figured our best contribution would be to tell the story in a different fashion with compelling detail."

Rather than summing up what readers already knew, Merzer gambled on writing a vivid, edgy reconstruction. The gamble paid off. The *Herald's* story, which won the \$10,000 Jesse Laventhol Award for Deadline Reporting, began in this irresistible fashion:





## LESSON 20

### THE COMPLEXITIES OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

#### Objective

The lesson deals with the kind of precautions reporters need to exercise while covering communal riots.

“...I would also appeal to the media to do their bit. The media is supposed to give subdued coverage to such volatile situations.... If you show dead bodies and then identify which community the bodies belong to then instead of playing the role of reducing tensions you are actually provoking people.”

Indian Law Minister Arun Jaitley in an Interview.

A journalist covering a communal riot – say in Meerut or Surat – in the past could move around in the riot-hit areas, taking for granted that he would never be a target of somebody’s ire. But that scenario has changed now. The watershed in reporting riots could be traced to 1992, during the demolition of the Babri Masjid, when the communal violence that followed involved the mobilisation of large mobs or cadres of a particular party or ideological group.

The street vandalism visible in the Ayodhya movement, where bands of unruly cadres ruled the streets, unchecked by the long arm of the law, changed all that. In 1992, as the Babri Masjid was demolished, several reporters, correspondents and mediapersons were brutally attacked. The motive: to destroy their attempt at documenting the who – did – it story.

The recent riots in Gujarat saw some of these tendencies being directed at the media. The Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi himself made repeated and veiled threats about the television coverage by national channels like NDTV and Aaj Tak. He even tried to ban few channels, but all in vain. The correspondents of the television channels had fanned across Gujarat to bring to their viewers the ugly and bitter images of the violence.

Who can forget the picture of Qutubuddin Ansari? His was the face flashed across the world as the face of Gujarat riots – eyes

welling with tears, chubby cheeks caked with mud and dried blood, dusty hair and hands folded in a plea for mercy. He was pleading with a bunch of blood-thirsty fanatics – armed with choppers, crowbars, kerosene cans and torches – to spare his family’s life.

That was March, 2002 and Gujarat was in the throes of one of the worst communal flare-ups ever seen by the state.

On February 28, Bhargava Parikh of ZEE TV along with his cameraman, was attacked because the attackers thought that he was documenting proof of individuals who led the mobs. Dibang from Aaj Tak (now with NDTV India) was attacked near the Kabadi Market on March 2. Rajdeep Sardesai and Star TV were threatened and attacked. ANS staff was attacked. Two correspondents of NDTV, Sanjay Singh and Sanjay Rokhade were held at Bhavnagar for five hours. They were terrorised and traumatised by a band of Bajrang Dalis who kept taunting them, asking, should we kill you, should we not?

On April 3, 02, the Asian Age crime reporter in Ahmedabad, Ms. Sonal Kellogg, along with the reporter of a Surat-based daily, was beaten up by the police in the Mariam Bibi Ni Chawli area in Gomitpur. When she complained to the deputy commissioner of Police [Zone V] RJ Savani, whom she knew quite well, all he said was that “it might have been a mistake.” When she protested to the Police Commissioner PC Pandey in his office, he was dismissive, “Don’t bother me...I don’t have time...file a complaint if you want.”

Five days later, on April 8, 02, the Ahmedabad police, which had failed to control mob violence over the past 33 days, severely assaulted about two dozen reporters and photographers at the historic Gandhi Ashram. The journalists, who had assembled to cover two peace meetings, including one attended by Medha Patkar, were beaten up ruthlessly. Leading his men was Deputy Commissioner of Police VM Parghi.

Three of the mediapersons, including *The Indian Express* photographer Harsh Shah, NDTV cameraman Pranav Joshi and E-TV reporter Harshal Pandya were seriously injured. Pranav had to be admitted to the ICU at a private hospital and his condition is now stable. Aaj Tak correspondent Dhiman Purohit, who suffered a fracture in his hand, NDTV reporter Sanjeev Singh, *Jansatta* photographer Amit Dave, *Gujarat Samachar* reporter Ketan Trivedi, a photographer of the same newspaper Gautam Mehta and reporter Ashish Amin were amongst the other victims.

But there is a flip side as well. One consequence of too much media is that after the first couple of days of any major news event, the media coverage itself becomes the story. Two things stood out in media conduct during the Gujarat communal riots, which is rather tiredly being logged as the first communal riot for the satellite TV era. One was the naming of communi-

ties which the media has been circumspect about doing in the past.



One Star TV report by Rajdeep Sardesai talked of a mob identifying Muslims and then setting them alight. The Government's case is that such reporting was watched in the villages and reacted to by further violence. The other was the live filming of pitched battles, as well as attacks on cars, including that of George Fernandes, as well as those used by the channels. Violence was carried live.

Newspapers this time were also both sensational and fairly upfront about identifying the communities it involved.

The Asian Age named Muslim victims, and I have been told that some newspapers in Uttar Pradesh had also been fairly provocative, naming both communities and victims. Other Hindi newspapers however, refrained from being communal in editorial tone, Jansatta, Punjab Kesari and Nav Bharat, to name some examples.

Media coverage became a major issue for the State and the Central Governments, which took time off from dousing fires to ban Star News in Gujarat, using the cable regulation act.

On the morning of March 2, orders were issued to district headquarters to order cable operators in their jurisdiction to take the Star News channel off the air. The same evening while being interviewed by the channel, the Chief Minister declared with a flourish that the order should be rescinded.

But the Central Government was also in the picture by then. The Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Sushma Swaraj, was on the phone to New Delhi Television in Delhi protesting, her fellow cabinet minister Pramod Mahajan was calling those doing the live reporting on their mobiles.

Certainly Barkha Dutt's reporting on a 90-kilometre rural stretch where she said violence was taking place and there was not even a single constable in sight along the entire stretch, irked the Government. Graphic pictures of violence and pitched battles were also shown at another point.

Dutt's reports and those of Rajdeep Sardesai alarmed those who watched. People differed in their judgment. Some fellow journalists thought Dutt was being hysterical. Others thought she was doing a good job. E-mail appeals went around, urging people to e-mail Rajdeep Sardesai and Dutt, to express solidar-

ity with them and appreciation for their "non-partisan role". But Law Minister Arun Jaitley was among the critics, without naming the channel.

He thought the print media had been less sensational than TV. It had not. The Dainik Bhaskar had a banner headline describing Bapu's Gujarat as going up in flames. Another paper thought up the headline "Battering Ram" to describe the situation at Ayodhya. The Hindustan Times published a front page close up photograph of a child with 90 per cent burns and added in the caption that the picture had been taken just before the child died.

Not to mention the foreign press, which had a field day. "Rampaging Hindus burn Muslim children alive" shrieked the Independent of London over eight columns. "Muslims burnt alive in Indian revenge riots," said the Times of London. No delicacy about naming communities in a far off land even though there were Hindu and Muslim communities there who could have been provoked.

Aaj Tak did its bit to draw attention to the mayhem and to itself. Its cameraman focussed at one point at a bullet coming through his car's window, and the channel covered its own camera team rescuing families and escorting them to shelter. I still remember a correspondent of Aaj tak, holding a gun mike in darkness and speaking in hushed tones, as if he was about to be attacked by a mob: *Aaj ki raat Qayamat ki raat hai...* Now this is sensationalistic and nothing else.

Zee News fished for compliments on its own coverage, and repeatedly asking its studio guests which channel they felt had been most irresponsible.

And Doordarshan, having shut its current affairs shop, did nothing particularly heroic. But not many know that the channel scored a dubious scoop on the day the Godhra incident was reported. It said the kar sevaks had brought the attack upon themselves by turning rowdy, not paying for tea on the platform, and shouting pro – temple slogans. It was foolish story, and duly dumped after initially being shown.

The danger with the media is that, wittingly or unwittingly, it promotes those whom it condemns. How effortlessly the Vishwa Hindu Parishad recaptured centrestage and set the media's agenda once the flames in Gujarat had begun to be doused. When the last of the editorials had been written asking for Narendra Modi's head, attention went back to Ayodhya, and the saints began to fill camera frames, pop up in TV studios and address press conferences. Graphics departments in both TV channels and newspaper offices produced maps of the disputed area, and the location of the "disputed structure".

Possibly the media will now introspect, and ask themselves how such events should be covered in the future.

**Assignment:** Write a detailed report on Qutubuddin Ansari. Find out where he is now and what does he do to make a living?

## LESSON 21

### THE COMPLEXITIES OF COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

#### Objective

The lesson will give the students an overview of how things work during elections post the satellite boom in India. What it means to be a part of the sound-byte culture and how the future of the candidates and the electorate is sealed through poll



Poster showing M. Karunanidhi and his son  
surveys and reports.

Let us take the example of India's first television elections. The world's largest democracy followed the sights and sounds of Election '98 on nearly a dozen satellite channels, including BBC, CNN, and the nation's domestic, government-sponsored network, Doordarshan, reaching an estimated total viewership of 400 million. It was for the first time that an entire nation saw politicians being grilled by the poll pundits and television correspondents. Politicians rushed from one television studio to another, to score over rivals.

The elections of 1998 painted an entirely different picture from the previous election that was held less than two years ago. At that time, Doordarshan was the only channel that could cover election in its own insignificant way. That time the foreign satellite channels faced a lot of trouble; the government had put restrictions on uplinking. Now you must understand that Doordarshan still had the numbers and the resources on its side this time around: 330 million viewers, more than half of the India's voting public; twelve production centers and a national computer network that enabled it to broadcast voting results one hour before its competitors. On of its two channels, DD1 and DD Metro, the network aired 130 hours of election-related programming during the three days that votes were tabulated. During that time, there were no electronic voting machines; the counting was done manually.

But the elections in 98 were destined to be different. This time, the government allowed some channels to jump into the news



arena. The first 'Hulk Hogan' happened to be Zee India TV, which started broadcasting more than 30 news programmes everyday. But a real good work was done by Star TV, which got its programming from NDTV. Psephologists like Prannoy Roy beamed results round-the-clock, breaking the monopoly

Around the country, the pace was as frenzied. In south India, regional channels such as Sun TV, ETV, and Asianet (combined viewership: 10 million) introduced extra news bulletins into their daily schedules. Nothing like this had ever happened in India since the news giant CNN brought the 1991 gulf war into the Indian drawing rooms.

Television's wall-to-wall coverage redefined the scope of Indian journalism. Normally taciturn politicians, realising the immediacy and the impact of TV, became instantly available. They began to understand that live, two-minute sound bites were easier to control than pesky press conferences. Sonia Gandhi, who was mostly campaigning for the first time to revive the flagging fortunes of the Congress party gave her only interview — albeit a brief one — to Star News.



From being the brash, elbow-jutting pariahs of Indian journalism, television newspeople suddenly became acceptable



conduits to the people. A correspondent with *Aaj Tak*, a daily news bulletin broadcast on DD, noticed that print journalist unable to buttonhole politicians would happily use information given to television reporters as “background” or simply tag along with TV crews to meet an elusive source.

Faced with the prospect that television for the first time would beat them at their own game, print reporters re-oriented themselves. Some national papers like *The Times of India* (circulation: 1.3 million) stuck with their old ways of reporting on the day’s campaigning, but others like *The Indian Express* began leaning heavily on investigative stories. *The Pioneer* resorted to graphic techniques — front-page photographs of politicians flanked by television screen-shaped bubbles containing their statements made on TV.

For their part, Hindi dailies like *Rashtriya Sahara* started using over-sized colour pictures. The news magazines, too, reacted. The country’s leading English-language weekly *India Today* (circulation: 650,000) prepared two special issues in advance. The bosses at the magazine realised that it was no use repeating what the tv channels had already said. So it adopted a unique approach of profiling little-known candidates and reporting lesser-known facts about the main protagonists.

The equation was very simple: the orgasmic election coverage on television set the pace for newspapers and news magazines and they were literally forced to respond. So magazines like *Outlook* looked at the so-called big picture - why certain states voted they way they did; what issues were vital to which castes — matters that the small screen could not delve into as effectively. In an attempt to make India’s political system more accountable, *Outlook* even initiated a citizen’s campaign listing candidates having criminal records.



Now let us take a look at the impact. I mean, this is a country where only 52 out of 100 people can read or write and they saw it all on television. From Moradabad to Madurai, the television swept it all. The pundits spoke of the beginning of an era of tele-democracy — a time when the small screen would substi-

tute completely for a candidate’s guts-and-gore rally speech. They pointed to how villagers near the small town of Betul were suddenly speaking of “vote swings” and “incumbency factors” using vintage TV pollster jargon.

Cable subscriptions increased dramatically, especially in smaller towns. A survey conducted by the Center for Media Studies revealed that while 32 percent of the people in a rural pocket of Andhra Pradesh, a state in South India, had heard of Sonia Gandhi through the medium of newspapers, as many as 49 percent had heard of her through television. The voter turnout suggests that TV coverage caused voter awareness to peak: 62.2 percent of eligible voters turned out in 1998’s mid-term elections, up from 56.5 percent in full-term races in 1996.

Nonetheless, television’s coverage emphasized sound bites. Prannoy Roy is absolutely right when he compares Indian politics to a Cricket match: It is not about issues, but who wins and who loses. The announcing of the results did, in fact, take on the tone of a cricket match. In finding out who scored the most runs, Indian TV journalism was in danger of drifting into the quagmire of trivialization. Very few programs treated the crucial issues: population control, poverty, literacy. Instead most channels pitted one politician against another, creating instant celebrities out of those most articulate and telegenic. And few news presenters challenged official lines or analyzed shifts in party agendas.



A worse transgression was politically motivated coverage. In the south Indian city of Chennai, Sun TV openly supported the party in power while a rival channel, Vijay TV, propped up the opposition. ETV’s coverage from Hyderabad had a noticeable tilt toward its state government, as did Asianet’s approach to the United Left Front, the party in power in its home state of Kerala.

Sadly it was not only the privately owned channels that were not playing fair. Objective reporting was scarce in Doordarshan’s coverage, even though it’s funded by taxpayers’ money and expected to be evenhanded. As the votes were being counted, the English language program *India Decides* on DD 2 threatened to destroy the channel’s neutral mandate with its shrill bias toward the Bharatiya Janata Party, making Muslim viewers grow



**Assignment:** Analyse and discuss the effect of Judeo tape scandal and cash-for-MLA scandal on the election results in Chattisgarh.

**Notes:**

## LESSON 22

### HANDLING CRIME REPORTING

#### Objective

The lesson will take students through the annals of Crime reporting. The students, after attending this class, will be able to understand the fundamentals of the beat and understand how to fare during various crime situations.



If Journalism is about telling stories, then the crime beat should be the best in the business because it offers such great stories to tell. The characters involved in even routine crime tales likely will include a protagonist and antagonist, if not outright heroes and scoundrels.

The crime beat has it all: greed, sex, comedy and tragedy.

The crime beat is a place where a journalist can “make his bones,” as the mob adage goes. Top crime reporters share a number of traits, including exceptional initiative and determination, an eye for accuracy and detail, a knack for sourcing, and the ability to tell a story.

Many editors and producers still use the crime beat as a sink-or-swim test. Those who display fortitude and resilience under the beat’s special pressures are deemed capable of “promotion” to other beats. Those who don’t pass the Johnny Deadline test are destined for features.

Although there is a solid cadre of career crime reporters across the country, the beat suffers from high turnover. And while good crime reporters are highly valued in a newsroom, the cop beat still has a stigma.

Crime beat is supposed to be a cub reporter’s beat. I have seen journalists who told me that they were too good to waste their talents on crime reporting.

Most reporters have no criminal justice background when assigned to cover crime. Whether a reporter plans a year or a lifetime on the beat, news organisations should help the

journalist get off on the right foot by allowing adequate time and resources for training.

So, what constitutes Crime? Murder, Rape, Robbery or more! One would say anything that upsets law & order and hinders good governance - murders, robberies, burglaries, homicide, fire, fraud, blackmail, kidnapping, rape, etc - is Crime. Public interest created by crime stories is enormous and that explains to a large extent why no news medium can afford to ignore it without damaging its circulation and credibility.

Crime is a part and parcel of urban culture and therefore automatically it becomes an integral part of a newspaper as it is a newspaper’s duty to inform the readers of what’s going. Care must be taken however, never to glorify Crime related news (as happened with the sensationalisation and glorification of Charles Shobraj).



Crime reporting is actually a highly responsible and specialised job, involving the shifting of the grain of truth from the chaff of rumours and mis-information. Chances are that a trainee reporter (maybe YOU) would begin his/ her career in a newspaper/ TV channel as a Crime Reporter.

#### About the Beat

Like few other news beats, crime requires a reporter to juggle many forms of news. At most newspapers and news channels, the crime reporter will cover an array of stories – from traffic tie-ups and fires to murders and drug scandals. The beat is synonymous with breaking news.

Most crime reporters also are expected to produce longer-range pieces – weekend features, analysis, investigations. That often makes them the busiest journalists in any newsroom.

In a big city like Delhi, crime reporting is more competitive than say in Bhopal. Journalists in cities like Delhi are more aggressive.

But Police-reporter relations remain similar in every city. Cops are leery of journalists, and many journalists are cynical about cops. Perhaps this is healthy.

A former Crime Reporter with the Times of India once told me over a few drinks that crime reporters and police officers need not begin the day with a group hug. Each should simply resolve to give the other a fair shake. Reporters should seek respectful cooperation, not admiration, from the police. And if the police do their job well, we should respect them in return.

As with most beats, the best crime reporters are those who manage to develop the best sources. Today's crime reporters have the advantage of vast electronic resources, including improved access to expert sourcing and direct access to information.

A crime involving prominent people is bound to receive attention. For example, as discussed in chapter 1, the mysterious death of Natasha Sharma, the estranged daughter-in-law of senior Congress leader Natwar Singh evoked a major response from the media.

Crime reporters spend their time covering the exciting but stressful routine of police work. If you are a reporter, who has been put on a crime beat, the first thing you need to do is – understand the way the police works. For example, in Delhi, the police department is divided into various districts – I think seven, each headed by an officer of DCP level. So it would make sense to go and visit them, one by one. Go to them, exchange your business cards and let them know that you represent so and so newspaper. Don't start asking them questions from Day 1. Let them get comfortable with you. Then, you may want to further extend your umbrella – meet and get introduced to additional DCP's and ACP's. While you are on a particular news coverage, say Jessica Lal murder case – which happened in Mehrauli, you'd also get to meet the SHO's of those particular *thanas*. Once you have done that, it would also make sense to get introduced to the PRO. He will not be of a major help, in terms of stories, but at least he will make sure that you are kept informed about routine stories. And moreover, if you develop a good relation with them, they at times go out of their way to help you – say fixing up an appointment with a senior police officer. At the Police headquarters you get to meet other senior officers as well – Joint Commissioners of Police, Additional Commissioners and then the Lion King himself – I mean the Commissioner of Police.

There is another important person, whom you should call everyday. Usually he is of the rank of a Sub-Inspector. For example, in one area, the Delhi Police has arrested two militants. Now apart from your own channel, this news is also flashed to the SI Press. Make a habit of calling him at least twice a day. Once he knows that in this newspaper – say Hindustan Times, Meenal Dubey is the crime reporter, he will call you and let you know on time the events and the incidents.

Once you have done this, you must read and know details of major crime stories, which have been reported since the last one

year. For example, Jessica Lal case, BMW case, Romesh Sharma case, Cocaine scandal, Nitish Katara case etc. You must also understand laws pertaining to crime reporting. Certain stages of police investigation require secrecy in the public interest. So in crime reporting investigation work should be done very carefully. While reporting any murder or suicide case or any such violent death, it is advisable to report only what is known. One should avoid speculation in the absence of an official verdict.

Crime reporters often have to go behind the news. Some safeguards are to follow during their coverage. Some of them are:

**Arrests:** It is a serious matter to report that a person has been placed under arrest. When such a report is made, the exact charge against the arrested person should be given and it should be documented by either a record or attribute to a responsible officer.

**Accusation:** It is commonly written that someone is wanted in a case of robbery, arson or murder. This is journalistic shorthand, which has gained acceptance through usage.

**Confession:** The use of the word “confession” to describe statements made by a person to the police or to prosecuting authorities is dangerous when it is not a matter of public record. Actually the word should not be used until it is admitted in the open court.

In his memoir, journalist Russell Baker said he first faced the negativity criticism as a Baltimore Sun police reporter in the late 1940s. Baker wrote, “It happened, didn't it?” That was a sentence I was to use many times in years to come when dealing with desperate people who believed that terrible things didn't really happen unless they were reported in the newspaper. ‘It happened, didn't it?’ Keeping it out of the paper can't make it unhappen.”

Edna Buchanan wrote of the phenomenon in a chapter of her memoir entitled “Nobody Loves a Police Reporter”:

“To be a police reporter is to be an unwelcome intruder. It can be lonesome and arduous. People blame you for the bad news. It's human nature: Somebody gets in trouble, you report it, and he turns on you like it's your fault, not his, that he is in this mess. The truth can get you in a lot of trouble.”

But she added, “Police reporters deal with lives, reputations, and careers. So you keep on – ask one more question, knock on one more door, make one last phone call, and then another. It could be the one that counts.”

### Knocking on Doors

Crime reporters frequently go to scenes of violence and interview victims or their loved ones.

Many journalists have experienced the emotions that some survivors have felt in speaking with a stranger about a traumatic event. Reporters frequently are able to provide others with a well-rounded portrait of a victim or a suspect as a result of such interviews.

Yet victim interviews – and the cliché question, “How does it make you feel?” – have become a black eye for journalists. A few simple tips:

- Be honest and respectful.
- Consider whether the subject understands the ramifications of speaking with you – for example, that the comments might appear in print or on TV. (This is essential when the subject is a minor.)
- If you are turned away, don't badger. Leave a business card and ask sources to call if they reconsider.

Experts offer following tips to reporters for interviewing victims:

- Prepare thoroughly.
- Be empathic. Stick to simple statements of condolence, such as “I am sorry for your loss” or “I am sorry for what happened to you.”
- Listen. Most victims want to tell their stories. Make sure to give them a chance to tell their stories their way.
- Be prepared for tears.
- Understand survivor guilt.
- Touching “can be unwelcome or misinterpreted, particularly by members of the opposite sex.”
- Allow subjects time and space to explain their feelings.

## Sexual Assault

While an increasing number of victims of sexual assault have chosen to step forward in the media, the crime still carries a special stigma.

Sexual assaults warrant careful consideration in the use of details. In stranger assaults, be careful not to identify a victim with oblique details – for example, “a 31-year-old woman who lives in the 1900 block of South Oak Street.”

Family sexual assaults can be confounding since naming the perpetrator identifies the victims. Even when the name of the accused offender is withheld, the reporting of the ages of young victims can lead to identification.

It would be a good idea not to confuse yourself with the investigative journalist. Investigations require time which you as a daily crime reporter will always be tight for. In fact, as a crime reporter, you'll realise that at times the police becomes the 'crime reporter' for you and you merely end up reproducing the police version, which need not always be true. In this situation it is always best to use the terminology 'according to the police...' or 'sources have informed...' and get on with the story with a human touch, unless otherwise specified by your editor or unless you have some solid leads in the case.

Getting on with the story does not imply that you necessarily agree to the police version (even if you doubt it).

Professionally you should cover the story from different angles talking to the victim's relatives, neighbours, and leading citizens of the neighbourhood who can give an insight into the murder mystery. then the story will never be biased. And who knows you might get a great lead to a great investigative report.

Accidents and natural disasters qualify themselves to the epithet, 'News Nobody Likes'. Minor accidents are reported on the basis of police bulletins or information supplied by police spokesman. But one cannot do the same for a Charkhi Dadri or a Uphaar fire tragedy. For major tragedies, the reporter must

rush to the scene and gathers the facts himself to give authenticity to his story.

## India-IT-West Bengal-Crime

This time, Calcutta police slaps swift cyber crime charges

By Krittivas Mukherjee, India Abroad News Service

Calcutta, Dec 3 - Thanks to new the Information Technology (IT) Act, police here could move swiftly in booking two people for alleged cyber crimes, unlike last year when they were caught in bind because of the absence of a suitable law.

Cases have been lodged against two software engineers — Indranil Chatterjee, 25, and Sanjoy Ghosh, 25 — for allegedly stealing data and destroying the software of a medical transcription company.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (detective department) Banibrata Basu told IANS that the framing of the new IT act had made it possible to pin down the two software professionals by fixing precise charges under it. Both were arrested and then granted bail.

Calcutta was in the news last year over a cyber crime involving a hate site against Bengalis. With little legal armory at their disposal, the authorities had been at a loss to deal with the situation then, because of lack of suitable laws.

But this time, the police had no problems fixing charges against the software professionals under the new IT law for illegal accessing, tampering with documents and stealing and damaging data. They were charged under Sections 65, 66, 43 of the IT Act. If convicted, the duo can be sentenced to three years' imprisonment and fined up to Rs. 10 million.

According to Basu, the two used to be employed with a medical transcription company and were arrested following a complaint lodged by the managing director of that firm.

The complaint said the two arrested had resigned from their jobs to start their own venture with data stolen from the medical transcription company they originally worked for. They have also been charged with damaging other data in the company's computers.

Basu told reporters that police then sought the help of computer experts and raided the office of the two software engineers. Stolen software and data were found from the duo's office computers. A few computers, some CD-ROMs and floppy disks were seized.

**Assignment:** Collect cases of teenagers involved in various crimes and make a list of people you need to interview to get the overall picture. Based upon your inputs, file a news report.

**Notes:**

[illegible]



## LESSON 23

### POLITICAL REPORTING

#### Objective

The objective of this lesson is to make the students understand how the government functions in India.

Intelligence, perception and a strong historic background are characteristics that political reporters require or should acquire. Most trainee reporters at the entry level in a Newspaper aspire to cover the political beat as they presume that it could be a ladder to the coveted office of the editor. And they are not entirely wrong. Most top-notch political reporters later move on to the editor level eg. Vir Sanghvi of Hindustan Times.

Political reporting is not just about factual reporting, it also involves a great deal of interpretative journalism, as also investigative journalism. For this one needs to understand the historical background of colonialism, Indian nationalism, political party structures and processes and the federalism of Indian democratic state to be able to provide adequate insights.

Since 1947, the Congress occupied centre stage in Indian politics for the next thirty years, with Nehru (1947-1963) and subsequently his daughter Indira Gandhi at the helm of affairs as Indian Prime Ministers'. The vision of the post-independence Government and its leaders was, however, mostly shrouded amidst the mindset of British imperialism. With the results that till date India's foreign policy, domestic policy, economic and financial policy bears the definite stamp of the British Colonial Rule.

The Indian politicians who took over the reins of the country from the British crown were mostly those trained under the British system. The bureaucrats were mostly the Indian officers who had also served the British crown. Independence automatically meant to them that they inherited the British colony. They changed little the draconian British laws, which virtually declared you guilty till proven innocent. An attitude similar to the Raj prevailed in most areas, right from embracing the system of Parliamentary Democracy.

Beyond this broad marker, there are a whole set of lesser known ideas inherited by New Delhi from the Raj. Notable among these are, notions on relationships with smaller neighbours and special treaty arrangements with them, the nature of interaction with India's extended neighbourhood, and the imperatives of ensuring India's security both on its land and maritime frontiers.

There have been cases of large-scale communal frenzies in India, largely instigated by political parties and political pressure groups. The politics of votes makes the politicians indulge in provocative speeches and focus on mere short-term goals. Elections are won on emotive regional and social issues. The long-term goals of the nation therefore get ignored. In fact when the reforms were initiated in 1991, P Chaidambaram, the union commerce minister's first reaction on hearing the radical economic policy proposed by his finance minister Dr.

Manmohan Singh, was that it would tantamount to committing political suicide of all ministers involved in liberalisation. This is where the political reporters perspective and insights come into play - of separating the wheat from the chaff, that exposes the naked ambitions of political beings and the hypocrisy of political parties and the machinations of those in power.

The sad thing about Indian democracy is that it is these short-term gain oriented politicians who guide the destiny of some one billion million people, while the country's progress goes from bad to worse. Political reporters should never glorify politicians but truthfully present their achievements and failures. Programmes of political parties should be critically evaluated and their flaws commented upon, so that the people are not carried away by their rhetoric or patriotic postures. The performance of governments need constant review and herein is the wisdom and maturity of the reporter set on a national level.

One knows about the cacophony of things that happen behind closed doors - the Judeo-Jogi standoff during the 2003 assembly elections is just one case in point. Horse-trading, lobbying, image building, conspiracies and dinner diplomacy, this is just the tip of the iceberg. The challenge of political reporting is in unmasking the behind-the-scene operations, which has a high curiosity and readership value. Prabhu Chawla makes a great political commentator on Aaj Tak and India Today because of his connections and sources close to the PM. So, while the other media are left floundering for details, the TV Today group has it all.

Party conferences, campaigns and rallies and press conferences are normal reporting events. But to add news value to these the reporter should have 'inside' information or exclusive stories. In India, politics sells like hot cakes because the readers have a roaring appetite for Vajpayee, Mamta and Samta and; newspapers utilise it to the fullest by having or striving toward a great political bureau. This is also why journalism is often described as "history in the making..."

So, what does a political reporter do first, apart from developing contacts? Identify the good vs. bad leaders and educate the viewer without biases and added colour about the same. The honest and well-meaning politicians deserve your support and the people's support. This part of a political reporters role is essential in a Democracy as it serves as the 'Right to information' to the reader. The reporter in the political beat must therefore have knowledge of history and the intellect to understand how ideas shape history. This is also how interpretive journalism becomes an important part of a political reporters task.

The interpretative reporter gives the reader the background of an event and explains the possible consequences. Besides his own knowledge and research, he often relies on the subject

authorities. It is therefore advisable to read both magazines and journals (national and international) and be up to date on various facets of India's political economy. This will not just fine-tune your perception and analysis but also improve your writing skills.

### Covering Parliament

India is a Westminster style parliamentary democracy - in a way, then, the Indian parliament is the cornerstone of our very being. All major policy decisions and laws are passed/ framed by the Parliament, which directly or indirectly affects the masses. Most political news emanates from the daily proceedings in and outside the Parliament when it is in session. When in session, the Parliament is the Oxygen to the newspaper mill.

Parliamentary reporting focuses on the day-to-day proceedings of Parliament as well as the respective state legislatures. Normally, seasoned Special Correspondents are assigned to cover parliamentary proceedings, to ensure accuracy and maturity in reporting. Legislature reporting often involves taking copious notes of speeches made by ministers and members of the legislature, for which knowledge of shorthand is an advantage, although not necessary. Now parliamentary proceedings are recorded in the parliament and they can collect the briefing from the office before they leave the sacred premises.

However, the reporter must take down notes during the parliamentary proceedings as the exact quotes of the PM and senior Cabinet Ministers lend credibility to a news report.

But in order to effectively cover Parliamentary proceedings a few things need to be understood about the Indian Parliament and the Indian federation.

### The Parliament (source: [www.nic.in](http://www.nic.in))

The framers of the Indian Constitution provided for a bicameral Parliament of Lok Sabha (the House of the People) and Rajya Sabha (the Council of States).

Lok Sabha is composed of representative of the people chosen by direct election on the basis of adult suffrage. The maximum strength of the House envisaged by the Constitution is 552- upto 530 members to represent the States, up to 20 members to represent the Union Territories and not more than two members of the Anglo-Indian Community to be nominated by the President, if, in his opinion, that community is not adequately represented in the House. The total elective membership is distributed among the States in such a way that the ratio between the number of seats allotted to each State and the population of the State is, so far as practicable, the same for all States.

The qualifying age for membership of Lok Sabha is 25 years. The Lok Sabha at present consists of 545 members including the Speaker and two nominated members.

Lok Sabha, unless sooner dissolved, continues for five years from the date appointed for its first meeting and the expiration of the period of five years operates as dissolution of the House. However, while a Proclamation of Emergency is in operation, this period may be extended by Parliament by law for a period not exceeding one year at a time and not extending, in any case, beyond a period of six months after the proclamation has ceased to operate.

The Constitution of India came into force on January 26, 1950. The first general, elections under the new Constitution were held during the year 1951-52 and the first elected Parliament came into being in April, 1952, the Second Lok Sabha in April, 1957, the Third Lok Sabha in April, 1962, the Fourth Lok Sabha in March, 1967, the Fifth Lok Sabha in March, 1971, the Sixth Lok Sabha in March, 1977, the Seventh Lok Sabha in January, 1980, the Eighth Lok Sabha in December, 1984, the Ninth Lok Sabha in December, 1989, and the Tenth Lok Sabha in June, 1991, the Eleventh Lok Sabha in May, 1996, and the Twelfth Lok Sabha in March, 1998.

### Presiding Officers

Lok Sabha elects one of its own members as its Presiding Officer and he is called the Speaker. He is assisted by the Deputy Speaker who is also elected by Lok Sabha. The conduct of business in Lok Sabha is the responsibility of the Speaker.

### Procedure in the House

The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha and Directions issued by the Speaker from time to time thereunder regulate the procedure in Lok Sabha.

The items of business, notice of which is received from the Ministers/ Private Members and admitted by the Speaker, are included in the daily List of Business which is printed and circulated to members in advance.

For various items of business to be taken up in the House the time is allotted by the House on the recommendations of the Business Advisory Committee.

### Time of Sittings

When in session, Lok Sabha holds its sittings usually from 11 A.M. to 1 P.M. and from 2 P.M. to 6 P.M. On some days the sittings are continuously held without observing lunch break and are also extended beyond 6 P.M. depending upon the business before the House. Lok Sabha does not ordinarily sit on Saturdays and Sundays and other closed holidays.

### Commencement of a Sittings

At the time fixed for the commencement of a sitting the Marshal of the House after ascertaining that 55 members are present in the House which number including the Speaker is required to form the quorum, announces *Hon'ble Members, Hon'ble the Speaker*

The Speaker then reaches his seat from his Chamber and the members rise in their seats. After bowing or doing *namaskar* with folded hands to all sides of the House which is reciprocated by members bowing or folding hands towards the Chair, the Speaker takes his seat. Thereafter the members take their seats and the business of the House starts.

Before the business entered in the order paper is taken up, a new member who has not yet made and subscribed an oath or affirmation does so. In the case of death of a sitting or an ex-member or a leading personality, obituary references are made and this item is also taken up before Questions.

### Question Hour

The first hour of every sitting of Lok Sabha is called the Question hour. Asking of questions in Parliament is the free and unfettered right of members. It is during the Question

hour that they may ask questions on different aspects of administration and Government policy in the national as well as international spheres. Every Minister whose turn it is to answer to questions has to stand up and answer for his Ministry's acts of omission or commission.

Questions are of three types - Starred, Unstarred and Short Notice. A Starred Question is one to which a member desires an oral answer in the House and which is distinguished by an asterisk mark. An unstarred Question is one which is not called for oral answer in the house and on which no supplementary questions can consequently be asked. An answer to such a question is given in writing. Minimum period of notice for starred/ unstarred question is 10 clear days.

If the questions given notice of are admitted by the Speaker, they are listed and printed for answer on the dates allotted to the Ministries to which the subject matter of the question pertains.

The normal period of notice does not apply to Short Notice Questions which relate to matters of urgent public importance. However, a Short Notice Question may only be answered on short notice if so permitted by the Speaker and the Minister concerned is prepared to answer it at shorter notice. A Short Notice Question is taken up for answer immediately after the Question Hour.

#### Business after Question Hour

After the Question Hour, the House takes up miscellaneous items of work before proceeding to the main business of the day. These may consist of one or more of the following:-

Adjournment Motions, Questions involving breaches of Privileges, Papers to be laid on the Table, Communication of any messages from Rajya Sabha, Intimations regarding President's assent to Bills, Calling Attention Notices, Matters under Rule 377, Presentation of Reports of Parliamentary Committee, Presentation of Petitions, - miscellaneous statements by Ministers, Motions regarding elections to Committees, Bills to be withdrawn or introduced. A number of exclusive stories can be picked up by the astute political reporter here. The scandalous Bofors story emerged from the report of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

#### Main Business

The main business of the day may be consideration of a Bill or financial business or consideration of a resolution or a motion. Legislative Business

Legislative proposals in the form of a Bill can be brought forward either by a Minister or by a private member. In the former case it is known as Government Bill and in the latter case it is known as a Private Members' Bill. Every Bill passes through three stages - called three readings - before it is passed. To become law it must be passed by both the Houses of Parliament, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and then assented to by the President.

#### Financial Business

The presentation of the annual Budgets - General and Railways - their discussion and voting on the various demands for grants followed by passing of Appropriation Bill and Finance Bill,

which is long drawn process, take up a major part of the time of the House during its Budget Session every year.

#### Motions and Resolutions

Among the other kinds of business which come up before the House are resolutions and motions. Resolutions and motions may be brought forward by Government or by private members. Government may move a resolution or a motion for obtaining the sanction to a scheme or opinion of the House on an important matter of policy or on a grave situation. Similarly, a private member may move a resolution or motion in order to draw the attention of the House and of the Government to a particular problem.

The last Two and Half hours of sitting on every Friday are generally allotted for transaction of private members' business. While private members' bills are taken up on one Friday, private members' resolutions are taken up on the succeeding Friday, and so on.

#### Half-an-Hour Discussion.

A Half-an-Hour Discussion can be raised on a matter of sufficient public importance which has been the subject of a recent question in Lok Sabha irrespective of the fact whether the question was answered orally or the answer was laid on the Table of the House and the answer which needs elucidation on a matter of fact. Normally not more than half an hour is allowed for such a discussion.

Usually, half-an-hour discussion is listed on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only. In one session, a member is allowed to raise not more than two half-an-hour discussions.

During the discussion, the member who has given notice makes a short statement and not more than four members who have intimated earlier and have secured one of the four places in the ballot are permitted to ask a question each for further elucidating any matter of fact. Thereafter, the Minister concerned replies. There is no formal motion before the House nor voting.

#### Discussion on Matters of Urgent Public Importance

Members may raise discussions on matters of urgent public importance with the permission of the Speaker. Such discussions may take place on two days in a week.

No formal motion is moved in the House nor is there any voting on such a discussion.

#### Debate in the House

After the member who initiates discussion on an item of business has spoken, other members can speak on that item of business in such order as the Speaker may call upon them. Only one member can speak at a time and all speeches are directed to the Chair. A matter requiring the decision of the House is decided by means of a question put by the Speaker on a motion made by a member.

#### Division

A division is one of the forms in which the decision of the House is ascertained. Normally, when a motion is put to the House members for and against it indicate their opinion by saying "Aye" or "No" from their seats. The Chair goes by the voices and declares that the motion is either accepted or

negated by the House. If a member challenges the decision, the Chair orders that the lobbies be cleared. Then the division bell is rung and an entire network of bells installed in the various parts and rooms in Parliament House and Parliament House Annexe rings continuously for three and a half minutes. Members and Ministers rush to the Chamber from all sides. After the bell stops, all the doors to the Chamber are closed and nobody can enter or leave the Chamber till the division is over. Then the Chair puts the question for second time and declares whether in its opinion the “Ayes” or the “Noes”, have it. If the opinion so declared is again challenged, the Chair asks the votes to be recorded by operating the Automatic Vote Recording Equipment.

#### Automatic Vote Recording System

With the announcement of the Speaker for recording the votes, the Secretary- General presses the button of a key board. Then a gong sounds serving as a signal to members for casting their votes. For casting a vote each member present in the Chamber has to press a switch and then operate one of the three push buttons fixed in his seat. The push switch must be kept pressed simultaneously until the gong sounds for the second time after 10 seconds.

There are two Indicator Boards installed in the wall on either side of the Speaker's Chair in the Chamber. Each vote cast by a member is flashed here. Immediately after the votes are cast, they are totalled mechanically and the details of the results are flashed on the Result Indicator Boards installed in the railings of the Speaker's and Diplomatic Galleries.

Divisions are normally held with the aid of the Automatic Vote Recording Equipment. Where so directed by the Speaker in terms of relevant provision in the Rules of Procedure etc. in Lok Sabha, Divisions may be held either by distribution of 'Aye'/'No' and 'Abstention' slips to members in the House or by the members recording their votes by going into the lobbies.

There is an Indicator Board in the machine room showing the name of each member. The result of Division and vote cast by each member with the aid of Automatic Vote Recording Equipment appear on this Board also. Immediately a photograph of the Indicator Board is taken. Later the Photograph is enlarged and the names of members who voted 'Ayes' and for 'Noes' are determined with the help of the photograph and incorporated in Lok Sabha Debates.

#### Publication of Debates

Three versions of Lok Sabha Debates are prepared viz., the Hindi version, the English version and the Original version. Only the Hindi and English versions are printed. The Original version, in cyclostyled form, is kept in the Parliament Library for record and reference.

The Hindi version comprises all Questions asked and Answers given thereto in Hindi and the speeches made in Hindi as also verbatim Hindi translation of Questions and Answers and of speeches made in English or in regional languages.

The English version contains Lok Sabha proceedings in English and the English translation of the proceedings which take place in Hindi or in any regional language.

The Original version, however, contains proceedings in Hindi or in English as they actually take place in the House and also the English/Hindi translation of speeches made in regional languages.

The Rajya Sabha consists of 250 members, of whom 12 are nominated by the President for their outstanding contributions to the field of literature, science, law, education, art and social service. The remaining seats are allocated to the states and Union territories, roughly in proportion to their population. Each state is, however, represented by at least one member. The members representing the state are elected by the legislative assemblies.

Parliamentary Correspondents should know the rules and procedures which are, by and large, the same for parliament and state legislatures. He should know the rights and privileges and immunities and amenities of the members of Parliament.

Some states have with a bicameral legislature of Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad, the former equivalent of the Lok Sabha and the latter of the Rajya Sabha, while others have only the Vidhan Sabha.

Parliament questions may provide leads to news-breaking stories if diligently followed up.

#### The Budget

The annual financial statements are laid before both the Houses with estimated receipts and expenditures of the government for the forthcoming financial year. And the Finance Bill which seeks to give effect to the government's taxation proposals is called the Budget.

#### Breach of Privilege

No person commits any civil or criminal offence, if he publishes substantially true reports of the proceedings of a House. However, if the publication has been done with malice, the protection conferred on the journalist by Article 361-A does not apply.

The publication of the expurgate portion of the proceedings of a House is breach of its privilege. So is the publication of proceedings held in camera.

Before 1977, the Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Act 1956, popularly known as Firoze Gandhi Act, was in force which was repealed during the Emergency.

While Article 361-A covers proceedings of Parliament as well as that of the state legislature, Firoze Gandhi Act covered only the House of Parliament.

The custodian of its own privilege, the House is empowered to take action against a correspondent, if his conduct or writings is in breach of its privileges. Since the scope of parliamentary privileges has not been codified, the Correspondent has to use abundant caution in reporting the proceedings.

Deliberate distortion of speeches, aspersions cast on a member's behaviour in the House, and imputation of motives to him for his speech or behaviour in the House are serious transgressions of the privileges of the members.

Publishing comments or any other statements which undermine the dignity of the House or the confidence of the public in the legislature are accordingly punishable by the Parliament as



Parliamentary correspondents are given accreditation cards which the Speaker can withdraw without assigning any reasons. Normally, a card is withdrawn if a journalist is found to be “misrepresenting proceedings of the House in the press (or any other media), or publishing (or broadcastong) matters not intended for the public, or casting aspersions against the Speaker”.

Another great source for possible stories are the various committees of the house as a good deal of legislative business is transacted by Parliamentary committees. The Indian Parliament has two kinds of committees, ad-hoc committees and Parliamentary Committees. Ad-hoc committees are appointed for a particular purpose after which they cease to exist. Parliamentary committees which are permanently there but are reconstituted from time to time are *business advisory committee, committee on petitions, privileges committee, committee on welfare of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, rules committee*, etc.

**Assignment:** Collect a few recent samples of speeches given by RJD supremo Laloo Prasad Yadav in the parliament and write a news report, not exceeding 500 words. The report should be witty and hard-hitting.

**Notes:**

## LESSON 24

### UNDERSTANDING THE INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY

#### Objective

The students, through this lesson, will get a glimpse of the power corridors of the ministry of foreign affairs. They would also get acquainted with the functioning of the ministry.

Their job is neither easy nor leisurely, but a popular belief about the bright officers of Indian Foreign Service at the much-hyped Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is that they enjoy many idle hours. They are supposedly India's window to the outside world. But there is so much happening in India these days – for example, Gujarat violence – that events like these have made the job less envious.

But the fact is that the MEA itself could do with doing a spin in self. Look at some of the things – the way the *babulogs* handle diplomacy, supposed to be India's bastion since Chanakya walked on this soil. Of course, it can be said in defence that everything in government offices move at a snail's pace with the unwritten warning: "Caution Dead Slow".

What about decisions on matters that beg for some urgency? The problem here is fundamental: how quick is "quick" in decision making?

Who can forget the government's failure to manage media during the Agra Summit? It conveys a mindset that perceives the media as an entity that needs to be managed and brought around with a handshake, a dinner, a junket.

Having said that, it is also true that the remarkable PR success of General Pervez Musharraf in presenting his case owes a great deal to the freedom enjoyed by the Indian media, which conveyed his words to the world.

During the summit, when NDTV's Prannoy Roy managed to procure a copy of Musharraf's closed-door meeting with Indian editors and air it on his channel, the MEA was furious with him. But as a journalist, it was not his job to inform the government that he was buying the tape of the breakfast meeting from PTV.

Undoubtedly, successful diplomacy is not conducted through the media — as the Foreign Office keeps telling us. No leader would speak freely if he suspected that the words he pronounces in private may be transmitted back to his adversaries. India will lose face with other countries if it breaks the rules of engagement. It is no one's case that the government should go public with every word that transpired between Vajpayee and Musharraf. But that does not mean the media should be starved of news and not a word be conveyed to hundreds of journalists waiting from 7 am to midnight for some information about an event that has so much significance for millions on the subcontinent.

If Musharraf was prepared to hold an impromptu press conference at midnight, surely the MEA spokesperson could have done better than deliver a one-liner. She could at least have hung around to talk to people informally. Here was a govern-

ment clearly unwilling to give its point of view but unhappy with the media for carrying the point of view put forward by the Pakistanis. If the government was willing to hold a dialogue with the Pakistani president, what is wrong with the media presenting his viewpoint?

If the MEA people were so busy to do the job themselves, they could have lined up a team of former Pakistan deskwallahs and experts to take the editors into confidence, to brief the media, to monitor the panelists on TV, and arm them with sharper talking points against Pakistani arguments. The lack of preparation stemmed from a lack of clarity about who would coordinate with the media. The fact is that there was a lack of coherence at the top.

Even as the Indian media enjoys a remarkable degree of freedom, there are problems it faces from the government, particularly the babus at the foreign ministry. There are sections in the government which perceive journalists as upstarts who have to be tolerated and "managed" and not as professionals who are required to provide credible, accurate information to enable people to make up their minds. There are sections in the media which consider the government as an adversary, no matter what. Neither attitude helps.

After Afghanistan was freed of the Taliban rule, everyone expected the Indian embassy in Kabul to be re-opened without much loss of time; maybe the first foreign mission to spring to life after the dark five-year rule of the Taliban.

It took weeks to search the right man to head the mission, more weeks to build up a team and still more time to dispatch the Indian mission staff.

Unlike other government offices, the offices of the External Ministry have a quaint quality about them, perhaps a reminder of the colonial days. There are still MEA officers who look uncomfortable in the company of the hoi polloi and seem to look at their counterparts in other "Indian" Ministries as a shade below them in terms of self-importance.

A discernible class system operates within the entire Indian bureaucratic setup. But at the MEA much of the "outside" world of Indian officialdom is seen by the "sahibs" (used as a neutral gender) as a lower species. Perhaps, for understandable reasons!

When the bureaucrats in other Ministries have long taken to attending office attired informally in trousers and shirts, the Indian diplomat stands out in his immaculate suits and dashing ties, not to mention his allegedly clipped style of speech.

A "sahib" of the External Affairs Ministry can drive a Mercedes while the officer of equal rank in the Indian civil service can hardly expect anything better than the good old "amby" which had a brief period of revival among some nostalgic Englishmen.

The MEA ‘sahib’ is adept in the use of the knife and the fork but many among the rest of the Indian officialdom wield the two pieces of cutlery as though they are battling with the food on the plate.

It is a common belief that a hedonistic style of living is part of the ‘duty’ of an Indian diplomat; the other bureaucrats who copy them do so with the risk of being under scrutiny.

Till recently, toppers in the civil services examination would opt for the Foreign Service, a coveted job in a land, where any opportunity to live abroad is still seen as the ultimate in privileges. A change in recent years has forced by circumstances.

The public in India still shows a good deal of indulgence towards the Foreign Office and its huge staff. But it is the politicians who now and then flash some audit report or the other to damn the MEA for sins like ‘wasteful expenditure’. Sometimes it produces ‘results’.

Last year, for instance, about 25 posts were abolished by the MEA. India has over 150 missions abroad with staff strength of over 7500 Indian nationals and 2000 local recruits. The expenditure on the Indian missions is said to be over Rs 800 crore annually.

The abolition of posts was matched by another gesture. Over the last 10 years or so, nearly dozen Indian missions were closed. But where? Kabul, Kandhar, Jalalabad Karachi, Aden, Mogadishu et al.

At least one of these missions (Kabul) has since been revived ! But other missions like the one in Karachi were certainly not closed for economy reasons.

One who is given to washing dirty linen in public will perhaps not be considered a blue blooded diplomat. But lately there have been instances of this diplomatic ethic being breached. Reports have appeared in recent months about a spat between two top officers in an Indian mission.

The matter was essentially about one officer accusing the other of being extravagant. That was something of a surprise.

After all, the less privileged outside of the foreign service always thought that qualities like extravagancy and a flare for flashiness, mixed with a dash of snobbery, are the hallmarks of an Indian diplomat.

It is commonly believed that the fourth estate is held in some awe by the bureaucrat serving within the country. But many are the scribes with experience of covering MEA who may question this perception.

Till recently, the MEA did not have a hall of its own for briefing the Press. Scribes covering the MEA beat would be briefed in the room of the Joint Secretary (JS) incharge of publicity at a fixed time of the day, generally, 4 pm. Post Kargil, things have moved a bit. Who doesn’t know the chit-reader Nirupama Rao, with her collection of pearl necklaces and We-weren’t-lover’s-like-that Navtej Sarna?

**Assignment:** Search the newspapers for a recent statement coming from the spokesperson of the MEA and discuss that issue in the class.

For someone who has spent a lifetime with the Gurkhas of the Indian Army and walked 30,000 kms through the length and

breadth of Nepal, I should understand the reasons for the periodic groundswell of anti-India feelings there despite most Nepalese regarding India-Nepal relations as one between *dajubhai* (brothers).

King Prithvinarayan Shah, who unified Nepal in 1746, warned his people to tread carefully between its two giant neighbours, China and India. Being Himalaya-locked, the Nepalese have gravitated only south for succour and salt. They have become conditioned to blaming India for their ills, frequently motivated by the ruling establishments and its adversaries and more lately, by external forces.

So when there is a drought, floods, cholera, or a price rise, Nepalese usually hold India responsible. Proximity not just familiarity, breeds contempt though it is generally ignorance.

Take Madhuri Dixit when she said she did not realise that beautiful Nepal was a part of India. She was only rubbing salt in the wounds as Nepal is fiercely proud of the fact that it was never colonised and that once the might of the Himalayan kingdom had spread from the rivers Sutlej to Teesta. Only unequal treaties imposed by the British, later India, have undermined the glory of Nepal and its identity.

Being anti-India is therefore seen as being nationalistic among intellectuals and the establishment and sometimes also fashionable. India provides the necessary political space for them to get it off their chest.

Previously Nepal used the China card against India. Now after the restoration of democracy and freedom of expression, the anti-India lobby is more vocal. This is however, less noticeable in the countryside. India on the other hand, is seen acting as the proverbial Big Brother which has failed to contain the fallout of dissidence and anger.

Anger comes from frustration and unhappiness over the ups and mainly downs in India-Nepal relations, starting more recently with the Indian economic blockade of 1988 — one of the reasons that triggered the movement for the restoration of democracy.

This was followed by a series of events seen in Nepal as violating Nepalese sovereignty — the 1998 Delhi police raid in Kathmandu, similar police incursions in Nepalgunj and Jhapa subsequently, the 1995 ‘invasion’ of Nepalese skies by IAF helicopters (these were requested from India to help locate victims of an air crash) and so on.

With the advent of democracy, anti-India protests can be orchestrated easily. But this means there is a basic grievance.

It is mainly the Left or extreme Left wing Communist parties who are in the forefront of the anti-India campaign. The periodic row over the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, Mahakali Treaty, Kalapani, and Trade and Transit is their handiwork, both while they were in and out of office.

The ruling Nepali Congress is perceived to be pro-India. The delay in resumption of Indian Airlines flights to Nepal after the hijack of IC 814 was seen by many as another economic blockade to punish Nepal. This hurt the people of Nepal and not so much the government of the day.

So with the Nepali Congress now in power, what has sparked off the Hrithik Roshan riots? Take your pick from among these — the ISI, Maoists, other Left parties, the palace, a carry-over of the Bombay underworld, infighting in the Nepali Congress and the party's crucial Pokhara convention next week, even China and spontaneity.

The purpose of the riots was no doubt, to further sour Indo-Nepal relations and the media played no mean role in this. It is also no coincidence that 57 out of 113 Nepali Congress members of parliament chose to fish in troubled waters by challenging the leadership of the third-time Prime Minister G P Koirala. In the blame-game, the Nepalese media has been singled out for fanning the riots.

Nepal's rumour mill and bush telegraphy are the best anywhere in the world. Students are a potent power centre though the Nepalese media is a late starter in this game.

In 1979, soon after Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto was hanged in Pakistan, massive student riots broke out in Kathmandu and rest the of the kingdom forcing King Birendra to hold a referendum: a partyless panchayat system versus multiparty system.

The king won by a whisker. But no one has ever explained how Bhutto's execution triggered off the student riots which nearly brought down the monarchical partyless panchayat system. It is obvious that the students need to let their steam off.

The media on both sides has not been helpful in narrowing differences and correcting perceptions. Not long ago, an Indian magazine had implicated the queen of Nepal through a general in the palace in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. The said general had died four years earlier. The same magazine recently leaked an Indian home ministry report on ISI-related activities in which former and present ministers including a prime minister of Nepal are named.

Right or wrong, the Nepalese can't help feeling not only India's overbearing influence on everyday life but also its interference in its internal affairs. As for blaming India, the habit has got ingrained in the Nepalese psyche.

During a trek in 1959 in the far west of Nepal, an elderly guring told me that India had been very unfair: it had commandeered the rich and fertile plains for itself and left Nepal all the arid mountains. His son is from my Gurkha battalion. And it is these very Gurkhas who have fought for India's independence and territorial integrity. So how can they be anti-India and at the same time, lay down their lives on Tiger Hill?

It is due to Nepal's complex internal dynamics that India has been unable to balance its security concerns and national interests to Nepal's sensitivity to independence, identity and well being. As for Nepal, it wants to eat the cake and have it too.

It was on and then off. Hopes of a rapprochement with the Maoists was shortlived. After two years of inconclusive and indecisive moves to initiate talks with the extreme Left Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) waging a Maobadi Jana Sangharsh (People's War) against monarchy and constitution, the government finally succeeded in breaking the ice.

As dramatic as it was surprising, the window of opportunity opened last month when Deputy Prime Minister Ram Chandra Poudyal met the Maoist Central Committee member, Ravindra

Shreshtha as a prelude to an official dialogue. But the window closed immediately after an inconclusive end to talks when Maoist leaders claimed they had been brought there under duress.

Since the insurgency started in the far west of Nepal in September 1995, and spread rapidly throughout the kingdom, no government has been able to determine whether it is simply a law and order problem, or more seriously, the alienation of the poor and underprivileged due to the dismal performance of the mainstream political parties following the restoration of democracy in 1990.

Who would have thought even five years ago, that the world's last Shangrila ruled directly till recently by the reincarnation of Lord Vishnu, would force simple village folk into turning revolutionaries following the teachings of Guzman's Shining Path guerillas in Peru. Some of the worshippers of the God King are now demanding the abolition of monarchy.

For many years graffiti denouncing both the partyless and multiparty systems in Nepal has been on the wall. Disillusionment with the ruling elite — Brahmins, Chetris and Newars — of the lower castes and tribes called Jan Jattis has been growing. A Nepalese Army veteran had predicted, in the late eighties, a Sri Lanka-type ethnic conflict in Nepal.

It is a strange coincidence that the hotbed of the present insurgency is centered in the erstwhile state of Magrat — consisting of Nepal's largest ethnic group, the Magars, now part of Jan Jatti and a separate Magar movement — extending from Tanhu to Rolpa districts, once part of the Gurkha kingdom ruled by King Prithvinarayan Shah. He too, waged a war against Kathmandu and united Nepal. The Rapti zone, one of the least developed areas of west Nepal, is the epicenter of the Maoist struggle for political and economic reforms. According to them Parliament is a sham: like displaying a goat's head but selling chicken.

Not many people realise that communists have ruled Nepal independently and in a powersharing arrangement. The fount of the communist movement is Jhapa, in the east, where the Marxist Leninists started the Jhapa movement in 1971 in harmony with the Naxalites next door. The movement though suppressed by the Panchayat regime was not eliminated. Vast tracts of the east have communist sympathisers.

By the late 1970s at the time of the students' movement against the Panchayat regime, the communists had regained their preeminence and controlled several districts in the east. For a full three days in 1979, Kathmandu was cut off from the east.

If the East was once the stronghold of the Marxist Leninists, today it is the Maoists whose writ runs in much of the west. The rebels number about 800 hardcore, including females with thousands of local supporters. They do not possess any sophisticated weapons like mortars and machine guns. With just a few automatic rifles, crude guns, plastic explosives and petrol bombs, they have terrorised more than half of the country's 75 districts.

Nepalese say their headquarter is in India — either in Lucknow or Gorakhpur — and they have links with the Peoples' War Group in UP, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh.



Recently there were reports of arms being helidropped for the Maoists but no one has been able to nail the source of external support.

Nearly 1600 — about 100 policemen, 60 Maoists and remainder civilians — have lost their lives in the insurgency. Maobadi tactics are a mix of terror and more terror: extortion, assassination, abduction, bomb blasts, raids and attacks. They have looted banks, raided prisons, overrun police posts and district headquarters and even bombed the premises of government and police officials.

Their most spectacular attack was wiping out a 30-man police post in Rolpa last month. A typical terror and siege operation is surrounding the police post by flame-throwing rebels till panic would lead to exhaustion of ammunition and spirit.

Last year, on one day alone, rebels carried out 25 attacks which included demolishing a police post in Rukum. Recently they wiped out two police posts at Dolpa and Kalikot with allegations that the army refused to come to their help.

Their strategy is *army lai na chhu, police lai na chhod* (don't touch the army, don't leave the police). The police have been unable to cope with the insurgency. They were promised new military hardware including hand grenades and a fresh package of training but most of it has not materialised.

The police is low in morale and military capability. An armed police trained by the army is being raised to deal with the Maoists. Achyut Kharel, Inspector General of Police, was forced to resign amid speculation that the army was at last being mobilised.

Three years ago, a similar report had surfaced in Kathmandu. Three brigades of the army under Maj Gen Prajwala Rana (now the army chief) were earmarked for anti-Maoist operations. Apparently, there was no political consensus on their employment.

The truth is different. The cerebral Gen Dharam Pal Thapa, the then army chief, was strongly opposed to the idea. The last occasion when the army was used was against the Tibetan Khampas in the mid 1970s. Otherwise, not since the Gurkhas fought the British in 1846 has the army been used on Nepalese soil.

Another reason for dithering over the use of the army is the known objection by King Birendra who is also the supreme commander of the fiercely loyal army. According to Article 118 of the constitution, operational deployment of the army is the responsibility of His Majesty but on the advice of the National Defence Council (NDC). At least one of the country's 12 infantry brigades is always deployed in the Narayanhitti Palace.

The rumour mill in Kathmandu allege a member of the royal family is involved in the Maoist insurgency. The idea being to discredit democracy and revive monarchy. Some Nepalese see a foreign hand in the conspiracy to destabilise Nepal. One government official has linked the insurgency to future developments in Tibet. Besides these creative explanations on the cause and effect of insurgency, divisions within the ruling Nepali Congress have needlessly delayed choosing between negotiations and/or use of military force.

Prime Minister G P Koirala nominated rival and former prime minister S B Deuba to head a committee to bring the Maoists around to the negotiating table. Just when Deuba seemed to be succeeding, Koirala pulled the rug from under his feet and let Poudyal stage the coup of establishing contact with the rebels. Koirala also sent tough signals to the Maoists — talk peace or face the army. He appointed new home and defence secretaries as well as an inspector general of police.

Further, he reconstituted the NDC, the country's highest body for making security policy. Its statutory composition includes the prime minister, defence minister and army chief. Previously since the prime minister was also his own defence minister, there was often a tie in voting. That is how Dharam Pal stalled the use of the army in 1998.

Koirala has got out of the jam by giving the defence portfolio to his finance minister Mahesh Acharya. This has broken the impasse over using the army and giving Koirala greater flexibility in dealing with the Maoists, provided His Majesty accepts the advice.

Former Prime Minister K P Bhattarai on a recent visit to Delhi told this writer that the king, and only the king, can mobilise the army against Maoists. Koirala has said the constitution is non negotiable though he is open to discussing political and economic reforms as demanded by the Maoists.

The king holds the cards. Till he gives the go-ahead for using the army, the Maoists are unlikely to give up violence and the government unable to come up with an adequate politico-military response.

#### Notes:

## LESSON 25

### FEATURE WRITING

#### Objective

This lesson discusses the importance of feature writing and its grammar. After going through the contents of this chapter, the students should be able to distinguish between news reports and features – news or otherwise.

What is a feature story?

**A feature takes an in-depth look at what's going on behind the news.**

- *It gets into the lives of people.*
- *It tries to explain why and how a trend developed.*
- *Unlike news, a feature does not have to be tied to a current event or a breaking story. But it can grow out of something that's reported in the news.*

It may be a profile of a person or a group — an athlete, a performer, a politician, or a community worker or a team, a choir or a political organization. Or perhaps it's an in-depth look at a social issue — like violence in Canadian schools or eating disorders among young women. It could also be a story that gives the reader background on a topic that's in the news — like a story that explains how land mines work and the history of their use in war.

A feature story is usually longer than a news story — but length is not a requirement! What's more important is the form the story takes. Features are human interest stories that speak of people, places and situations. Celebrities, films, travel, music, sports, fashion, food, health, careers and such themes are the favourite hunting ground of Feature writers. Try it and you pop up with stories — News features and Timeless features that have intrinsic human interest to get updated. Features tend to be original and descriptive; original in ideas and writing skills. News stories often preclude description. Features writers can evoke imaginary stories, which would be edited out of a news story but subject to the journalistic standards of accuracy, fairness and precision.

#### Feature Writing

The hard news of a newspaper's front-page leads in a straight line with clear sentences the spare readers confusion and tired language. "The business tycoon cheated on his taxes and will go to jail." "It rained for the 28th day in a row, and farmers say their harvest is ruined." "Two persons killed when bus falls in river."

Writing these kinds of stories takes special skills and attention to the news writing craft that we explored in previous lessons. The no-nonsense news story embodies the watchdog function of the Press and frankly, newspapers could not survive without them.

But the daily paper also gives room for another kind of story, the feature story that allows reporters time to explore a wide landscape with a free writing style. Feature stories reflect people

in their most tender, strong and fascinating moments. They also give room for close and compassionate inspection of society by using people to breath live into the often impossible problems and tragedies of our times. Readers love to read about each other, compare themselves to those in the news, and weep and laugh at their stories. While a general discourse on AIDS is compelling and important, the epidemic is made more real with the stories of the people surviving. A report on childhood leukemia, for example, is made far more riveting with stories from a hospital's children's ward.

A feature story can be a source of inspiration. It might be on a blind students who plays chess, or a fisherman who saved dozens of school children from drowning. It might be about an old woman down the street who chases kids out of her yard, but tames and fixes feral cats. Features are also entertaining, such as The Hindu's features on the history of Delhi or a feature on bird varieties found in Delhi's woods.

Feature writers have more freedom to write longer sentences and paragraphs than they can in straight news stories. They may, however, opt for very short, two- or three-word sentences. Either way, it's a departure from the norm.

A reporter uses a feature story to unleash his creativity and writing talents. But these stories still adhere to basic newspaper reporting and writing principles. The writing must be clear and straightforward. A feature writer cannot leave the reader lost in a field of vague abstractions, or impatiently guessing at where the story is going. Most importantly, reporters cannot make things up. A feature story is in a newspaper and it must be accurate and true.

The success of a good feature depends on a reporter's skills to gather facts and observations that give the reader a front row seat. The old adage about walking in another person's shoes to know him aptly describes feature reporting. A writer must get into another person's environment through all his senses and stay alert for something surprising, refreshing and insightful.

A reporter must avoid clichés and stock phrases readers have heard thousands of times (unless he uses the clichés intentionally to add irony, or wit). This is never more true than in features about luminaries interviewed so many times they've become clichés.

In a feature story that appeared in the Outlook about Priyanka Gandhi, the Correspondent used small details to give the reader a glimpse of Priyanka. He wrote:

Anecdotes about Priyanka have already passed into Amethi's folklore. Imprinted on its soul are powerful images: of the princess crying silently as a woman relates how her life was devastated when a fire struck her home. Picking up a jalebi from a halwai's tray on Amethi's dusty, fly-encrusted Railway Road and biting into it. Reaching across the spg barricade to embrace a woman, unfazed by the mass of burns on her neck, the

squalling baby in her arms. Laughing as a group of village women coax bichhia (toe-ring) on to her toes. Walking through a slushy field, holding two children by the hand. Hands on hips before a crowd, asking: Kya mein videshi maa ki beti lagti hoon (Do I look like a foreigner's daughter)?

Now let us take an example from a foreign newspaper. The other day I was reading Tom Hallman's article in *The Oregonian*, in which he has masterfully collected so many details in his feature on Bill Porter, a crippled door-to-door salesman, that he can give us a moment-by-moment account.. Note how the spare writing in this example allows the reader to be instantly in the room with Porter.

The alarm rings and he stirs. It's 5:45. He could linger under the covers, listening to the radio and a weatherman who predicts rain. People would understand. He knows that. A surgeon's scar cuts a swath across his lower back. The medicines and painkillers littering his night stand offer help but no cure. The fingers on his right hand are so twisted that he can't tie his shoes. Somedays, he feels like surrendering. But his dead mother's challenge reverberates in his soul. So, too, do the voices of those who believed him stupid or retarded, incapable of being more than a ward of the state. All his life he's struggled to prove them wrong. He will not quit. And so Bill Porter rises. He is on the first unsteady steps on a journey to Portland's streets, the battlefield where he fights alone for his independence and dignity. He's a door-to-door salesman. Sixty-three-years old. And his enemies—a crippled body that betrays him and a changing world that no longer needs him — are gaining on him.

This story is rather long, but is worth the time to finish, particularly to note the writer's use of short sentences, and paragraphs and narrative style.

The regular news of the day is more accessible and interesting when reporters compose what is known as a "news feature." These are done by reporters who work a little harder and do more than just sit behind a desk talking on the telephone. They require more work because a reporter has to go out and talk to ordinary people rather than quote the so-called experts. A news reporter can also lure his reader into the story with a feature lead. This helps make a dry issue more interesting. As you may recall from the previous lecture, the lead is the story's opening and most important part. (If the reader can't get excited by the lead he is not going to read the rest of the story.)

Features are not meant to deliver the news firsthand. They do contain elements of news, but their main function is to humanize, to add colour, to educate, to entertain, to illuminate. They often recap major news that was reported in a previous news cycle. Features often:

- Profile people who make the news
- Explain events that move or shape the news
- Analyze what is happening in the world, nation or community
- Teach an audience how to do something
- Suggest better ways to live
- Examine trends

- Entertain.

### Hard News and Soft News

A news story can be hard, chronicling as concisely as possible the who, what, where, when, why and how of an event. Or it can be soft, standing back to examine the people, places and things that shape the world, nation or community. Hard news events—such as the death of a famous public figure or the plans of city council to raise taxes—affect many people, and the primary job of the media is to report them as they happen. Soft news, such as the widespread popularity of tattooing among athletes or the resurgence of interest in perennial gardening, is also reported by the media. Feature stories are often written on these soft news events.

There is no firm line between a news story and a feature, particularly in contemporary media when many news stories are "featurized." For instance, the results of an Olympic competition may be hard news: "Canadian diver Anne Montmigny claimed her second medal in synchronized diving today." A featurized story might begin: "As a girl jumping off a log into the stream running behind her house, Anne Montmigny never dreamed she would leap into the spotlight of Olympic diving competition." One approach emphasizes the facts of the event, while the feature displaces the facts to accommodate the human interest of the story. Most news broadcasts or publications combine the two to reach a wider audience.

Today's media use many factors to determine what events they will report, including

- timeliness
- proximity
- consequence
- the perceived interest of the audience
- competition
- editorial goals
- and the influence of advertisers.

All these factors put pressure on the media to give their audiences both news and features. In a version of featurizing, pressure from advertisers or lobbyists often result in writing that appears at first blush to be news when it is, in fact, promotion for a product, idea, or policy.

When a hard news story breaks—for example, the sinking of a ferry in the Greek islands—it should be reported with a hard news lead. Soft leads and stories are more appropriate when a major news event is not being reported for the first time: a profile of the Canadian couple who had their vacation cut short when the Greek ferry struck a reef and sunk while the crew was watching television. Some editors dispute the emphasis on soft writing and refer to it as jell-o journalism.

Feature writing can stand alone, or it can be a **sidebar** to the main story, the **mainbar**. A sidebar runs next to the main story or elsewhere in the same edition, providing an audience with additional information on the same topic.

### Types of Features

**Personality profiles:** A personality profile is written to bring an audience closer to a person in or out of the news. Interviews

and observations, as well as creative writing, are used to paint a vivid picture of the person. The CBC's recent profile of Pierre Elliot Trudeau is a classic example of the genre and makes use of archival film footage, interviews, testimonials, and fair degree of editorializing by the voice-over commentary. It's not everybody's cup of tea to attain Fame and fortune. Fame and success stories are rare and conjure up the imagination of the readers who would find juicy fulfillment in them. It makes the reader dive into the hidden traits of a character with the effective newsworthiness and reality of truth. The rich and famous celebrities are a common subject that has a curiosity value.

**Human interest stories:** A human interest story is written to show a subject's oddity or its practical, emotional, or entertainment value. Movie stars and pop singers are the role models of today that inspire the youth. Acting, gossip, mega success stories, flops, characters, comedy, tragedy etc. could be raw material for Feature writing.

The Travel themes are a class apart for the adventure they hold in the writing themes. The Travel feature unfolds the romance inducing the wander lust and creating a spell on readers making them fly on the seventh heaven. People and places are always exciting but the places recommended must be worth spending money, time and trouble. Travel features demand exceptional descriptive and narrative skills.

People have pursued for various hobbies and a very few exceptional genre have the taste of interest in various hobbies. Stamp collecting, gardening, reading, music, photography are the common hobbies but some uncommon hobbies like cloud watching, bird watching, lizard eating, bees collecting etc. present exotic feature avenues. Hobby feature writing interests the readers that have to say about exceptional hobbies.

More on the Feature writing and one can pursue writing Event Features like the valentine day, Teacher's day, Independence day, etc. themes. Feature writing on Health & medical issues, Sun sign writers or Numerical features like writing on the magic of numbers – astrology and numerology. Historical features can be made interesting with the perpetual spell of age old times with history, stories, unique features and more.

**Trend stories:** A trend story examines people, things or organizations that are having an impact on society. Trend stories are popular because people are excited to read or hear about the latest fads. Changing fashion trends and life-styles makes an interesting reading. A passion for fashion and acquaintance with fashion moguls and a fondness for showmanship make a good fashion Feature writer. This is not a job of any Tom, Dick and Harry! All leading business magazines carry life style features which are more or less showpieces of a changing society and so, the competition is hand to hand for an exposure in writing with a flair as a Life style feature writer.

Career features focus on Career guidance scaling to career peaks or career blues. Choosing the right career, getting started, aptitude and such feature writing are good breeding grounds for beginners. Stories that give insight to careers, role models, career planning, mid career crisis lead to interesting and informative feature writing especially for the people who have to decide the fate to earn their bread and butter.

**In-depth stories:** Through extensive research and interviews, in-depth stories provide a detailed account well beyond a basic news story or feature. Concerned Features have the power to exposure the burning issues like the Education, poverty, corruption, drug addiction, women issues, hapless victims, etc. The concerned writing calls for a debate to show the magnitude of the problem through cases, anecdotes and quotable quotes and a lot of writing stuff challenging the perspective.

**Backgrounders:** A backgrounder—also called an analysis piece—adds meaning to current issues in the news by explaining them further. These articles bring an audience up-to-date, explaining how this country, this organization, this person happens to be where it is now. In a market driven world with day-to-day crisis boom, Business feature writing provides a platform to give a glimpse of the insight of the business world. Exploring ideas, opportunities, market trends, dizzy world of CEOs, Corporate ladder, alliances, mergers and various other feature writing on Business is a challenge and par excellence to rise faster than reporters and correspondents. Business feature writing requires special eye to vision the business – the expression of the art of minting money!

### Writing and Organizing Feature Stories

Feature writers seldom use the inverted-pyramid form. Instead, they may write a chronology that builds to a climax at the end, a narrative, a first-person article about one of their own experiences or a combination of these. Their stories are held together by a thread, and they often end where the lead started, with a single person or event. Here are the steps typically followed in organizing a feature story:

**Choose the theme.** The theme is similar to the thesis of a scholarly paper and provides unity and coherence to the piece. It should not be too broad or too narrow. Several factors come into play when choosing a theme: Has the story been done before? Is the story of interest to the audience? Does the story have holding power (emotional appeal)? What makes the story worthy of being reported? The theme answers the question, “So what?”

**Write a lead that invites an audience into the story.** A summary may not be the best lead for a feature. A lead block of one or two paragraphs often begins a feature. Rather than put the news elements of the story in the lead, the feature writer uses the first two or three paragraphs to set a mood, to arouse readers, to invite them inside. Then the **news peg** or the significance of the story is provided in the third or fourth paragraph, the **nut graph**. Because it explains the reason the story is being written, the nut graph—also called the “so what” graph—is a vital paragraph in every feature. The nut graph should be high in the story. Do not make readers wait until the 10th or 11th paragraph before telling them what the story is about.

The body provides vital information while it educates, entertains, and emotionally ties an audience to the subject. The ending will wrap up the story and come back to the lead, often with a quotation or a surprising climax. Important components of the body of a feature story are background information, the thread of the story, transition, dialogue, and voice.



**Provide vital background information.** If appropriate, a paragraph or two of background should be placed high in the story to bring the audience up to date.

**Write clear, concise sentences.** Sprinkle direct quotations, observations and additional background throughout the story. Paragraphs can be written chronologically or in order of importance.

**Use a thread.** Connect the beginning, body and conclusion of the story. Because a feature generally runs longer than a news story, it is effective to weave a thread throughout the story, which connects the lead to the body and to the conclusion. This thread can be a single person, an event or a thing, and it usually highlights the theme.

**Use transition.** Connect paragraphs with transitional words, paraphrases, and direct quotations. Transition is particularly important in a long feature examining several people or events because it is the tool writers use to move subtly from one person or topic to the next. Transition keeps readers from being jarred by the writing.

**Use dialogue when possible.** Feature writers, like fiction writers, often use dialogue to keep a story moving. Of course, feature writers cannot make up dialogue; they listen for it during the reporting process. Good dialogue is like good observation in a story; it gives readers strong mental images and keeps them attached to the writing and to the story's key players.

**Establish a voice.** Another key element that holds a feature together is voice, the "signature" or personal style of each writer. Voice is the personality of the writer and can be used to inject colour, tone, and subtle emotional commentary into the story. Voice should be used subtly (unless you're able to make a fetish of it like Hunter S. Thompson!). The blatant intrusion of a distinctive voice into news writing has been called **gonzo journalism**—an irresponsible, if entertaining, trend in contemporary writing according to traditionalists.

**Conclude with a quotation or another part of the thread.** A feature can trail off like a news story or it can be concluded with a climax. Often, a feature ends where the lead started, with a single person or event.

### Building A Strong Story

The second paragraph is what a feature rests on.

The second paragraph is of first importance.

In a feature like the one you're writing, the second paragraph most often serves to authenticate the story. And it supports, reinforces and expands upon the premise stated in the lead.

The editor or broadcaster should be able to end the story at the end of 60-80 words in two paragraphs (eight lines total) to use it as a box, short, filler, brief, column item, or broadcast newsbrief. Achieve this to significantly expand your opportunities for results.

Having established the story angle or lead, you come up against one of the few ironclad rules we have at PR Newswire. In features, we require attribution within 60 words or by the end of the second paragraph whichever comes first.

The reason is simple: Readers and editors both need to be told up front from whom a story is coming. If an editor has two

releases to choose from and the source is unclear in one, the editor will pick the other. Clear attribution high up is also vital for legal reasons.

If the attribution is already stated in the lead, the source can be described further in the second paragraph. Example: Lead: "according to a cardboard box maker." Second Paragraph: "Reginald Whipple, president of RW Container Co." This may also be a good place to add a website address in case the story is cut for space.

Here also is where you have the chance to achieve name identification for a product. In fact, this is the best place to introduce the company by attributing the story to the spokesperson and identifying the spokesperson and his or her expertise.

Saying the expert said it is less commercial than having the same thing said by the company. The release appears less self-serving. For the same reason, the product name, spokesperson attribution and company name go best at the end of the paragraph.

Example: The new reinforced paperboard containers, called Strongbox, will be in national distribution this fall, according to, etc.

Many editors like having BRIEF information on how to get a product/service. It solves the problem of letters from readers asking them for that information. So "available in stationery stores" might be included in the above example.

Specific information, phone numbers, addresses, prices, etc., is best provided in greater detail at the end of the release. The second paragraph works best when short — preferably a single sentence or two short sentences. Remember: subject, verb, object with the addition of attribution.

Your second paragraph can — and most often should — wrap up the essence of the story so that the first two graphs will stand as a brief, box, column item or page brightener if the rest is chopped. Such shorts often are better read than longer pieces.

### Beyond The Essentials

#### Crafting a well-balanced feature

If done right, a feature could end at the third paragraph if the editor lacks more space. But hopefully there's room for you to get down into details. That's where the fourth paragraph, what we call the transition paragraph, comes in.

If quotes are the spice of a story, transition paragraphs are the meat and potatoes. They help you cover the ground in as few words as possible. After a lively quote, this paragraph develops the story further.

Here is your chance to sell the editor on using more of your story and convince the reader not to turn the page.

A number of things may occur in the fourth paragraph that will greatly enhance the story. It is the point at which you can most easily — and most effectively go beyond getting across in simple, direct, understandable terms what you are trying to say.

Here - *better than cluttering the top* - is where you might do things that enhance many stories and are strongly advocated by longtime professionals.

- In a tips piece, you start bullets—not numbers because they inhibit editors needing to chop to length his suggestions: A way to avoid that fate is to simply say: “Here are his suggestions.”
- In a product or service story, you may want to begin to give specifics on how it works. Or if they are self evident, it is appropriate to tell why this will be good or beneficial to the reader.
- In a human interest story, this is a good place to paint in some of the background you have covered in general terms higher up.
- In an advice narrative, this is a good place for the interview subject or spokesperson to unfold more extensive advice but not in quotes. For this kind of story, chained quote paragraphs don’t usually work well. In fact, chained quotes rarely work well at all and impede story flow.

Yes, there are many other uses for the fourth paragraph. However, the above four seem to work best in terms of story development in the majority of cases.

### Why We Avoid Repeating Identical Copy

The quest to keep features fresh

The Feature News Service delivers timeless and semi-timeless features, enabling their use when the editor/broadcaster chooses. The possibility of duplicate publication is increased by the fact the packages and daily features are designed for verbatim pickup. Thus the feature service is for original copy.

The editor or broadcaster trapped into doing the identical story twice is unforgiving. The packages have a reputation and a following among special sections editors who would be less likely to know if the story has been previously carried elsewhere on PR Newswire.

These editors of advertising supplements and other special sections published by newspapers are among the big users of feature packages. Repetitions fail to enhance the reputation of the packages that have prospered because of the cooperative effort of our clients.

Repetitions, as a result, hinder our efforts to provide good results for our clients.

**What to do instead:** The same story delivered with a fresh angle can garner increased play with alternative target editors. Invariably this involves rewriting the first three paragraphs to better target the story and improve the lead.

**Exception:** When we err and the copy is carried as a correction and so labeled.

**A less desirable alternative:** Carrying a disclaimer on a repeat of identical copy such as:

(dateline) — The following has been released by XYZ Co. and is an identical repeat of a story previously carried on PR Newswire.

### Special Topics Need Special Approaches

Sometimes writing a feature can be a case of fitting that round hole in the square peg. More than one approach may produce results for a particular client or program. Here are some variations that, given the right circumstances, might work well for you and your clients.

**Single Product Story:** Speak to the reader. Put the consumer interest first. Leave for last or omit entirely the technical or industry information of a trade release. Putting the message at the top in the headline and repeating it in the first paragraph are most important. Avoid excessive name repetition. Don’t put the product name or company all in capital letters. It violates the style of almost every newspaper. Introducing a human-interest angle helps.

**Product Line or Multi-Product Story:** Deliver good advice from the spokesperson, designer or manufacturer citing introductions of a product line to demonstrate trends, styles, health benefits. Who better to talk about the variety of cell phones or hiking boots and their varied advantages than a spokesperson for a manufacturer or distributor? Strive for a three- paragraph introduction that can stand alone. Follow it with bullets. Keep paragraphs to three lines each, the bullets to two. You are feeding scanning readers. Write tight to hold them.

**Shorts Release:** If diverse products or services are involved, try a shorts release. Use an umbrella headline with the parenthesized word (shorts) at the end so editors will know what you are offering. Most use shorts for column items and to fill holes. But shorts are just as the name implies — six lines maximum. If they need separate contacts, put them in parentheses at the end of each short.

**Charitable Gift Tie-in:** This can help a story. The company that sets out to make a formidable effort on behalf of a cause is likely to get credit. But chintzy donations probably won’t work. Editors tend to ask up front what the percentage being donated is. If it is small and clearly done as an afterthought, it may do more harm than good.

**Celebrity Tie-in:** Look for the celebrity name. It may be appropriate to and work into a lead that sells the story. A highly successful release pegged to holiday brides last fall told how salons were deluged with requests for gowns like the costly dresses of celebrity brides and affordable knock-offs of these designer gowns were offered.

**Survey:** Look for the one most significant or interesting result. Peg the feature to that. Plug in the sampling size and whom it was conducted for in the second paragraph, so the story may be ended if space is tight. A quote on the significance of the primary result may come next to draw interviews. Offer “full survey results” in an editors note at the bottom.

**Fashion Trend:** Comment explaining how the fashion is shown and worn can move the feature to newsworthy from commercial. Editors often want prices. Some don’t. Put prices at the end of paragraphs in parentheses so they can be easily discarded if unwanted. They may be in the open in the last paragraph but not in the headline or first paragraph.

**Entertainment Event:** They come in many varieties - from ice shows and caroling to fireworks and hot dog eating contests. An interview with a participant or organizer or how it is performed can be used before, after or during the event. Details on time and place are carried in second paragraph in parentheses to be used if published or aired in advance.

**History:** Some of the most successful features may deal with a bit of history appropriate to the firm involved. One by a card

**Advice:** Avoid chained-quote paragraphs. A transition paragraph can extend the story and alternates quote paragraphs, while supporting and backing up a new point. Provide background of the expert quoted. However, feed it out piecemeal rather than sidetracking the story.

**Contests:** You can obtain publicity through an invitation to compete. However, a feature on a contest is not an advertisement. It needs to be written as an article that conveys information, pure and simple. Contest results will also get play if newsworthy. You can send out regional and local releases as a contest progresses. If used by an editor, they will often carry the results of the national competition as well.

**List Lead:** Great way to tell who is the best, worst, longest, shortest, etc. Be sure to tell up front the source of the list and how they made the cut. The description of those chosen should be kept to a line or two at most.

**Recipes:** These often work best with a short introduction suggesting a holiday or occasion for when it can be used. A good peg is to link it to a celebrity endorser if available. Confine the piece to a single recipe, but offer a way to get more.

**The Quiz:** When these work, they really work. While publications will often present answers on another page, for your purposes it's best to give them after each question. This makes it easier for editors to choose how to present the copy to meet their needs. Some, like their readers, have short attention spans and want the answers right away.

**Commentary:** These are often by-lined articles. But you can get around that by using a short introduction, perhaps three paragraphs, and lead into the commentary by saying, “Here’s how Joe Blow views the matter.” Then you can provide a brief commentary, leaving it in quotes.

## Good Features use Narrative

Good features that grab a reader and don't let go have much in common. The stories have anecdotes, telling quotes, scene setting and tight, lively prose.

But what sets top-notch feature writing apart from the pack of promising prose is the narrative thread. There are two threads of a story – one for the reporting process and the other that makes it into print.

When a reporter sees a glimmer of promise in a potential story, he or she grabs those obvious reporting threads and starts pulling to reveal details, secrets, motives, emotions. That is good reporting.

The second thread is the narrative thread that weaves the whole story together from beginning to end. That is good writing.

This is pretty basic stuff, but it's not easy to execute.

Poring through dozens of entries in this year Sigma Delta Chi Awards competition, there was little chaff to separate from the wheat. Strong reporting, good ideas and solid writing characterized most of the stories.

But it was the execution of the narrative weave that made the best stories grippers.

A strong, well-written piece can easily fall apart when the story skips around and abandons a strong narrative. Pull on the narrative thread. If it comes out in pieces, it is time to rethread the needle and start again.

**Assignment:** In the class, the students will be given a topic and they shall be required to write a feature based upon that topic.

**Notes:**

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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**EIILM UNIVERSITY**  
S I K K I M

Jorethang, District Namchi, Sikkim- 737121, India  
[www.eiilmuniversity.ac.in](http://www.eiilmuniversity.ac.in)